

Undergraduate
Department of Social Work
School of the Professions
SUNY College at Brockport

Advisement Handbook for Undergraduate Students

Information & advice for
a successful academic experience

2007/2008

The advisement handbook augments the information found in the Social Work Department's *Program Guide*. Students must read the *Program Guide*, as well as this handbook, for a full understanding of the program. Several parts of this handbook feature a "Tips for students" section to help students navigate the academic and professional process of becoming a social worker.

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I. Introduction to the program & the field of social work

The profession of social work is for people with big hearts, open minds, and a passion for making the world a better place. Social workers work in every aspect of human and health services, and with every population. What all social workers share is a concern for people, communities and social justice.

What the social work field offers

The field of social work offers a rich array of job opportunities. Fields of practice in social work include child, family, and school social work; medical and public health social work; mental health and substance abuse social work; aging and gerontology; and many other kinds of social issues, populations, and concerns. Social work consists of direct practice (giving benefits directly to people such as counseling, support and resources), as well as macro social work positions in administration, education, research and policy work. A majority of social workers are employed in human service agencies and government providing services directly to people and communities. BSWs receive a “generalist” education, meaning that they learn basic skills and information that prepare them for entry level work in all fields of practice.

Social workers work with people and social systems to create positive change using a variety of tools, including counseling and support services, education and research, policy development, advocacy and organizing. There are entry-level social work positions for which the Bachelor’s in Social Work (BSW) is the preferred degree. As the majority of supervisors in human service agencies have a Master’s degree in Social Work (MSW), they look favorably on those with BSW and MSW degrees.

For those who want to prepare for policy, administration or supervisory work, work in the health care field, or clinical social work, a master’s degree is typically required. Students with a Bachelor of Social Work degree are eligible for “advanced standing” when applying to a Master’s of Social Work program. A BSW may be accepted as an “advanced standing” student when applying to graduate school, which means that it is possible to complete a MSW in only one calendar year.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s 2006/2007 edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook, the profession of social work is expected to continue to “increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014.” Social work occupations in rural social work, child welfare, substance abuse, long term care and hospice, and private social service agencies are particularly expected to have strong growth. The national median annual earnings of social workers in May of 2004 ranged from \$33,920 to \$40,080, depending on the service area.

In addition to obtaining a degree in social work, the field offers a variety of professional credentials that help define the scope of practice for social workers. Acquiring these credentials is typically a matter of obtaining a degree and taking a test, while some require experience in the field as well. Most states license social workers, including New York State. In New York State, social workers with an MSW are eligible to apply to become a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) or a Licensed Master Clinical Social Worker (LCSW).

There are also national credentials available to social workers. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) offers three credentials and seven specialty certifications on a voluntary basis, two of which are for BSWs. The NASW bachelor level certifications are the Certified Social Work Case Manager (C-SWCM), and the Certified Children, Youth, and Family Social Worker (C-CYFSW). Social workers with an MSW may apply for an ACSW (ACSW), and clinical social workers may obtain the Qualified Clinical Social Worker (QCSW) credential, or the Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW) credential, based on their professional experience.

Why pursue a BSW at SUNY Brockport?

What makes our program exceptional are the outstanding professionals serving on our faculty. These accomplished social workers are deeply committed to providing a high quality education. Full-time faculty teach the great majority of classes, and local, experienced professionals also serve as adjuncts. All our faculty are experienced in the field, with strong records in research, publishing, and professional service. Most importantly, we share a deep commitment to making the learning process rewarding.

The SUNY Brockport Department of Social Work program is nationally accredited, and faculty work hard to ensure that the curriculum fully addresses requirements established by the Council on Social Work Education. Faculty take care to ensure that concepts essential to effective social work practice are reinforced and integrated across the curriculum. National accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education provides an advantage to students who may wish to go on for graduate studies in social work. A student who completes their BSW from an accredited program is eligible for “advanced standing” status when applying to MSW programs, which accelerates the masters in social work to one calendar year.

Since about 85 new juniors start each year, there are usually at least three sections of each required course offered each semester. This provides choices for classes held during days and evenings. Offerings include a part-time evening program for those who work.

The Department keeps the class size of core courses relatively small, typically from 20 to 25 students, to allow for time to discussions and interaction among students and faculty. Senior field practice seminars are limited to ten to twelve students, which permits more

in-depth attention to professional growth, and the integration of theory and practice.

Our program brings diverse people together who represent a wide range of ages, backgrounds, religions, ethnicity, and interests, making the learning environment a rich one for students. The Student Social Work Organization (SSWO) is a student-led group that organizes a variety of social and professional development activities, as well as opportunities for community service that give students needed experience to prepare for their careers.

Career preparation includes local and state social work agencies in the educational process, so that students are exposed to the real world issues. Our experiential and service learning components in the junior year of course work provides direct experience to students in the services, research, administration, and advocacy processes of human service organizations. Students work on projects outside of class that are connected to the curriculum, and help make the classroom lessons come alive. The senior field experience provides a significant experience in the profession, as students spend 400 hours working in a human services agency. This gives students the opportunity to build skills, a professional track record, and graduate with the possibility of references from local social workers. These real life experiences help prepare and position students to obtain jobs after graduation.

National accreditation, an outstanding curriculum and faculty, excellent field placements, small class sizes, and affordable tuition make SUNY Brockport a wise choice for aspiring social workers.

II. Application, acceptance & starting the program

The social work program is a two year program designed to be completed in the junior and senior years of undergraduate college. Typically, at least three sections of each required course are offered each semester, which provides a variety of options in terms of days and times.

Before formal acceptance into the program, students are able to take any social work elective (see the *Program Guide* for a list of electives). The Department recommends that you take SWO 221, Contemporary Social Work. Also, two of the core required courses: SWO 321, Human Diversity; and, SWO 322, Social & Economic Justice may be taken before formal acceptance. If you have not yet been accepted into the Social Work Department, and you want to take some core social work courses, you must register as an “Intent to Major”.

Students who have completed 54 credits may formally apply to the Department. Before you formally start in the social work program in the fall of your junior year, you need to complete any remaining pre-requisites (see the following section on prerequisites for more information). Remember that it is important to keep your Brockport GPA as high as possible. The Department requires that students have and maintain a 2.5 GPA.

SUNY Brockport students interested in pursuing a degree in social work are encouraged to sign up for the major by filling out an “Intent to Major” form as soon as possible. This not only entitles you to take some social work core courses in your sophomore year, but also allows you to be involved in social work department activities such as the Student Social Work Organization, and signing up for the listserv.

Majoring in social work - course planning considerations

Students should note that the social work courses are offered in sequence; for example, one must take Methods I before Methods II. Please refer to the “BSW Degree Planning Sheet” provided in Appendix I. for the schedule of course offerings. Most of the core required courses are typically offered only one timer per year, in either the fall or spring semester (but not both semesters). The only core requirement that is offered both in the fall and spring semesters on a regular basis is SWO 321, Human Diversity. Core required courses are generally not offered in the summer. Plan carefully to make sure that you can finish the program in a timely fashion.

It is important that students plan time during the week to study, read, and complete assignments in addition to class time. A rule of thumb typically used for allowing adequate study time for college courses is that for every credit hour taken, three hours per week should be set aside for course work outside of class time. Social work students are advised to schedule between 5-9 hours per class per week for studying, reading and completing assignments (depending on your study skills, course work load, and the types of courses taken).

Students should plan to set aside extra time in their junior year for the experiential and service learning components in the junior year of course work (at least an additional 25 hours per semester). In both the fall and spring semesters, students work on projects outside of class that are part of their class assignments.

All eight 300 level social work core courses must be satisfactorily completed (passed with at least a C) before a student starts their field experience in their senior year.

Students who intend to have two majors will be assigned two advisors. There are several degree programs that have worked out an ideal sequencing of courses for a dual major with social work. (See proposed schedules in the Appendices section for various majors.)

◆*Tips for students*

On occasion, the department may be able to make some other courses available, depending on the number of course sections offered in a particular year. Other courses that students may be able to take before formal acceptance into the program include SWO 310 and SWO 311.

Part time, evening students are advised that only two of the four core required courses have an evening section offered at night each semester. Therefore, if one plans to complete the part time program in four years, and can only take evening courses, then the student must take the core required courses that are offered in the evening that particular semester. Part time students should discuss their plan of study in detail with their advisor to make sure their plan is feasible. Part time students should also make pre-registration advisement meeting with their advisor early, and should register as early as possible to be sure to get into the evening sections, as these fill up quickly.

SUNY Brockport requires several courses as part of the general education requirements. All students must take a Contemporary Issues course during their Junior or Senior year. These are listed in the front of the newsprint course offerings under that title. Social work courses designated as Contemporary Issues courses are: SWO 475 Women's Lives, SWO 476 Aging in America, and SWO 492 International Social Work. The Women's Perspective requirement is met by SWO 301, Human Behavior and Social Environment I. The Diversity requirement is met by SWO 321 Human Diversity.

Carefully review your DARS report (see Appendix IV for more information on your DARS report) each semester and make sure you have completed all breadth and general education component courses.

◆Tips for transfer students

Many students believe that the best associate degree one can have to prepare for a bachelor level program in social work is a human service degree. While these degrees can be beneficial for exposing students to the field and building basic skills, it is not necessary to have such a degree to apply. In fact, students who have a liberal arts degree are as well, if not more, prepared for bachelor level studies, as these courses emphasize developing writing and critical thinking skills that are essential for success in higher level academic programs.

The faculty has noticed that a number of transfer students coming from some community colleges have struggled to meet the Department's standards for writing. These students have informed the faculty that they did not do much writing in their community college courses, and that their writing was not always thoroughly critiqued. The core courses in the Social Work program demand competency in reading and writing. The faculty expects students to be writing at the college level. If you want to strengthen your writing skills, then you should consider taking the social work elective on writing: SWO 201 (This elective is currently offered in the summer and in the fall, and is recommended for incoming juniors who wish to strengthen their writing skills), as well as taking additional writing composition and liberal arts classes.

If you transferred to SUNY Brockport after 2002, be sure to take the Computer Competency exam.

Prerequisites

Students considering a degree in social work should review the prerequisites for the program listed below, and make sure they can complete these courses before their junior year. With some exceptions (see the tips section below for more information), all applicants to the program must have completed the program prerequisites prior to formal acceptance into the program, and to taking the required core courses.

Prerequisite Courses (12 Credits)

Sociology 100: Introduction to Sociology

Psychology 110: Principles of Psychology

Biology 281: Elements of Human Biology

SOC 200: Social Statistics or PSH 202: Introductory Stat

◆Tips for students

Students planning to apply to the social work program should look over their Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) report carefully to assess their progress, and make sure that they have a plan to take all of the prerequisites for the program, and general education requirements needed for graduation at SUNY Brockport. (See Appendix IV for more information on DARS and transferring credits, and Appendix V for a sample DARS report and how to read it.) If the DARS report has a plus sign to the left of a listed prerequisite or a general education requirement (+), then the student has met that pre-requisite. If the student has a negative sign (-) on the left, then the student still needs to complete the listed requirement.

Sometimes students are admitted with the provision that they complete one or two prerequisites before they start the program. Such students should develop a plan to do so before the Fall term in which they wish to start their studies and note this plan on their application (such as in the spring semester in which they apply to the Social Work Department, or in the summer before entering the program). Plans should be discussed with the student's advisor. In rare circumstances, a student can petition the Chair of the Department to finish up one prerequisite during the Fall semester of which they begin their social work major. A formal letter must be sent to the Chair of the Social Work Department addressing specific details. The chair will make decisions on an individual basis and the student will be notified of the decision.

◆*Tips for transfer students*

Transfer students: If you think that a course you have taken elsewhere will meet the requirements of the prerequisite, then please contact Jo Ann Sigler in the Social Work Department at 395-2324.

Application process & screening of applicants

SUNY Brockport students are encouraged to indicate an interest in the major by filling out an “Intent to Major” form in social work early in their college career. This will enable students to take some of the social work courses early, and to become a part of the social work community on campus. Transfer students ideally should apply to the social work program in their sophomore year. Apply to the Social Work Department as soon as you have completed, or are in the process of completing, the pre-requisites for the program. Students typically apply starting in late fall or spring of the sophomore year; the application process usually closes by March 15.

Transfer students should start with an application to SUNY Brockport, as students must be accepted by SUNY Brockport before the Department of Social Work can accept a student (although students may start both processes simultaneously).

Decisions for acceptance will be made before a student has to pre register for fall classes. The student will receive a formal letter of acceptance or denial.

◆*Tips for students*

Occasionally openings remain after the usual deadline of March, so applicants should check with the Department to see if applications are being accepted after the deadline that particular year. The Department does keep a waiting list of students.

Student applicants should obtain a copy of the Social Work Department’s Program Guide (which may be downloaded from the department’s website), and read the “admission and continuance process” section (pages 14-17), for more information.

Plan to spend an adequate amount of time writing the application essay, because it must reflect your true abilities. Do not have someone else write or correct your essay.

Acceptance & registration

Faculty members review each application, and decisions are made several weeks after received a completed application. Students are notified of their acceptance via letter. Students who are in the process of completing their prerequisites should keep in touch with the Department on their progress, and notify the Department when they have completed them, so that a final decision on acceptance is made. If you are unsure of your status, be sure to call the Social Work Department to check.

SUNY Brockport students who have declared themselves “intents to major” may register for some social work classes (such as SWO 321 and 322) before formal acceptance into the program. SUNY Brockport students who are accepted into the program as intents to major will be able to register in the spring semester of their Sophomore year for their fall social work courses. Transfer students who apply early may take some of the social work classes during their sophomore year

To register, transfer students may attend one of the Student Orientation, Advisement & Registration (SOAR) sessions that are offered for transfer students. Two or three SOAR sessions are typically offered in the spring and summer, and one is offered at the beginning of the fall semester as well.

Students usually register using the online registration process. See the “FAQs on Registration” on the registrar’s website at <http://www.brockport.edu/registrar/> for more information, or call the registrar’s office at 395-2531. If students are having information technology difficulties navigating the online system or have any other question related to information technology, they can call the Help Desk at 395-5151, or stop by the Help Desk in Daily Hall for assistance and computer access. Students can also go to the registrar’s office in which has been temporarily relocated to Drake – Ground Floor for help in registering for classes.

◆*Tips for students*

Social work “intents” are strongly encouraged to take SWO 221 Contemporary Social Work; as well as SWO 321 Human Diversity and/or SWO 322 Social & Economic Justice in their sophomore year. Other social work classes may be available to “intents” (check with your advisor).

Orientation & advisement

All new junior students in the major must attend an orientation session held by the Department at the beginning of the Fall semester. At this session, students will receive more information about the program, and meet their fellow classmates and faculty.

All students who are accepted into the program should sign up for the social work student

listserv immediately, as that is the primary means of department communication with students. (See Appendix II. for instructions on how to subscribe.) All social work students (those who are formally accepted into the program) are also assigned a mail file folder, which is found in the social work student lounge in the Albert W. Brown Building – room 151L.

Each semester students should make an appointment with their advisor before their designated time to register to develop a plan of study. Students should bring a copy of their DARS report to the meeting. For information on when to register, see the information on the SUNY Brockport website under the registrar’s office. Transfer students should try and register at one of the spring or summer SOAR sessions, as by the Fall many of the sections of courses are already full.

Freshmen and sophomores at SUNY Brockport who intend to pursue a degree in social work may file an “Intent to major” form with the Department, and the Department’s Advisement Coordinator will then assign the *Intent to Major student* to a faculty advisor. The advisor can then provide guidance to the student to help them prepare for the program. An “Intent to major” student who is accepted into the Social Work major will keep the same advisor through the rest of their course work at Brockport, unless the student requests a change of advisor. The Admissions Coordinator will notify the Academic Advisement office of the students change from an intent to a major in Social Work by letter.

New transfer students accepted into the Social Work program will be assigned an advisor by submitting the form *Declaration of/Change of Academic Major*, at the summer SOAR session. The student will get their advisor assignment at Junior Orientation in the Fall semester. If a change of advisor is requested, the student must see the Advisement Coordinator.

◆*Tips for students*

New students should arrange to meet with their advisors before or in their first semester of the program to make sure that they understand the program requirements, and to have their questions answered. Students should get on the student listserv as soon as possible (directions for signing up on the listserv can be found in Appendix II), as this is the primary means that the department uses to communicate with students about when academic advising for registration occurs each semester.

The primary purpose of an academic advisor is to help you develop a feasible plan for completing your degree in social work.

Feel free to use your advisor to help you in developing strategies to succeed academically and professionally in the process of becoming a social

worker. Some topics to discuss with your advisor include:

- ◆ Field preferences, and how to use field to advance your career goals;
- ◆ Career options and development, resume development, and career planning; and,
- ◆ Assistance in achieving academic success, and dealing effectively with academic challenges.

Sometimes the stress of college, and the process of studying human behavior and social problems, can bring unresolved personal problems to the surface. It is very important for social work students to learn how to deal effectively with and resolve their own problems, as social workers teach, model and provide mental health services to others. SUNY Brockport offers a free, confidential counseling service that is available to students. These services include individual counseling, group sessions, couples and family counseling, as well as assistance in developing skills in stress management. The Counseling Center is in Hazen Hall, and is open Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm. You may reach them at (585) 395-2207.

III. Curriculum

The profession of social work is unique among professions in that it employs a focus of the “person in the environment” when addressing personal or social problems. A bachelor’s in social work degree is the only degree that prepares baccalaureate students to be professional social workers.

All BSW programs that are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education require a solid foundation in “generalist” content, which includes the topics of human behavior and the social environment, social policy, research, human diversity, social and economic justice, populations-at-risk, and social work practice, values and ethics.

The undergraduate program at SUNY Brockport is an upper-level program primarily for juniors and seniors, although freshman and sophomores may indicate an “intent to major” in social work at any time and become a part of the social work department’s academic community.

The junior year of the social work program includes courses plus a service learning component that is typically a part of the fall research course, and the spring policy course. The senior year has fewer core courses, as more time is devoted to the field experience. Juniors must successfully complete all 300 level courses before entering field.

This activity exposes students to the process of human service agencies, and is an

important pre-requisite to field work. Sometimes social work students are interested in combining a BSW with another major or program, such as sociology, criminal justice, or the pre-law program. Coursework that prepares students to sit for the New York State Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) exam is available in the Health Sciences Department. Consult the SUNY Brockport Undergraduate Studies catalog, and the departments, for information on how to pursue double majors and other credentials.

Social work students must complete fourteen required social work classes; these classes are laid out in Appendix I, and in this section. Students may not take more than 54 credits in social work.

Achieving success in the classroom

Good time management, study skills, and allocating enough time for studying and completing assignments are essential for academic success. Use the many resources that SUNY Brockport offers students through the *Student Learning Center* (open Monday-Friday in Room B-10 in Cooper Hall, with evening hours; Phone (585) 395-2293), where you can receive help in learning how to study, read for taking tests, and for consultations on your writing assignments (you need to make appointments for writing consultations). See the website at <http://www.brockport.edu/~slc/index.html> for more information; the site has many good tips and resources on how to develop strong study skills. Students should plan to reserve between 5-9 hours per class per week for studying, reading and completing assignments (depending on your study skills, course work load, and the types of courses taken). Also, see the *Time Management Tips* in your orientation packet.

Learning effective, appropriate and ethical communication skills is an important part of becoming a social worker. Accordingly, participation is a significant part of the grade for most social work classes. In all communications, both verbal and nonverbal, make sure to address everyone in the class with respect and consideration. Take care to understand and be open to other points of view; do not make assumptions about other speakers.

Be considerate of your fellow students in the amount you participate in class. Try to strike a balance: Aim for an amount that is somewhere in between sitting back during discussions and letting your classmates shoulder the discussion, and dominating the floor. Understand that the professor may need to facilitate the discussion in order to allow all students to be heard. Refer to *Your right to know - Academic Policies Handbook* for more information on expectations of students, and your rights as a student.

Stay on top of your reading, get to work early on big assignments, and discuss any concerns, confusion or difficulty you may have with class assignments with the instructor early, always do your best, and you will be well on the way to academic success.

Junior year: requirements, electives, and service learning

Full time students who have received their acceptance into the Social Work Department should plan to take the following courses in the fall semester of their junior year:

SWO 301 Human Behavior Social Environment I (This meets the Perspectives on Women requirement)

SWO 341 Social Work Methods I*

SWO 310 Research Methods*

SWO 321 Human Diversity

Elective(s): Electives do not have to be social work courses.

Of all the above courses, only SWO 321 Human Diversity is also offered during the spring semester.

***Note:** If you plan to complete your degree on a part time basis, take SWO 341 (Methods I) and SWO 310 (Research Methods) before taking the other two required core courses.

Juniors should plan to take the following courses in the spring semester:

SWO 302 Human Behavior Social Environment II

SWO 342 Social Work Methods II

SWO 322 Social and Economic Justice

SWO 321 Human Diversity (if not taken in the fall semester)

SWO 311 Social Policy

Elective(s): Electives do not have to be social work courses.

◆Tips for students

Carefully review your DARS report to be sure you have completed the necessary breadth components and general education requirements. You should consider taking your Contemporary Issues course in your junior year, if you have not already done so.

To count toward the BSW degree, all courses must be completed with a C or better. Students may take a course over again to improve their grade (the most recent course grade is the one that is counted on your transcript). If you fail the course, you may retake it and have financial aid cover the course if it is required

for your major; however, you must take it in addition to 12 credits. For more information on this, consult the registrar's webpage.

Early in the spring semester of your junior year, you will need to apply for field. Start early to prepare for field. Work on developing a resume, as you will need to submit one with your field application. Try to get some experience in the human services field through other internships or jobs to help you prepare to make the most of your field experience. The service learning hours in your junior year will also expose you to human service organizations and advocacy processes.

If you think you may wish to go on for graduate school, it is not too early to look over the requirements of the colleges you are interested in attending. One item you should review is what academic requirements they may have. For example, the MSW Collaborative program of SUNY Brockport and Nazareth requires three humanities courses, while you only need two humanities to graduate from SUNY Brockport with a BSW. This way you can be sure to include the courses you need in your two year plan.

Senior year: requirements and electives

In the senior year of the program, students have an intensive field experience in which they have an opportunity to practice the skills and apply the theories they have been taught. Most students do a **concurrent** field placement, which provides a field experience two days a week during both semesters. If a student has a good grade point average (3.25 or better) they may elect to apply for a **block** field placement, which means the student is in field four days a week for one semester (either fall or spring).

Students in field must also take the field seminar at the same time (most are offered on Monday mornings, and one in the evening), which occurs every other week for concurrent field placements, and every week for block field placements. All of the international field placements are offered in the block format, and are typically taken during the spring semester of the senior year.

Students apply for a field placement in the spring semester of their junior year. Students indicate areas of interest, and then interview with several organizations. The final decision about the suitability of a particular field placement for a student will be made by the placement agency and the field coordinator.

After students complete all the steps necessary to apply for a placement, students will be notified regarding which placement they receive via a letter from the field supervisor. Applications for overseas placements go through International Education, however, acceptance by OAP is not synonymous with admittance into a social work international placement. This will be funneled through the Department's Field Coordinator. Senior social work students enroll in a field placement and seminar, and take two core social work courses, SWO 411 and SWO 441. Students typically take SWO 411, Human

Service Systems/Policy Analysis, in the fall, and SWO 441, Methods III, in the spring, and any other remaining general education requirements or electives needed to graduate with the necessary 120 credit hours.

All seniors must pass the first semester of both field and the field seminar to be able to go on for their second semester in field (the seminar is graded A-E, and the field placement is pass/fail). To pass field, students must receive a satisfactory evaluation from their field supervisor, and complete all of their field hours by the end of finals week in the fall semester.

Students in block placements will take Methods III simultaneously with field, and students in concurrent placements will take Methods III in the second semester of their placement. Students who are doing an international block placement in the spring take Methods III and Human Service Systems/Policy Analysis in the fall. Due to the heavy work load, students who are in a block field placement locally are strongly discouraged from taking block and the two core senior classes all in the same semester.

Senior fall semester

Full time senior social work majors register for the following courses in the fall semester:

CONCURRENT FIELD Students:

Field Instruction I – SWO 451*

Field Seminar I – SWO 455*

Human Service Systems/Policy Analysis – SWO 411

* Students who register for field and seminar should register for the seminar of their choice. However, you must register for the same section of field as you do for seminar.

BLOCK Field Students Only:

Field Instruction – SWO 454

Field Seminar – SWO 456

Social Work Methods III – SWO 441

Human Service Systems/Policy Analysis – SWO 411

Note: Students planning an international social work placement for the spring semester should complete both SWO 411 and SWO 441 during the fall semester.

Senior spring semester

Full time seniors register for the following courses in the spring semester:

SWO 453: Field Instruction (Sign up for the same section as the one in which you are currently enrolled. You will have the same Faculty Liaison as in the fall semester).

SWO 457: Field Seminar

SWO 441: Social Work Methods III

◆Tips for students

Students who for some reason need to take SWO 441, Methods III without simultaneously being in a field placement will need to find a suitable macro project (as macro projects are typically associated with the student's field placement). They should discuss this with their advisor and their Methods III instructor.

Evening students are advised to meet with the field coordinator no later than February of their junior year to arrange for an evening field placement the following fall. Even though the Department is able to negotiate evening hours for part time evening students, there may be some placements that require some amount of daytime hours for supervision.

In the semester in which you plan to complete all of your requirements, you must complete and return a Graduation Data Card. (These are available in the SWO office, and must be returned to the Office of Registration and Records.)

International Field Placements

The Department of Social Work at SUNY Brockport offers four international field placements in Puerto Rico, Costa Rico, Ireland and Vietnam. The rewards of a field experience abroad are well worth the investment. Such experiences prepare students for a wide variety of professional positions, and to be a world citizen. In this era of rapid globalization, international knowledge and experience prepares a student to take

advantage of many diverse opportunities in the future. If you are interested in possibly pursuing an international placement, see the field placement coordinator for more information early in your college studies.

◆*Tips for students considering an international placement.*

Students who wish to go abroad in an international field placement should take some time to inventory their academic and life experiences, as international placements demand a high level of maturity. Students who want to go abroad for their field should be resilient and resourceful in the face of new challenges, and should possess a certain degree of independence and flexibility. A strong sense of curiosity and adventure is useful, and an open mind is essential. Knowledge of cultural differences, including self-knowledge and awareness of one's own cultural blinders, is key.

If you are considering an international placement, discuss this possibility with your advisor and other faculty to get ideas on how to best prepare yourself. To develop and strengthen the aforementioned characteristics and skills, students should engage in the following activities before going abroad in an international field experience:

1. Take courses that will prepare you for a cross-cultural experience. The Department offers an elective, International Social Work, that covers relevant information for students preparing for international social work experiences. Especially recommended are any anthropology courses, and human diversity courses. A sociology course, Globalization, is also highly recommended.
2. Volunteer or work with immigrants or refugees from other countries. Any experience working in a human service agency will also be beneficial.
3. Travel. Take a trip to areas and cities you have never visited before, and gain experience in learning how to read maps and find your way around. Take a trip to nearby country, such as Canada, and notice the differences between U.S. and Canadian culture. Consider taking courses that include travel to other areas.
4. Learn everything you can about the country you intend to visit. Take courses on the countries, regions, or cultures you will visit. Read travel books, and blogs put up by travelers, to get a sense of what you may encounter there.

For more information on the Department's current international field placements, talk with the field coordinator. As SUNY Brockport has an extensive international program with connections to academic and internship programs in many countries, in some cases it may be possible to arrange other international field placements than the current

international placements.

IV. Building a career

Assessing your strengths and interests, developing a resume and obtaining work experience in the human service field are the first steps of building a career in social work. An essential part of preparation for a career in social work involves obtaining direct experience in the human service field. You should volunteer, set up internships, and acquire part time or summer jobs in the human service field prior to your senior field experience. School provides a time in your life when you stretch yourself, move out of your “comfort zone” and try new challenges. Try to vary the types of experiences you have, so that you can experiment, and build a broader knowledge base.

Becoming a social worker

The social work community is made up of professionals who, for the most part, share common values and beliefs about human nature and society at large. Social workers see and believe in the potential of each human to be their best, and in the possibility of change on the individual and societal level.

Students may encounter personal and professional challenges in the process of becoming a social worker. As social workers deal with many intense social problems, it is important to learn how to deal effectively with the emotions raised by encountering such situations. Focusing on the strengths of consumers and clients, and maintaining a positive outlook on the possibility of personal growth and change are hallmarks of an effective social worker. Learning strategies to focus on the positive, and maintain good mental and physical health, can prevent burnout.

Refer to the NASW Code of Ethics for a sense of what is expected of professional social workers. Certain codes of conduct, such as always following confidentiality of clients, valuing human diversity and human rights, and dealing positively, constructively and fairly with others, are part of what it means to become a social worker.

Think about your own characteristics, and what areas you might want to enhance or strengthen as you seek experience in the field. Read about what other social workers have done that you admire, and think about what attributes are needed to create such achievements. Put yourself in an employer’s shoes, and think about what they would want in an employee. As a starting point, review the list of items on the self-appraisal check list offered by Columbia University School of Social Work, and make your own list of the characteristics you wish to demonstrate in the workplace:

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/careers/tips/self_appraisal.html

Resume development

If you have not already developed a resume, now is the time to start. You will need to have a resume to seek a senior field placement. The process of putting together a resume helps you assess your current attributes, skills, and characteristics that make you a good social worker, as well as identify gaps and areas in need of development or improvement.

You should maintain one complete resume that lists all of your jobs, activities, and achievements. You then use this complete list to pick those items most relevant to the job you are applying for. Resumes that you send out to apply for jobs are typically one-two pages in length, and provide a summary of skills, education and attributes that employers review to determine if they want to interview you for a position.

See Appendix V for a sample resume, draft one for yourself, and meet with your advisor to obtain feedback.

Gaining Work experience

Experience in the field will not only help you in securing a good field placement (you must apply for these, and field supervisors are increasingly looking for students with previous experience), but will also make you much more competitive when you seek a job after graduation. Supervisors from volunteer and paid positions may be used as references for future jobs and graduate school.

There are many programs that seek volunteers, and one may have a significant volunteer experience even if you only volunteer a few hours each week. Talk to your advisor, call agencies in your community that advertise volunteer positions, or reach out to human service agencies yourself to see if you can find a volunteer position. One should approach such commitments with as much seriousness as one gives to a paid position.

Paid experiences in social work are very valuable to add to your resume. There are many paths that a new social worker might take in obtaining a paid position in the field of social work. One is to obtain a direct care position in a residential program caring for a vulnerable population, such as individuals with developmental disabilities. These kinds of agencies offer entry-level positions on evenings and weekends.

Working with children in summer camps and after school programs offer another avenue for students on an academic schedule.

Gaining experience will help you in determining what kind of population you would like to work with, or what type of social work you may be interested in pursuing. Take some time to think about what kind of work environments and types of tasks you enjoy most. Do you enjoy working in groups, or mostly one-on-one? Do you like a fast paced environment, or one that is more measured? Do you like and need a lot of structure, or do you work well independently?

Even if you decide later to pursue another career path, a social work degree is one that provides a broad array of skills and knowledge that are useful in many other positions. For example, students with BSW's have gone on to obtain advanced degrees in education, health care, politics or management. Others creatively combine social work with other fields, such as the arts, to develop expertise in art therapies in dance, theater or the fine arts. Other career options in advocacy might include obtaining a position as a community organizer, policy analyst or legislative aid.

◆*Tips for students*

Start early to preparing yourself for the job market by using your academic experiences to the fullest. It is important to make the most of every aspect of your college experience, especially the opportunity for internships and community-based service learning. While it is very important to achieve as good grades as possible, it is also important to volunteer for campus-based and community volunteer and service opportunities, develop strong, collegial professional relationships for future references, and have as many career-related internships as possible.

If you do not have other social work related job experiences aside from field, consider taking an independent study in your sophomore or junior year, or during the summer, to gain additional experience in the field. You may be able to arrange an independent study (SWO 499) with the field coordinator, or another social work professor, to gain more real world experience. Discuss this with your advisor and professors to get ideas for projects and placements, and keep an eye out for community events where you can network to find possible volunteer or paid work experiences in social work related fields.

See the following online resources to use in your search for an internship or job.

Columbia University School of Social Work maintains an extensive list of online sources for job searches.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/careers/resources/index.html>

Volunteering, Summer Jobs & Internships

A current, complete list of volunteer opportunities, internships, nonprofit career fairs, events and resources both in the US and internationally

<http://www.idealists.org/>

Peterson's

<http://www.petersons.com/highschool/landing.asp?id=872&path=hs.fas.summer&sponsor=1>

General job search links

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>

<http://www.collegegrad.com/>

<http://www.jobsource.com/>

<http://www.nationjob.com/>

<http://www.monster.com/>

<http://www.career.com/>

Government & Policy Jobs

GovJobNet – A link to federal government jobs

<http://www.govtjob.net/>

International Opportunities

USAID has job offerings and student internships, in the US and abroad

<http://www.usaid.gov/>

Peace Corps

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/>

Graduate school

Many BSW students know that they wish to go on for a master's degree in social work (MSW) after graduating. One's undergraduate experiences and track record are key factors that graduate programs use in their acceptance process.

In addition to getting good grades, graduate schools highly value strong writing skills, a firm commitment to social work values as evidenced by your statements and actions, and a grasp of what the profession of social work entails. Here are some ideas on how to strengthen these aspects during your bachelor's level studies.

1) Writing.

Graduate programs are very unlikely to accept a student who cannot write well. This is a skill that employers often look for in a graduate social worker. Requesting feedback and learning from critiques of your writing is one of the best ways to improve your writing.

Ask your professors to give you as detailed feedback as possible on your papers.

If professors have told you that your writing skills are weak, take classes and use the writing center to make improvements. Purchase a good writers reference guidebook, and redo your papers based on your professor's grades and remarks so that you can learn from your mistakes. Read some good books on how to write well (Strunk & White- The Elements of Style, William Zinsser).

Practice! Ask for writing assignments in your volunteer and field work and work hard to do a good job (almost all reference forms ask about a student's writing ability). Turn off the TV and read as many good writers as you can.

2) Commitment to Social Work Values

All social workers abide by the NASW Code of Ethics, which lays out the values that professional social workers expect of each other. The code requires social workers to make every effort to support social and economic justice for clients of social work, and society in general. In addition to direct service work, gaining advocacy experience on social issues is a great way to round out your resume and to demonstrate a commitment to social work values.

Visit the websites of the New York State Chapter of Social Workers, as well as the National Association of Social Workers, and find ways to get involved in advocacy campaigns so that you can learn about how to create social and political change. Get involved in political activities and groups on campus and in your local community.

Social workers with a master's degree are often expected to take leadership and supervisory positions in agencies. Prepare yourself to be a leader and an agent of change. During your undergraduate studies, try to do some political internships or volunteer at: unions, nonprofit organizations that do advocacy, policy think tanks, political parties- any local state or national campaign. Internships with federal or state agencies or legislatures are also very valuable. Also, summers are a good time to gain policy experience in internships in Albany or Washington, DC. Read the newspaper daily and keep up on political and social change developments.

Being informed and having these kinds of experiences on your resume will make you stand out from the crowd, and are the best way to show your commitment to social work values.

3) Understanding the profession of social work

Graduate programs value prospective students who have some significant work experience, particularly those who have had some experience in the field. Demonstrating that you have some knowledge of the field will help show that you understand the profession, and are committed to completing the graduate program. Try to have more than just your undergraduate field experience under your belt before you apply to

graduate school. Obtaining social work experience through either paid or unpaid work in the field is a crucial part of not only understanding the profession, but also showing your commitment to the field.

Any kind of experience in the human services is good to have. Often programs that depend on volunteers such as rape crisis programs, or programs that need residential caretakers, offer good accessible entry-level positions with evening and weekend hours. Also, find some social work mentors who can give you information about the field.

Many faculty believe that taking a couple of years to gain social work experience before you apply to graduate school will prepare you to take advantage of the graduate curriculum, and will better position you as an applicant. This is especially true of a student who does not have a very high undergraduate grade point average, as very good references from professionals in the field can help strengthen an applicant's chances. For students who aim to pursue a Ph. D. in social work, continuing on for a master's degree immediately or soon after graduation is probably a smart course of action. Again, this option is a good one to discuss with your advisor before making a decision.

Surveying & selecting schools

One site that has a list of all the CSWE accredited schools of social work is the website of the Council for Social Work Education – www.cswe.org. Go to their accredited graduate school database, and type in “New York” as a search term to find regional programs, and type “social” in to get the full list, with links to the schools' websites. The CSWE also publishes a guide with a complete list of social work programs that you can purchase.

It's important to apply to schools that match your interests and goals. For example, if you have a passion for policy and macro social change work, applying to a school that specializes in clinical social work, such as Smith College in Massachusetts, is not a particularly good idea. The poor match will be noted by the school and you will be much less likely to be accepted.

Conversely, if your only goal is to hang out a shingle and start a private clinical social work practice, then applying to the Brockport/Nazareth GRC program here in Rochester, which takes an ecological approach and focuses on macro and social service-oriented social work, is a poor choice.

In addition, it is a good idea to go to a school that has faculty with knowledge in the areas of interest to you. Review faculty biographies to see who has experience in the areas of interest to you. Also, talk to your advisor and other faculty you know and ask them which schools they recommend based on your interests.

Typical time table and tasks for applying to graduate school

If you want to attend graduate school directly after completing your undergraduate degree, start to plan for applying for graduate schools no later than after you have completed your junior year. Deadlines do vary by school, so if you have some in mind, check out their timetable and processes. Don't forget to also check their financial aid deadlines, as these may differ as well.

During the summer before your senior year, write a statement about your goals and purposes in pursuing graduate school. This is a good start for your application essay, and will help you articulate the criteria to use in selecting schools. Write for school brochures and guidebooks to their degree programs in addition to checking out their websites, which may or may not have the detail you need to make decisions. Sign up for and prepare for taking standardized tests. If a school does require the GRE, you may want to invest in a standardized preparatory course, or at least buy a book and do a review.

Depending on the schools' deadlines, in the Fall & early winter of your senior year, line up the people who are willing to write recommendations for you. Request letters of recommendation, giving faculty at least 3-4 weeks advance notice. Order transcripts and other materials you need to apply. Rework your application essay or statement so that it represents your best thinking and writing, and addresses all of the questions asked. Mail your application on-time, and follow up to be sure it was received.

◆ Tips for students

NOTE for Ph.D. Seekers: If you know or think you may want to pursue doctoral education, then you may want to attend a graduate program that has a doctoral program, even if you decide to go elsewhere for your PhD. These programs are more likely to have paid graduate assistantships where you may be able to gain valuable research experience while getting your masters degree. Often these programs have a joint masters/PhD program that will allow you to shave a semester's worth of credit off your PhD or master's requirements.

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