



**BE BOLD. Shape the Future.
School of Social Work**

New Mexico State University Master of Social Work (MSW)

Student Handbook

2025-2026



A Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Accredited Program Since 1991

<https://socialwork.nmsu.edu/>

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

History

The School of Social Work (SSW) has a long and meaningful history at New Mexico State University (NMSU). It all began in 1969 with undergraduate courses in social welfare, and by 1972—thanks to Dr. Corinne Wolfe and a Section 707 grant—the university launched a full BSW program within the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The BSW program earned accreditation in 1975, and just a few years later, in 1980, Social Work became its own academic department. This shift happened as part of a larger university reorganization that eventually led to what we now know as the College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation (HEST).

Recognizing the growing need for professionally trained social workers in New Mexico and beyond, NMSU launched its MSW program in 1990. This development was a direct response to statewide priorities, including federal mandates to improve public child welfare services and the rise of social work licensure. There was a pressing need for practitioners with advanced skills to serve families in diverse, multicultural communities—and the MSW program rose to meet that challenge.

Over the years, the program continued to evolve. In 1999, Social Work became a School within the college, and in 2008, we shifted our curriculum from a Family-Centered focus to an Advanced Generalist model. This change marked a move toward competency-based education that prepares students to work effectively across the following levels of practice: individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

MISSION AND GOALS

The mission of the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at New Mexico State University is: “To prepare graduates to promote human and social well-being through ethical, theoretically based and evidence informed advanced generalist social work practice, with individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities in the culturally diverse environment of the Southwest, the United States, and the world. The MSW program is committed to serving people impacted by poverty and oppression through the promotion of empowerment, cultural humility and competence, and social and economic justice.”

The specific goals of the MSW Program are to prepare graduates for:

1. Advanced generalist social work practice that is responsive to rapidly changing environments.
2. Multidimensional social work practice through the integration of theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and professional experience.
3. Practice committed to social justice and to ethical practice in complex settings.
4. A life committed to continuing their professional development, developing autonomy and leadership within practice settings, and contributing to the knowledge and skill base of the profession.
5. The employment of a strengths-based, culturally humble approach to practice with populations and communities of the Southwest.

Focus

Our MSW program is designed with an Advanced Generalist focus, which means you'll gain the skills and knowledge needed to work across a wide range of settings—including with individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, and in shaping public policy.

We emphasize collaborative practice and critical thinking, helping you apply advanced social work theories, values, and ethics to real-world challenges at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

In your Advanced Generalist year, you'll be supported in developing the professional autonomy, leadership, and creativity needed for thoughtful, ethical, and adaptable practice—especially in today's fast-changing world and within the unique contexts of the Southwest and beyond.

MSW Program Options

The School of Social Work at NMSU offers a flexible and comprehensive Master of Social Work (MSW) program, available both online and in person at our Las Cruces campus. No matter your background or schedule, we have a pathway designed to help you reach your goals in the field of social work. These pathways include:

- **Advanced Standing (1 year):** For students with a BSW from a CSWE accredited University and a GPA of 3.5 or higher, this track allows you to begin directly with the Advanced Generalist year.
- **Full-Time (2 years):** Ideal for those ready to complete their degree in a traditional timeframe.
- **Part-Time (3 years):** A great option for students balancing school with work or other responsibilities.
- **Dual Degree MSW/MPH (3 years):** For students interested in both social work and public health, this program offers interdisciplinary training and broader career opportunities.

As you plan your degree pathway, it's important to take into account your outside commitments, including work and family responsibilities. Graduate-level coursework is demanding, and managing your time effectively will be key to your success and wellbeing. You can view the degree maps for each of these pathways at socialwork.nmsu.edu.

The maximum number of credits a graduate student can take in a regular semester is 15. In some cases, this limit may be increased with approval, depending on your specific degree plan. During a six-week summer session, the maximum allowed is 6 credits.

Students in the **one-year Advanced Standing** or **two-year MSW program** typically take four academic courses each semester along with a practicum placement. This means you should expect to spend:

- **At least 12 hours per week** in class,
- **An additional 4–6 hours per week** on readings and assignments, and
- **16–20 hours per week** in your practicum setting.

Students in the **three-year program** usually take three to four academic courses each semester. In their final two years, they will also complete 16–20 hours per week in practicum.

Given these time commitments, we strongly encourage you to choose a degree pathway that supports your mental health, physical wellbeing, and academic success. While some students do work part-time during the program, managing a full-time job (40 hours per week) alongside coursework and practicum may be very difficult.

MSW Program Formats

- **Site-Based (Las Cruces Campus):** All four-degree pathways, including the MSW/MPH dual degree, are offered on campus. Courses are delivered through a mix of in-person classes, hybrid formats, and online components.
- **Online (NMSU Global):** All courses are offered through Canvas and Zoom, and may be delivered either synchronously (live sessions at scheduled times) or asynchronously (flexible, no scheduled meetings). All degree pathways, including the MSW/MPH program, are available fully online (though Practicum placements that are completely virtual in nature are limited and dependent on availability and individual circumstance).

Important Practicum Note:

Students admitted to either the Advanced Standing or regular two-year programs should contact the Practicum Education Team as soon as they are accepted to begin the placement process. Full details can be found in the Practicum Education Handbook. Please note that virtual placements are not guaranteed and are subject to availability.

MSW CURRICULUM

The MSW curriculum is structured in two parts: a **Foundation Generalist year** (30 credit hours) followed by an **Advanced Generalist year** (30 credit hours), for a total of 60 credit hours. Students on the Advanced Standing track begin directly with the Advanced Generalist year and complete the program in just one year (30 credit hours total).

Social work education at NMSU is grounded in two key components: classroom learning and practicum experience. These work together to prepare you for real-world, ethical, and effective practice.

The MSW curriculum is organized into several core content areas:

- **Practice courses** focused on building direct social work skills
- **Practicum courses** that provide hands-on learning in real-world settings
- **Theory-based courses**, such as *Sociocultural Concepts of Social Work in the U.S. Southwest, Human Behavior & the Social Environment, Policy, and Research*

Each of these areas are taught at both the Foundation (Generalist) level and the Advanced Generalist level, ensuring a strong, well-rounded education as you move through the program.

Social Work Competencies

In accordance with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the SSW follows the Educational Competencies as described in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS 2022).

These Core Competencies are:

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
2. Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice
4. Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research
5. Engage in policy practice
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Each core competency in the MSW program is supported by several key practice dimensions: knowledge, skills, values, critical thinking, and affective processes (such as self-awareness and emotional understanding). These dimensions help connect what you're learning in class to the practice behaviors used to assess your growth and readiness as a social worker.

You'll see these connections clearly laid out in every course syllabus, where the course objectives, learning goals, and assignments are all directly linked to the competencies and practice behaviors defined by CSWE (the Council on Social Work Education).

Foundation Year: Generalist Social Work Practice

During the foundation year of the MSW program, you'll build the essential knowledge and skills that set social work apart from other helping professions. At NMSU, we follow a generalist practice model, which means you'll learn how to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in a wide range of settings.

As a generalist social work student, you'll explore how to apply ethical principles and critical thinking in real-world situations. You'll also gain a strong understanding of how people and their environments interact. With a focus on strengths and resilience, you'll learn to support and build on the capacities of the people and systems you work with.

Generalist practitioners collaborate with clients to assess needs, connect to resources, advocate, educate, and facilitate change. You'll also learn how to evaluate services and use evidence-based practices to ensure you're offering the most effective support. Throughout your training, your practice will be rooted in the NASW Code of Ethics and guided by a commitment to diversity, human rights, and social justice.

Advanced Year: Advanced Generalist Social Work Practice

In the second year of the MSW program, you'll expand your skills through the Advanced Generalist Practice model. This prepares you to take on more complex cases and challenges at the individual (micro), group or organizational (mezzo), and community or policy (macro) levels.

You'll deepen your critical thinking and apply social work theories and methods with greater nuance and independence. The advanced generalist approach equips you with the professional leadership and adaptability needed to practice effectively in dynamic and diverse communities—especially those in the U.S. Southwest. You'll also strengthen your ability to make ethical decisions, design interventions, and advocate for meaningful change.

Practicum Education

Practicum is a vital part of your MSW education, giving you hands-on experience working directly with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. This real-world learning complements what you study in the classroom and helps you grow into a confident, capable social worker.

For more details about practicum expectations, policies, and placement information, be sure to check out the *Practicum Education Student Handbook*.

Dual MSW/MPH Degree Program

The School of Social Work (SSW) and the Department of Public Health Sciences (PHS) have partnered to offer a dual Master of Social Work (MSW) and Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. This integrated program allows students to earn both degrees with a total of 90 credit hours.

Public health social work is an increasingly in-demand area of practice that combines the strengths of both fields. Professionals in this area are trained to address the social and behavioral determinants of health and to challenge the structural inequities that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

In this dual program, social work training emphasizes culturally humble, ethical, and justice-oriented practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities across micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Public health training brings a population- and community-level perspective, using tools like epidemiology to inform policy, research, and systems change.

Both fields prioritize culturally responsive approaches and prepare students to work in research, advocacy, and policy. This program is also an excellent option for students interested in international work, as it offers tools to address global health and behavioral health issues.

To learn more about public health social work practice, visit: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839919886284>.

Students pursuing the dual MSW/MPH degree must:

1. Be formally admitted to both the MSW and MPH programs as a dual-degree student.
2. Complete all courses required in the dual-degree pathway.
3. Fulfill a capstone requirement (graduate competency exam) for *each* program during their final spring semester.

Child Welfare Scholars Program-Title IV-E

The Child Welfare Scholars Program is a partnership between the School of Social Work and the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD). Students selected for this program receive financial support while completing their MSW and, in return, commit to working for CYFD as a child welfare protective services social worker after graduation—with full pay and benefits.

Scholars take specialized courses in child welfare practice and policy, which are built into their curriculum and help prepare them for this important work. This is a great opportunity for students who are passionate about supporting children and families and are considering a career in child welfare.

If you're interested in learning more or applying to the program, please reach out to Mónica Montoya, Child Welfare Scholar Coordinator, at 575-646-2846 or monicamo@nmsu.edu.

PROGRAM/COURSE CHANGES

The academic calendar with important deadlines for students is located at <https://records.nmsu.edu/faculty-and-staff/academic-calendar.html>. Please consult with the MSW Coordinator and review <https://uar.nmsu.edu/refunds/withdrawals.html> for information on the process for withdrawing from coursework or the university.

Students may withdraw from social work courses during the period in which withdrawals are permitted by NMSU policy. However, students are encouraged to work with the SSW Academic Advisor and MSW Program Coordinator when dropping or withdrawing from a course for the following reasons:

1. Because the MSW curriculum is designed to build knowledge and skills progressively, dropping or withdrawing from a course may require a student to wait one full academic year to complete that course.
2. Dropping or withdrawing from courses that are prerequisites may mean students are not able to progress in their degrees until they have met these requirements.
3. Dropping or withdrawing from courses that are corequisites (meaning they must be taken at the same time as other courses, such as practicum) may require students to withdraw from those courses as well.
4. Dropping or withdrawing from courses will likely delay completion of the program.

Credit for Life or Work Experience

The MSW Program at NMSU does not grant academic credit for life or work experience in lieu of social work courses, including practicum courses.

Changing Degree Pathways/Plans

Students who wish to change their degree pathways/plans must first discuss this with the SSW Academic Advisor and the MSW Program Coordinator. The MSW Program Coordinator must review and approve the proposed changes before the student alters their courses.

Transferring Between Site-Based and Online Programs

Students who experience an unanticipated change in their situation which might require them to move between site-based programs, from site-based to online, or from online to site-based may petition the department for approval to change programs. Petitions to change in the fall must be received by March 30 of the previous spring semester and petitions to change in the spring must be received by October 30 of the previous fall. Petitions will be approved in situations of documented need and in which there is adequate space in the desired program.

NMSU Student Resources

Here are important resources for you as you begin your MSW Program! Please also feel free to contact the MSW Program Coordinator and faculty if you need resources and would like support.

- Aggie Cupboard: <https://aggiecupboard.nmsu.edu/>
- Aggie Health and Wellness Center: <https://wellness.nmsu.edu/>
- Aggie One-Stop: <https://onestop.nmsu.edu/>
- American Indian Program: <https://aip.nmsu.edu/>
- Black Programs: <https://blackprograms.nmsu.edu/>
- Chicano Programs: <https://chicano.nmsu.edu/>
- College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP): <https://camp.nmsu.edu/>
- Disability Access Services and Student Application:
<https://studentlife.nmsu.edu/disability-access-services1/index.html>
- Family Outreach Center: <https://families.nmsu.edu/>
- Financial Aid and Scholarship Services: <https://fa.nmsu.edu/>
- HEST College Financial Aid Contacts and Scholarships:
<https://hest.nmsu.edu/students/scholarships.html>
- LGBT+ Programs:
<https://studentlife.nmsu.edu/lgbt/index.html#:~:text=LGBT%2B%20Programs%20is%20committed%20to,programming%20to%20the%20college%20community>
- Military and Veterans Programs: <https://mvp.nmsu.edu/>
- NMSU Bookstore: <https://www.bkstr.com/nmsustore/home>
- NMSU NOW: COVID-19 Pandemic Action Plan: <https://now.nmsu.edu/>

- Office of Institutional Equity: <https://equity.nmsu.edu/>
- Scholar Dollar\$: <https://scholarships.nmsu.edu/>
- School of Social Work webpage: <https://socialwork.nmsu.edu/index.html>
- School of Social Work Child Welfare Scholars Program:
https://socialwork.nmsu.edu/files/documents/2019_CWSP_Brochure.pdf
- NMSU Student Handbook and Code of Conduct: <https://studenthandbook.nmsu.edu/>
- TRIO Student Support Services: <https://triosss.nmsu.edu/>
- Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.nmsu.edu/>
- Zuhl Library: <https://library.nmsu.edu/>

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK POLICIES

Transfer of Credits

If you're considering transferring into the MSW program at NMSU, we're here to help you understand how your previous coursework might apply. The number of transfer credits allowed will depend on your specific program of study. In order to be eligible for transfer, course credits must meet the following requirements:

- Courses are completed within the last five years.
- Courses must be completed in a Graduate Social Work program at a CSWE accredited University.
- Courses received a "B" or better grade.
- Courses were taught by Graduate Faculty.
- An official transcript must be submitted to NMSU

To meet residency requirements for a master's degree, **at least 50% of your required coursework must be completed at NMSU.**

If you are transferring from another CSWE-accredited MSW program and would like to have courses reviewed to replace required NMSU coursework, you'll need to submit a transfer credit request. This must be indicated on your Application for Admission to the Graduate School, and all necessary forms must be completed before your first semester begins at NMSU.

All transfer credit requests must be reviewed and approved by both the MSW Academic Advisor and the MSW Program Coordinator. Please note that the School of Social Work reserves the right to approve or deny any transfer credits based on how well the course content aligns with the MSW program and NMSU Graduate School requirements.

For more details, refer to the current Graduate Catalog:
<https://catalogs.nmsu.edu/nmsu/graduate-school/>

Redundancy and Waiver Policy

Redundancy

There are two pathways for students to avoid redundancy in their coursework:

1. Advanced Standing Option

Students who have earned a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree from a CSWE-accredited program within the **last five years** and who maintained a 3.5 GPA or higher in their social work courses may qualify for Advanced Standing. If accepted, students will bypass the first-year (Foundation Year) coursework and complete the MSW in a shorter timeframe (30 credits).

2. Course Waiver Option

Students who are not eligible for Advanced Standing but have previously completed coursework that overlaps with the MSW Foundation Year may apply to waive up to two Foundation Year courses (6 credits). This includes:

- BSW graduates who do not meet all Advanced Standing admission requirements.
- Students from other disciplines with relevant coursework.

Even if courses are waived, students must still meet the total credit hour requirements for their specific degree plan:

- **Advanced Standing:** 30 credits
- **Regular MSW Program:** 60 credits
- **Dual MSW/MPH Program:** 90 credits

Students who are approved for course waivers can work with their advisor to select graduate-level electives (500- or 5000-level) from related fields such as:

- Anthropology
- Borderland & Ethnic Studies
- Business
- Counseling
- Criminal Justice
- Economics
- Family & Consumer Science
- Government
- Nursing
- Psychology
- Public Health
- Sociology
- Special Education
- Statistics
- Women's Studies

Course Waiver Process

If you're interested in requesting a course waiver, here's how to apply:

1. **Eligibility:** You must have earned a grade of B (83% or higher) in the course you're submitting (B- does not qualify).
2. **Form Completion:** Work with the SSW Academic Advisor to complete a Course Exception Form.
3. **Course Identification:** Clearly indicate the Foundation Year course you are requesting to waive. (Refer to the Degree Pathways section for course options.)
4. **Supporting Documents:** Attach a syllabus and a list of assignments from the course you're using to support your request.
5. **Commonly Waived Courses:** The most frequently approved courses for waiver consideration include SOWK 5110 and SOWK 5135. Other foundation-level courses may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
6. **Deadline:** Submit all required materials to the SSW Academic Advisor by August 15 of your first year in the program.
7. **Review Process:** The MSW Program Coordinator and SSW Academic Advisor will review your request and notify you of their decision within two weeks. If approved, you'll work with your advisor to choose appropriate electives.

Note: All students—except those in Advanced Standing—must take at least one social work policy course and one social work research course (3 credits each) as part of their MSW degree.

New Mexico Cultural Competency Requirement for Licensure

If you plan to apply for social work licensure in New Mexico, you'll need to meet the state's cultural competency requirement by providing documentation that you've completed coursework focused on New Mexico cultures.

This requirement can be fulfilled in one of the following ways:

1. A three-credit course in New Mexico cultures listed on your official transcripts
2. A board-approved course, workshop, or seminar—For NMSU students, SOWK 3110 or SOWK 5110 meet this requirement
3. Proof of passing the New Mexico Cultural Examination (no longer commonly used)

If you're in the Advanced Standing program and completed your BSW at a school other than NMSU, or your transcript does not show a three-credit course in New Mexico cultures, you'll need to complete a board-approved course or workshop to meet the requirement.

For the most current information and approved course options, please visit the New Mexico Board of Social Work Examiners:

http://www.rld.state.nm.us/boards/Social_Work.aspx

Criminal Justice Involvement

Students with lived experience in the criminal justice system—either before or during the MSW program—are encouraged to proactively disclose this information to the School of Social Work.

Doing so helps us provide accurate guidance and support, especially regarding practicum placement, licensure eligibility, and future employment.

While having an arrest or legal conviction does **not** impact your academic standing in the program, it may have implications for certain aspects of your professional journey. The information you share will be kept confidential and reviewed by the SSW Administrative Team to help ensure you are set up for success.

Please also be aware that some state licensing boards, including New Mexico's, may deny licensure or certification to individuals with a felony conviction, depending on the circumstances.

We encourage you to reach out early to the practicum team specifically so we can work with you to explore your options and support your goals.

Behavioral and Professional Conduct for MSW Students

As an MSW student, you are expected to meet high standards of ethical and professional behavior throughout your academic and practicum experiences. These standards are essential to the social work profession and are part of the core competencies of the MSW program.

Professional behavior is guided by the **NASW Code of Ethics (2021)**, which serves as the foundation for conduct within the NMSU School of Social Work. All students are expected to understand and uphold the values and responsibilities outlined in this code. You can access the NASW Code of Ethics here:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

In addition to professional ethics, MSW students must follow the behavioral standards and policies outlined by the university. These include:

- The **NMSU Graduate Catalog**: <https://catalogs.nmsu.edu/nmsu/regulations-policies/>
- The **NMSU Student Handbook**: <https://studenthandbook.nmsu.edu/>
- The **NMSU Student Code of Conduct**: <https://studenthandbook.nmsu.edu/>

In cases of **academic or non-academic misconduct**, students will be held accountable according to the rules and policies outlined in the NMSU Student Handbook. Information about the student **grievance and appeals processes** can also be found in the "General Rules and Regulations" and "Special Grievance Policies" sections of the handbook.

Maintaining professional behavior is not only a requirement of the program—it's essential preparation for becoming a trusted and ethical social work professional.

Professional Conduct

In addition to meeting academic expectations, MSW students are expected to demonstrate professional behavior that reflects a strong commitment to the core values of social work. Below are the general expectations for students in the MSW program:

General Expectations

1. Attend classes, field placements, and other meetings regularly and reliably.
2. Notify professors, field instructors, and colleagues in advance if you will be absent or late.
3. Come to class, field placements, and meetings prepared to participate.
4. Meet course expectations as outlined in each class syllabus. These expectations will be explicitly detailed in your MSW syllabi.

Student Communication Skills

5. Communicate effectively and respectfully, both verbally and non-verbally (e.g., eye contact, appropriate personal space).
6. Demonstrate the ability to discuss and process information thoughtfully.
7. Articulate ideas, thoughts, and concepts clearly.

Student Conduct and Comportment

8. Uphold integrity and honesty in all matters.
9. Be willing to work collaboratively with others.
10. Show respect for the opinions of others.
11. Be open to positive and constructive feedback from peers, faculty, staff, and field instructors.
12. Demonstrate a willingness to understand and engage with difference and diversity.

Student Self-Awareness and Self-Control

13. Communicate in a respectful and effective manner.
14. Be aware of your personal strengths and challenges.
15. Understand the appropriate use of self-disclosure.
16. Demonstrate emotional regulation in challenging situations.
17. Use unimpaired judgment and decision-making skills.

Student Use of Technology

18. Demonstrate basic competency in word processing, email, and Internet usage.
19. Use public and private technology (e.g., social networking, texting, emailing, voicemail, and data storage) in a professional and respectful manner.
20. Follow specific classroom and field placement policies regarding technology use, especially regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Each course syllabus will include explicit guidelines for technology use within the course.

Behavioral Expectations and Review Process

Behavior that contradicts the ethical standards of social work, persistent failure to meet the above expectations, or violations of university academic integrity or conduct policies will lead to a review of the student's continued admission or participation in the MSW Program.

Examples of behavior that may prompt such a review include:

1. Making disparaging comments or gestures toward students, faculty, clients, colleagues, or agency placements.
2. Exhibiting personal functioning issues serious enough to impact the program or client welfare.
3. Failing to maintain confidentiality or boundaries with students, faculty, clients, or colleagues.
4. Consistently struggling to form or maintain appropriate, professional relationships with peers, faculty, or community members.
5. Language or actions that target or harm others based on race, class, gender, sexuality, language, disability, or any other identity.

Since social workers serve individuals from diverse backgrounds and with varying issues, it is essential that personal biases or unresolved issues do not interfere with this role. Students must possess the emotional and psychological resources necessary to effectively support others in need. If behaviors suggest that personal issues have not been sufficiently addressed, the student may be denied admission to the program or dismissed if already enrolled.

Confidentiality

Client confidentiality is a critical aspect of social work practice. Students are expected to maintain confidentiality regarding:

- Client information
 - Client identification
 - Specific social agencies and organizations
- This includes any discussions related to clients or personal information about students, faculty, or teachers in the classroom.

Process for Academic and Behavioral Concerns

The School of Social Work (SSW) is committed to supporting your wellbeing, academic persistence, and success throughout your time in the MSW program. Faculty, staff, and administration work together to provide advising, resources, and support, to engage you in your courses, and to foster an inclusive and respectful learning environment. When academic or behavioral concerns arise, we believe in addressing them early, clearly, and constructively.

These concerns may include, but are not limited to:

- Falling below a 3.0 GPA
- Failing or being at risk of failing one or more social work courses
- Disruptive behavior in class or practicum
- Violations of NMSU student conduct or academic integrity policies
- Violations of SSW or practicum site policies
- Breaches of the NASW Code of Ethics
- Unprofessional conduct
- Any behavior that may endanger the safety of oneself or others

The SSW uses a three-phase process to support students, clarify expectations and rights, and help ensure continued academic and professional progress. This process also outlines next steps and potential consequences if concerns are not resolved.

Phase 1: Student Support Meeting

When concerns arise, the first step is for students and faculty to communicate directly and seek resolution together. In addition to speaking with your instructor, you can reach out to the SSW Academic Advisor, your faculty advisor, or the MSW Program Coordinator for additional guidance and support.

If an academic or behavioral concern may impact your progress in coursework or practicum, a Student Support Meeting will be held to take a collaborative, problem-solving approach.

Please note that a Student Support Meeting is **not** a disciplinary action and should not be considered as punitive by faculty or other individuals involved.

A Student Support Meeting may be requested by the student, faculty advisor, or professor(s).

- If the concern involves practicum, the meeting is led by the Practicum Education Director and Coordinators and includes the practicum liaison, site instructor, and the student (see the Practicum Education Student Handbook).
- If the concern is academic, the meeting is led by the MSW Program Coordinator, includes the instructor(s) and student, and may include the SSW Academic Advisor.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Understand the concern from both the student and faculty perspectives
- Identify the student's strengths and areas of need
- Offer support and connect the student to resources
- Develop an Academic Success Plan with clear goals and a timeline for improvement

The Program Coordinator will monitor progress based on the timeline agreed upon in this meeting. A second Student Support Meeting may be scheduled to provide updates, continue the support process, or conclude the matter. In some cases, the program may communicate follow-up information or continued concerns via email instead of holding another meeting.

Phase 2: Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Accountability Process

If the issues identified in Phase 1 continue, worsen, or place the student at risk for serious academic or professional consequences, the process moves into a formal accountability phase.

This may include risks such as:

- Failing a course
- Being removed from a practicum placement
- Being placed on academic probation
- Facing dismissal from the School of Social Work or the university

In some situations—especially those involving significant ethical violations (e.g., of the NASW Code of Ethics), NMSU academic integrity policies, or other serious behavioral concerns—Phase 2 may begin immediately without first going through Phase 1.

This “Phase 2” formal process follows four steps:

Step 1: Identification of Concern: The Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Accountability Process is initiated when the MSW Program Coordinator is notified by a faculty member or other relevant party, or as a result of a routine review of end of term (semester or mini-mester) grades.

Step 2: Scheduling: The Program Coordinator will contact the student to schedule a meeting between the student, faculty, and any others involved. This contact will take place within two business days of step 1. This meeting must occur within five business days of notification. Prior to the meeting, the Program Coordinator will prepare and share all relevant information, including:

- A summary of the concern
- Previous efforts to resolve the issue
- Relevant academic records and policies

Step 3: Meeting: During the meeting, a formal plan will be developed to resolve the concern. This plan will include specific actions, responsible individuals, and a timeline for resolution.

Step 4: Follow-Up: If the student is not responsive, does not participate, or does not meet the agreed-upon expectations within the timeline, a second meeting will be attempted within 5 business days of the first meeting. At that time, a recommendation will be made regarding whether the student should continue in the program (with conditions) or be dismissed. If dismissal is recommended, the SSW Director will be notified in writing within one business day of the scheduled meeting.

Phase 3: Determination of Continuance or Dismissal

The SSW takes seriously its responsibility to graduate highly skilled, ethical, and well-prepared social workers. Dismissal from the MSW Program is considered only when other support and accountability efforts have been unsuccessful, or when a single, serious incident justifies immediate review.

A student may be dismissed from the School of Social Work if they:

1. Receive two grades of “D” in core social work courses
2. Receive one grade of “F” in a core social work course
3. Receive a grade of “U,” “D,” or “F” in a practicum
4. Are dismissed from a practicum agency
5. Demonstrate egregious or repeated unethical or unprofessional behavior that cannot be resolved through support

6. Have a GPA below 3.0 for two consecutive grading periods (students on provisional status may be dismissed after one grading period).
7. Fail to respond to attempts to meet as mentioned in phases 1 and 2.

If any of these occur—or if a behavior arises that warrants immediate review—the phased process skips stages one and two and begins at Phase 3. Upon identification of one of the above concerns, the MSW Program Coordinator will reach out within 2 business days to schedule a meeting with the student and all relevant parties to fully understand the situation. The meeting will need to take place within 5 business days of the coordinator reaching out. Upon completion of the meeting the Program Coordinator will submit a written recommendation of dismissal, probation, or no action to the SSW Director, including all documentation.

The SSW Director will notify the student in writing of the final decision—either dismissal or continuation in the program with specific conditions within 5 business days of receiving recommendations from the Program Coordinator.

A final meeting will be scheduled with the Program Coordinator, student, and MSW advisor to ensure the student understands the outcome, next steps, and any rights or responsibilities related to reinstatement or continuation in the program.

Reinstatement

If you receive a notice of dismissal from the MSW program and believe there were extenuating circumstances that contributed to the issues leading to dismissal, you have the right to request reinstatement.

To do so, you must submit a written request to the School of Social Work Director within ten (10) business days of receiving your dismissal notice. In your letter, please clearly explain the circumstances you believe contributed to your academic or professional difficulties and why you believe reinstatement is appropriate.

Once your request is received, the SSW Director will form an ad hoc review committee made up of three faculty members who were not involved in the original situation or decision. The Director will share your request and all relevant documentation with the committee for review.

Within 10 business days of your request, the committee will provide a written, non-binding recommendation to the SSW Director. The Director will then make the final decision regarding your reinstatement and notify you in writing within 5 business days of receiving the committee's recommendation. Reinstatement is contingent upon the student following through on actions recommended by the committee and/or Director (e.g. having to meet on a biweekly basis with the Academic Advisor, having to wait a semester/year to register again, have to repeat courses, etc...).

If you are reinstated, please note that you will be expected to maintain satisfactory academic and professional standing going forward. This includes:

- Maintaining a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
- Earning passing grades in all required social work courses
- Receiving a Satisfactory (S) rating in practicum education courses
- Failure to meet these expectations may result in immediate dismissal from the program.

ADVISEMENT

The School of Social Work places a strong emphasis on the advisor/advisee relationship, aiming to build a connection that is mutually respectful, supportive, and meaningful. The main goal of advisement is to help students achieve their educational and professional goals in a way that aligns with the mission of the School and the values of the social work profession.

As an MSW student, you are at the center of your educational journey and hold primary responsibility for your learning. Advisors are here to support you by helping you integrate your academic and professional experiences, stay on track with your goals, and make informed decisions about your future.

Advising is designed to help you navigate all aspects of the MSW Program. The School of Social Work provides two types of advising, MSW Academic Advising and MSW Faculty Advising.

MSW Academic Advising

Academic advising is available to all MSW students and is provided by either MSW faculty or the MSW Program Advisor, depending on your program and needs. Academic advising supports students by offering guidance on:

- Questions about the MSW program
- Understanding and reviewing STAR degree audits
- Transfer credits
- Course selection and registration
- Graduation paperwork and planning
- Recruitment support
- Academic performance coordination

MSW Faculty Advising

In addition to academic advising, every MSW student is assigned a **full-time MSW faculty member** as a Faculty Advisor. Faculty advising is available at both campus locations and focuses on:

- Professional development
- Addressing academic challenges (e.g., instructor or peer conflicts, life events that affect academic success)
- Mentorship in navigating the demands of graduate-level social work education

Students are encouraged to reach out to their academic or faculty advisor as a first step when issues arise. If concerns cannot be resolved at that level, they may be referred to the **MSW Program Coordinator** for further support and resolution.

Student Expectations for Advisement

To get the most out of your advising experience, students are expected to:

1. **Meet with your academic advisor** at least once per year—or more frequently as needed, especially during registration periods—to discuss course schedules, elective choices, and program requirements.
2. **Notify your advisor** if you're considering a leave of absence, withdrawing from the program, or making changes outside of the standard Program of Study.
3. **Respond to advisor meeting requests** if concerns about academic or professional performance arise that may impact your standing in the MSW program.
4. **Be open to guidance** and consider available resources and strategies to support your academic and professional success. Your academic advisor can help connect you with these supports.

Advisor Roles	Faculty Advisor	Academic Advisor
Provide advice and counsel advisees when they are experiencing difficulties	X	
Assist students on matters pertaining to the university and community, career/employment planning, special projects, practicum experiences, and possible problems impinging on academic performance	X	
Support Student Support/Rights and Responsibilities Process and work with the advisee to find appropriate solutions to problems upon advisee request	X	X
Help the student plan a program of study including helping in course selection; orientation to the substance and structure of the MSW curriculum		X
Assist with registration.		X
Monitor student progress ensuring that all degree/curriculum requirements are fulfilled in an orderly, timely and satisfactory way		X
Maintain accurate and up-to-date student records with relevant and regular notations		X
Support and protect the rights of students by informing them of grievance procedures	X	X
Conduct a thorough and final “audit” of their advisee’s academic records certifying that all MSW degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed for graduation.		X
Advise students of options when challenges arise including leave of absence or withdrawals.		X

Changing Faculty Advisor

Request to change a faculty advisor begins with discussing this with current faculty advisor and then bringing the request to the MSW Program Coordinator.

Changing Registration

If you need to make changes to your course registration, it’s important to first consult with your academic advisor to ensure your decisions align with your degree plan. All changes must also follow NMSU’s published registration deadlines.

Requests for exceptions to these deadlines—such as adding or dropping a course after the deadline—are **extremely rare** and are only considered under circumstances that are clearly beyond the student’s control and that arise after the deadline.

Examples of circumstances that may be considered appropriate for an exception include:

- A documented major medical condition
- A documented death or crisis in the student’s immediate family
- Other similarly serious and documented situations

Examples of circumstances that are typically **not approved** include:

- Work or employment conflicts
- Financial aid issues
- Poor grades or dissatisfaction with academic performance

In exceptional cases, requests for deadline exemptions may be reviewed **on a case-by-case basis** and must be supported by **appropriate documentation**.

GRADUATING FROM THE MSW PROGRAM

As you move toward graduation, it's important to understand the process for advancement to candidacy and the necessary steps to officially complete your degree. Admission to the Graduate School does not automatically guarantee candidacy for a master's degree. The School of Social Work must determine that each student has demonstrated strong academic preparation and the ability to succeed at the graduate level. Some departments, including ours, may require a comprehensive qualifying examination before officially approving candidacy for the degree.

Graduate Forms

All graduate forms are available through the NMSU Graduate School website:

- Visit <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu>
- Click on "**Current Students**", then "**Graduate Forms**"
- Or go directly to: [Graduate Forms](#)

Be sure to use only the most up-to-date forms and follow all instructions carefully.

Checklist for Master's Degree Candidates

To stay on track for graduation, review the **Graduate Catalog** checklist and work closely with your academic advisor. You are responsible for ensuring that all required forms are submitted correctly and on time. Missing a deadline or submitting the wrong form may **delay your graduation**.

Use this checklist to confirm that all essential paperwork is complete:

1. **STAR Degree Audit**
Meet with your academic advisor to complete your degree audit before submitting the Final Examination Form.
2. **Transfer of Credit Form**
If applicable, submit this form during your **first semester** to ensure transferred coursework is reviewed and approved.
3. **Register for Thesis or Research Project (if applicable)**
If you're completing a thesis or research project, register during the correct semester(s) and read the Graduate School's **Preparation of a Thesis or Dissertation** guidelines to help you choose the best research option.
4. **File Application for Degree Form**
Submit your Application for Degree (Diploma) through your [myNMSU portal](#):
 - Go to the "**Student**" tab
 - Click "**Student Records & Degree Application**"
 - Then select "**Application for Degree (Diploma)**"

***Please note: There is a **submission fee**, and if you do not meet all graduation requirements by the deadline, the fee will be forfeited and you will need to reapply and repay the fee.

5. **Complete Your Final Examination/Exit Project**

During your last semester you will complete your final examination (see below)

Graduate Student Competency Examination Requirements

All graduate students at NMSU are required to complete a **comprehensive examination** to qualify for graduation. For MSW students, there are two options to meet this requirement:

- **Thesis Option**
- **Final Exit Project (SOWK 5994)**

Each path assesses your readiness for professional social work practice and serves as a culmination of your graduate studies.

Final Exit Project (School of Social Work Comprehensive Examination)

The Final Exit Project is the standard option for most MSW students and is completed in the one-credit course SOWK 5994 during the student's final semester. This project offers an opportunity to integrate your entire learning experience and present your understanding of Advanced Generalist Practice to faculty.

The project may include both written and oral components and is intended to:

1. Confirm that you have integrated all aspects of the MSW curriculum and demonstrate the necessary competencies for professional practice in multicultural settings.
2. Provide a space for you to reflect on your learning, demonstrate your current knowledge, values, and skills, identify any gaps, and outline your plans for continued professional development.

Detailed instructions and structure for the Final Exit Project are provided in **SOWK 5994**.

Thesis Option (Research Track)

The **thesis option** is typically chosen by students who plan to pursue **doctoral-level studies (Ph.D.)** or who have a strong interest in research.

Key Steps:

1. **Select a Thesis Chair** – Ideally by the end of your first semester.
2. **Form a Thesis Committee** – Must include at least three members:
 - **Thesis Chair** (committee lead)
 - **Second Committee Member** (graduate faculty from the School of Social Work)
 - **Dean's Representative** (faculty from a different department)

The committee supports your research process and ensures adherence to Graduate School policies.

Research and Writing Process:

- Work closely with your committee to:
 - Develop your topic and theoretical foundation
 - Create a research design
 - Complete IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval if human subjects are involved
 - Conduct research and data analysis
 - Write and defend your thesis

Once registered for thesis credit, you must **maintain continuous enrollment** in at least one credit of thesis or coursework each **regular semester** (excluding summer unless you are defending in summer) until the thesis is approved. Failure to do so will result in **withdrawal from the university**, and re-entry requires re-application and compliance with current program requirements.

Thesis Requirements:

With the support of your chair, you will complete a **Thesis Proposal Form** and submit a **4–6 page proposal** that includes:

- The research question
- A literature review supporting the question
- A brief description of your research method
- The relevance of the research to **social work** and **advanced generalist practice**

The committee will review and:

- Accept the proposal
- Reject the proposal
- Conditionally accept it, pending revisions

For formatting and preparation guidelines, refer to the Graduate School's **Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines**:

<https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/thesis-and-dissertation.html>

Students are strongly encouraged to submit sample formatting items (e.g., references, tables, figures) to the **thesis editor** for review before finalizing the document.

Human Research Participants

If your project involves **human subjects** (e.g., interviews, surveys), you must obtain **IRB approval** before beginning research. This is strictly enforced by NMSU and applies to all research involving people.

Requirements:

- Submit a **Permission to Use Human Subjects in Research** form: <https://research.nmsu.edu/RIC/Home.html>

- Complete required **CITI training** for researchers and research staff: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

Be sure to complete these steps **before beginning your research** to ensure compliance with university policies and federal regulations.

STUDENT RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Communication

All communication related to the MSW Program—including contact with faculty, advisors, practicum coordinators, financial aid, and university services—must be conducted using your official NMSU email address.

Students are responsible for regularly checking their NMSU email, as all official notices—such as registration updates, graduation information, events, and student opportunities—are sent exclusively through this account.

Graduate Assistantship Opportunities

The School of Social Work offers a limited number of paid graduate assistantships each academic year. These are not automatically awarded upon admission to the MSW Program.

For an overview of the responsibilities, eligibility, and hiring process for graduate assistantships, visit:

<https://hr.nmsu.edu/general-resources/toolkits1/grad-assistant.html>

If you're interested in being considered for a graduate assistantship, please reach out to the **SSW Director** and **Academic Advisor** for guidance on the application process.

Scholarship Opportunities

NMSU offers a wide range of scholarships for graduate students. To apply, complete the Scholar Dollar\$ application each year by March 1: <https://scholarships.nmsu.edu/>

Use the search function on the site to explore scholarships by program or area of interest.

Student Engagement in the School of Social Work

MSW students are encouraged to be active participants in shaping their educational experience. One way to do this is by joining student-led efforts that align with the mission and values of the School of Social Work. Opportunities include participation in the **Graduate Student Social Work Association (GSSWA)** and other activities that support student voice and engagement across the program. The **GSSWA** selects representatives to serve on key faculty committees, including:

1. **MSW Curricula Committee**
2. **Diversity and Social Justice Committee**

3. Practicum Education Committee

This involvement is a meaningful way to contribute to the continued growth and inclusivity of the MSW Program.

School Governance and Graduate Student Voice

Students in good academic standing may serve as **non-voting members** on faculty committees. While student members do not participate in discussions involving confidential matters, financial issues, or personnel decisions, their contributions are **highly valued** in helping shape School of Social Work policies and programming.

NMSU AND GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

NMSU Policies

Several policies apply to all graduate programs. Please review information found online for the Graduate School at <http://gradschool.nmsu.edu/> for policies regarding

1. residency requirements,
2. time limits for degree completion
3. withdrawal from the university
4. delaying admission,
5. leaves of absence and readmission to the program, and
6. adding or dropping courses.

Detailed information regarding grade scales, incomplete grades, and GPA requirements are also provided by the graduate school. MSW students should refer to the current Graduate Catalog: <https://catalogs.nmsu.edu/nmsu/graduate-school/>

NMSU Office of Institutional Equity, Title IX

New Mexico State University, in compliance with applicable laws and in furtherance of its commitment to fostering an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity, does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, retaliation, serious medical condition, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, spousal affiliation, or protected veteran status in its programs and activities, including employment, admissions, and educational programs and activities. You may submit a report online at equity.nmsu.edu. If you have an urgent concern, please contact the Office of Institutional Equity at 575-646-3635.

Title IX prohibits sex harassment, sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, stalking and retaliation. For more information on discrimination or Title IX, or to file a complaint contact:

Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) - O'Loughlin House, 1130 University Avenue

Phone: (575) 646-3635

E-mail: equity@nmsu.edu

Office of Institutional Equity Website: <https://equity.nmsu.edu>

Disability Access Services

Disability Access Services (DAS) provides accommodations, education, consultation and advocacy for qualified students with disabilities at New Mexico State University. Section 504

of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA) covers issues relating to disability and accommodations. If a student has questions or needs an accommodation in the classroom (all medical information is treated confidentially), contact:

Main and NMSU-O Campuses
Disability Access Services
Corbett Center Student Union Room
204 Aaron Salas, Director 575-646-
6840 das@nmsu.edu

Student Code of Conduct

Students at NMSU are expected to observe and maintain not only the highest academic standards of conduct, but also high ethical and professional standards. Students should review the university's information regarding the rules of conduct and definitions of misconduct. Details on the administration of discipline in the case of nonacademic conduct violations by the University can be found in the New Mexico State University Student Handbook: <https://studenthandbook.nmsu.edu/>

Academic Integrity and Misconduct

NMSU requires all students to adhere to the Academic Code of Conduct: Academic Integrity policy outlined here: <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-10/>. Allegations of academic misconduct by graduate students shall be brought immediately to the attention of the College of HEST Academic Officer and the MSW Program Coordinator. Faculty members with concerns about academic misconduct are required to conduct an investigation detailed here: <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-11/>. If the investigation results in a sanction or sanctions that impact a student's academic standing with NMSU and/or the SSW, the student has a right to appeal the decision, following this guidance: <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-14/>.

Academic Grievance and Appeal Policy

Students with an academic grievance or need to appeal a grade should follow guidance provided through NMSU's Graduate Students Academic Grievances Policy, found here: <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-14/>.

Graduate School Provisional Status

A student admitted provisionally to NMSU's Graduate School must complete their first three courses, a total of 9 credits of graduate work, with a minimum grade-point average of a 3.0. A provisional student who does not meet the 3.0 grade-point average after 9 graduate credits hours is subject to dismissal.

A student admitted to the MSW program that has either a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0 and/or has not completed a prerequisite is admitted on provisional status. No provisional students will be allowed to enroll in the two-year program option. Students admitted on provisional standing must maintain a 3.0 GPA in the first semester to continue in the program or will subject to dismissal.