

**MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM**



**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**REVISED: 2012/2013**



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## **SECTION I. INTRODUCTION**

The Master of Social Work Program prepares students for professional social work practice. The child and family welfare concentration prepares students to become advanced practitioners within a rural context. Upon completion of the program, students will have gained the advanced knowledge, skills, and values to work with individuals, families, groups, and organizations within the unique cultural characteristics often found in rural communities.

Embedded in the rural landscape of the Mississippi Delta are social problems such as high poverty rates, inadequate housing, inadequate health care, scarcity of resources, and physical distance from services and transportation. The Social Work Program at Mississippi Valley State University has a commitment to excellence in the preparation of students as professional social workers skilled to address these rural social concerns. Although the program's concentration focuses on practice with children and families in rural communities, the knowledge, values, and skills that students gain can be transferred to other settings.

The purpose of this handbook is to assist graduate social work students during their enrollment at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU). It contains an overview of the department and information on admission, curriculum, academic and professional standards, advisement, evaluations and grievance procedures that govern all students from admission to graduation. Information on students' rights and responsibilities and MSW student organization is also included. The handbook provides the student a useful blueprint for successfully completing the Master of Social Work Degree at MVSU.

### **Overview of the Department of Social Work**

#### *Historical Background*

The Department of Social Work began in 1972 under the official title of Family and Community Service Program. This program was designed to meet the needs of human service agencies in the Mississippi Delta and beyond. Our earliest students earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in Family and Community Services with emphasis in Social Work. The baccalaureate program has been accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1978. In order to maintain its

focus on social work, as well as maintain a favorable accreditation status, the program began offering the Bachelor of Social Work degree in 1982.

The Department has undergone various administrative reorganizations. From 1982 - 1994, the Social Work Program was housed in the Social Science Department. In the late summer of 1994, the Criminal Justice and Social Work programs were removed from Social Science to create the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work. Finally, in 1999, Social Work became a free-standing department within the College of Professional Studies.

The Institute for Higher Learning of the State of Mississippi (IHL) and the College Board initially approved a master's degree in social work program to be jointly administered by MVSU and Delta State University in 1997. Delta State eventually decided not to pursue an MSW program and MVSU began preparations for the only graduate social work program in north Mississippi. Our first community meeting designed to gauge levels of support for, and interest in a graduate social work program at MVSU was held in the Spring of 2003. An Education Specialist from CSWE was present at this meeting and informed the public of the process necessary for MVSU to begin a master's program in social work. We met again with community social workers in April, 2004. Community support for this program has been overwhelming. In the Spring of 2005, the department submitted the Benchmark I Document to CSWE for the Pre-Candidacy status. In August, 2005 we admitted our first graduate class. The Program was approved for candidacy by the Commission on Accreditation of CSWE in June 2006. The Benchmark II document was approved by the Commission in June 2007. In June 2008 the Commission approved the draft self study. The final self-study was submitted to CSWE in December 2008 and we were successful in completion of the accreditation journey in June 2009. All students who graduated in 2007, 2008 and May of 2009 are considered as having graduated from a CSWE accredited program.

### **Social Work Values and Ethics**

The MSW curriculum is organized around the core values of the social work profession. These values, which are presented in the *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), include: a) service; b) social justice; c) dignity and worth of the person; d) importance

of human relationships; e) integrity; and f) competence. Together, they form the “foundation of social work’s unique purpose and perspective.” Principle values include:

**Value:** *Service*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers’ primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.*

Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers are encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro bono service).

**Value:** *Social Justice*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers challenge social influence*

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.

**Value:** *Dignity and Worth of the Person*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person*

Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles and ethical standards of the profession.

**Value:** *Importance of Human Relationships*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships*

Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individual, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.

**Value:** *Integrity*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.*

Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.

**Value:** *Competence*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.*

Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

## **Mission Statement**

The Master of Social Work (MSW) Program prepares students for professional social work practice at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. Through the curriculum, the program instills in students advanced social work knowledge, values and skills in a manner which enables students to work with diverse populations in a wide range of settings. Concurrently, special emphasis is placed on social work practice with impoverished minorities living in rural regions, such as the Mississippi Delta, where the University is located and committed to serve, as well as rural areas globally. Within the framework of rural social work practice, the area of concentration is Child and Family Welfare.

## **Master of Social Work Program Goals**

The goals of the Master of Social Work Program are:

1. Educate students for social work positions for advanced levels of practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.



2. Provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills for working with diverse populations, including oppressed, minority and rural populations.
3. Instill in students a professional social work identity and the values and ethics of the profession.

### **Core and Rural Competencies**

Mississippi Valley State University's MSW Program has incorporated the 10 core competencies outlined in the 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), as set forth by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Three additional competencies have been added to address the rural context of social work practice: one competency serves our foundation courses and the other two serve our concentration courses. "The 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) outlines 10 core competencies that are common to all of social work practice. Advanced practice, incorporates all of the core competencies augmented by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration"

(<http://www.cswe.org/CentersInitiatives/CurriculumResources/EPASImplementation.aspx>).

- 2.1.1: Identify as professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly
- 2.1.2: Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice
- 2.1.3: Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments
- 2.1.4: Engage diversity and difference in practice
- 2.1.5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice
- 2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research
- 2.1.7: Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment
- 2.1.8: Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work practice
- 2.1.9: Respond to contexts that shape practice
- 2.1.10: Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- 2.1.11F\*: Utilize appropriate interventions within a rural practice framework.

2.1.11C\*: Demonstrate knowledge and skills to apply a bio-psycho-social-cultural-spiritual perspective in advanced social work practice with children and their families.

2.1.12C\*: Integrate knowledge of rural values and customs into autonomous social work practice with children and families.

F\* = Foundation competency

C\* = Concentration competency

*The Conceptual Framework for the Advanced (Concentration) Curriculum*

The conceptual model that underscores instruction in the concentration curriculum is the ecosystems perspective, augmented by the strengths and empowerment approaches to social work practice within a rural context. The ecosystems perspective is especially suited for social work in a rural context, given the nature and scope of rural practice. Rural social work refers to practice with persons living in rural areas, as well as social work with institutions located in rural communities.

The ecosystems model uses elements of systems theory and the ecological perspective to create an approach that looks at the dynamic interactions that occur among various micro, mezzo and macro level systems. Social workers use this perspective “to order and comprehend complexity and avoid oversimplification and reductionism” (Meyer, 2002). It therefore provides a convenient and useful framework through which social workers “can comprehend diversity and the relationships between humans and their environment” (Miley, O’Melia and Dubois, 1998, p. 46).

The ecosystems perspective allows social workers to understand the client’s reality when separating the personal issues from the more public situations. Social workers practicing in rural areas and small communities must understand the influence of the rural environment upon the problems experienced by families and children, as well as other diverse and at risk populations. They must also recognize, understand and utilize those rural institutions that provide support and problem solving capacities to clients.

Augmenting the ecosystems perspective are the strengths perspective and the empowerment approach to social work practice. The Strengths Perspective stresses “the human capacity for

resiliency, courage, strength in the face of adversity, ingenuity in accessing and creating resources, and the right of individuals to form their own aspirations and definitions of their situations” (Robbins, Chaterjee and Canda, 2006, p. 18). This approach challenges the social worker to look not only at presenting problems, but at the potentials that exist in the client’s situation, including individual strengths and environmental resources. Using the strengths approach, the worker-client relationship becomes “a collaborative process depending on clients and workers to be purposeful agents and not mere functionaries (Saleeby, 2006, p. 1). Students need to understand that both rural communities and citizens possess certain strengths that may be helpful to practitioners. Scales and Streeter (2004) wrote that “failure to recognize and identify the considerable strengths and resources of rural people and communities can constitute a barrier to effective social work” (p. 38).

An empowerment approach in social work practice is used to help individuals who are members of devalued groups, as well as the collective group membership, to shed their feelings of powerlessness and to take greater control over their lives. As a helping model, “it is relevant to generalist, advanced generalist, and integrated practice curricula as well as to specialized advanced year methods preparation” (Lee, 2001, p. 6). It is thus an appropriate model to include in our conceptual framework.

### **The Framework of Rural Social Work Practice**

Citizens of Mississippi in general and the state’s delta region, more specifically, are a rural people. The Delta contains no true metropolitan areas and the people who live in the more populated communities of Greenville, Clarksdale, Greenwood and Cleveland maintain a largely rural identity. The communities of the Delta are marked by high levels of joblessness, poverty, inadequate public transportation systems, a reduced availability of professional services and inadequate economic development.

The ecosystems perspective of social work practice provides a suitable theoretical base for understanding the strengths and problems associated with client situations in a rural area. When students begin the advanced curriculum, they will gain knowledge and skills in providing

advanced assessments of problems with rural populations as well as how to employ more individualized interventions for specific clients.

## **SECTION II: SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM**

### **Overview**

The curriculum of the Master of Social Work Program is grounded in the liberal arts and contains an integrated foundation in social work practice. The Master of Social Work Program prepares students for professional social work practice in the area of child and family welfare.

Sixty semester hours are required to earn the Master's Degree in Social Work at MVSU. Four semesters or two academic years are required to complete the program for full time students. Part-time students will complete the program in three years or six academic semesters. Advanced standing students will complete the program in one and a half years (30 semester hours).

The first thirty-three hours in the curriculum comprise the "professional foundation curriculum." Students gain an in-depth knowledge of generalist practice during this period. This phase of the curriculum includes 450 clock hours (6 credit hours) of internship and a field seminar. Classroom courses include six hours of human behavior and the social environment content, three hours of research, six hours of social welfare services and policy content, three hours of diversity and six hours of social work practice. Content on diversity, social and economic justice and populations at risk are infused throughout the foundation courses. The final twenty-seven hours make up the concentration curriculum. Courses focus on child and family welfare and include 450 clock hours (six (6) credit hours) of advanced internship and an integration seminar.

To accommodate a wide range of student needs, the MSW program of study offers the following three options: Advanced Standing Program requires 30 credit hours; a Full-time Two Year Program and the Extended Three Year Program both requiring 60 credit hours. All MSW students in the full-time and extended program follow the same learning expectations for field education and meet the same requirements for graduation. MSW students in the Advanced Standing Program are required to complete Field Seminar and Field Internship II. Courses are

offered in the traditional classroom settings, on-line and in a hybrid format (combination of traditional classroom and on-line).

The Master of Social Work Program at MVSU does not grant social work course credit for life or work experience. Applicants to the MSW Program will not be required to duplicate course content in the professional foundation curriculum if proficiency can be demonstrated. Students may be exempt from courses in the foundation curriculum that represent duplication of course content previously taken by passing proficiency examinations.

### **Foundation**

The foundation courses enable students to internalize the use of the generalist perspective when performing advanced social work practice with children and families across a range of social systems.

### **Definition of Advanced Social Work Practice**

Advanced social work practice builds upon the professional foundation of social work in that it requires the practitioner to apply knowledge and skills of a generalist social work perspective to advanced practice with families and children. Workers at the advanced level should be more autonomous and should demonstrate a greater depth, breadth and specificity in work with children and families. They should intervene with multiple systems simultaneously and determine the appropriate practice approach. They must also demonstrate the ability to assess complex problems and to integrate multiple theories and skills into interventions.

In the concentration curriculum the student learns to engage in research to improve social work practice, to critically evaluate one's own practice and to contribute to the profession's knowledge building efforts. Furthermore, students must demonstrate leadership in child and welfare services. Students in the concentration curriculum will engage in program and policy development, research, administration, supervision and critical analyses of practice models in child and family welfare services.

## **Foundation Curriculum**

The foundation curriculum provides evidence-based knowledge, behaviors and skills for social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities with particular emphasis on rural content. The concentration curriculum allows students to extend the basic knowledge gained in the foundation to advanced evidence-based practice with families and children. Both the foundation and concentration portions of the program emphasize evidence-based practice and critical thinking skills.

Students must follow a structured program of study that includes all of the following foundation courses (33 credit hours):

- SW500 Social Work Practice I (3)
- SW501 Social Work Practice II (3)
- SW510 Social Welfare Policy & Services I (3)
- SW511 Social Welfare Policy & Services II (3)
- SW 520 Human Behavior in the Social Environment I (3)
- SW SW521 Human Behavior in the Social Environment II (3)
- SW531 Methods of Social Work Research (3)
- SW540 Diversity: Micro, Mezzo & Macro Applications (3)
- SW580 Field Practice Seminar I (3)
- SW581 Field Internship I (6)

## **Concentration Curriculum**

The MSW program at Mississippi Valley State University offers a single concentration: Advanced Practice in Child and Family Welfare.

The goal of the concentration is to advance the foundation content in a manner that prepares students to utilize evidence-based, ethically-informed social work practices to help children and families promote, restore, and maintain social functioning. The knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by students in the concentration are designed to produce advanced social work practitioners who have the skills for ethically-informed social work practice including

advanced assessment, relationship building/enhancement, application of goal-oriented and evidence-based interventions, evaluation of practice, and lifelong professional development. Upon successful completion of all foundation courses, students move to the concentration curriculum, which includes all the following courses (27 credit hours).

- SW600 Advanced Social Work Practice with Children and Families: Direct Practice (3)
- SW610 Family and Child Welfare Policy (3)
- SW615 Advanced Social Work with Children and Families: Indirect Practice (3)
- SW620 Rural Social Work (3)
- SW630 Mental Health: Assessment and Intervention (3)
- SW650 Needs Assessment and Program Evaluation (3)
- SW680 Field Practice Seminar II (3)
- SW681 Field Internship II (6)

#### Full-time Two Year Program

Students may elect to complete the MSW program on a full time basis in two years. Students who plan to complete the program full-time should register for twelve to fifteen hours per semester and follow the curriculum pattern below.

#### Extended Three Year Program

Students who are not able to take fifteen hours per semester may extend the program to three or four years. The extended study option includes nine hours per semester. The curriculum pattern for the three year plan of student progression is presented below. All foundation courses must be completed before moving forward with the concentration courses. All prerequisite requirements must be followed. Students in the extended study program must work closely with their assigned advisor.

#### Field Placement Process

At Mississippi Valley State University, the field internship consists of four different courses; two courses for the foundation (generalist) level, SW 580 Field Practice Seminar I and SW 581 Field Internship I; and two courses for the advanced (concentration) level, SW 680 Field Seminar II and SW 681 Field Internship II. For the foundation and concentration placement students will

collaborate with the MSW Field Director in selecting the agency for placement. However, the assignment of placement ultimately will be made by the MSW Field Director.

Each field seminar is three (3) credit hours and each field internship is six (6) credit hours, but the actual hours of placement per week vary based on the placement and availability of the student. The student will complete a total of 900 hours in their field internship.

Grades for field placement will be assigned by the MSW Director of Field Placement but will be based largely on the evaluation of the field instructor at the agency to which the student is assigned for placement. As a part of the field seminar, student will participate in classroom and online discussion and complete relevant assignments during the semester. The student's participation in the seminars is intended to foster their learning experiences involved in doing field placement and will be a factor in the student's grade.

#### Professional Liability Insurance

All students enrolled in field placement are responsible for procuring liability insurance (with a minimum coverage of \$1,000,000.00) prior to the beginning of field placement. It is recommended but not required that students join the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and then purchase coverage through the National Association of Social Workers Assurance Services. Further information can be found on their website:

<http://www.naswassurance.org/studentliability.php?page id=12>. However, students may purchase insurance through other sources.

### **Field Education: Structure, Function and Organization**

#### Educational Perspective and the Role of Field Education

Field education plays a pivotal role in student education. It is in the field education experience that students are able to test theory and knowledge learned in the classroom, as well as further develop their skills, professional competence and professional identity. Through the integration of class and field practice, students are trained to practice social work with children and families within a rural context.



Field education is viewed as a unique partnership between the Department of Social Work and a broad array of community agencies. Together, the Department of Social Work and the field agencies plan, implement and monitor a field education experience for each individual student. Through ongoing communication, the Department of Social Work and field agencies work toward the development of a shared educational philosophy and standards regarding field education, field placements, and student performance.

The field education curriculum requires students to complete 900 clock hours through foundation and concentration internships, which includes: Field Internship I (SW 581), Field Internship II (SW 681). Students are also required to complete two three hour seminars, Field Practice Seminar I (SW 580) and Field Practice Seminar II (SW 681). These courses are taken concurrently with Field Internships I and II respectively.

## **SECTION III: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Admissions**

#### Regular Admission

The standards for regular admission are as follows:

1. The applicant must hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university.
2. The applicant must be eligible to re-enter the last college or university s/he attended in good standing.
3. The applicant must provide an official transcript showing a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.5 on all undergraduate study, or a minimum grade point average of 3.0 on the last 60 semester hours of study. The GPA must be based upon a 4.0 point scale.
4. The applicant must submit three references from persons familiar with the applicant's fitness for graduate school and character. Two of the references must be from a professional (for example, a professor or supervisor).
5. The applicant must submit a three page typed essay on why s/he would like to be a social worker. The applicant's response should reflect important family and community

influences as well as a description of characteristics that distinguish him or her as a potential candidate for the MSW degree.

6. The applicant must complete applications for admissions to the MSW Program and to the Graduate School.

7. The MSW Program does not grant social work course credit for life and work experience.

8. An interview with the Admissions Committee may be required.

### Advanced Standing

Admission to the Advanced Standing Program of the MSW Program is determined on a selective basis using the following criteria:

1. Applicant must be a graduate of a Council on Social Work Education accredited baccalaureate program within the past five years.
2. A letter grade of “B” or better in all social work courses must be evident on the official transcript submitted from the college or university where the applicant earned his/her baccalaureate degree in social work.
3. A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better on a 4.0 scale for undergraduate coursework.
4. The MSW Program does not grant social work course credit for life and work experience.
5. An interview with the Admissions Committee may be required.

Advanced standing students must complete thirty semester hours in social work. This includes the following:

1. SW540, “Diversity: Micro, Mezzo and Macro Perspectives.”
2. Eighteen hours of concentration coursework (Child and Family Welfare)
3. Six hours of advanced field internship (450 hours in an agency placement)
4. Three hours of advanced field seminar

### **International Students**

International students must meet the graduate college requirement for admission. A student whose first language is not English must submit an official score report for a Test of English as a

Foreign Language (TOEFL) or must have earned a degree from an accredited college or university within the United States.

### **Graduation Requirement**

Students must complete all degree requirements before they are allowed to participate in graduation. Graduation requirements are typically met under the graduate catalog which is no more than five years old at the time of the student's graduation. To complete degree requirements a graduate student must:

1. Complete 60 graduate social work semester hours (thirty for the advanced standing students)
2. Maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher in social work courses.
3. Earn no more than two grades of "C".
4. Student is only allowed to repeat one (1) course.
5. Complete all course work within five years of admission to the program.

### **Transfer of Credits**

A maximum of six credit hours taken at another MSW Program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education will be accepted for transfer at MVSU, depending upon the following criteria:

1. Any course submitted for transfer of credit must have been completed within the last five years.
2. The student must have earned a "B" or better in any course submitted for transfer.
3. Only courses from the foundation curriculum will be accepted for transfer of credit.
4. In the event someone has earned graduate social work credit in another country, the MSW Program will seek approval for these courses through the Foreign Equivalency Determination Office of CSWE.

### **Incomplete**

The grade "I" (incomplete) may be assigned at the instructor's discretion in any course in which the student is unable to complete the work due to extraordinary events beyond the individual's control. The "I" may not be used to extend the term for students who complete the course with an unsatisfactory grade. The "I" grade indicated that you have not completed the course for

some unavoidable reason that is acceptable to the instructor. Graduate students have 30 days from the start of the semester in which to complete the work.

Unless the student completes the requirements for removal of the “I” within the allotted number of days from the end of the semester or term in which it was received, the “I” will automatically change to an “F”, regardless of whether or not the student is enrolled. The student will be certified for graduation when all requirements are met, including the removal of all “I” grades. For students who have an “I” in the semester in which they expect to graduate, the certification process and graduation will automatically be deferred to the next year.

### **Challenge Exams**

Students who are ineligible for admission to the Advanced Standing Program may seek an exemption from courses in the foundation curriculum that represent duplication of course content previously taken. Exemptions from specific courses must be achieved through proficiency examinations. The student must make a score of at least 80% on a 100% scale to test out of any course. University policy requires that a student must enroll in a course prior to taking the challenge examination. Students must have a bachelor’s degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

### **Advisement**

#### *Advisor Responsibilities*

Advising is an essential component of the MSW program. Upon admission to the MSW program, all students will be assigned an advisor. The academic advisor will be a member of the MSW faculty. Major responsibilities of the academic advisor are as follows:

- Assist students in assessing their aptitude and suitability for a career in social work practice;
- Provide students with specific information about courses and program requirements;
- Provide the students with permits to register for courses;
- Advise on course planning in relation to the program’s course requirements and the student’s educational needs;
- Consult with students as they prepare for field placement;
- Assist students in evaluating their progress and performance in the program;

- Advise students who experience class and field performance difficulties or other issues related to their professional education; and
- Serve as a mentor to student as they enter the profession of social work.

Advisors will provide students with a student advisement form which includes the required schedule of courses that are required for the semester in which the student will be enrolled.

Curriculum pattern should be followed unless there are special circumstances in which case the program of study will be reviewed and revised as approved by the MSW Program Director and Department Chair.

### Student Responsibilities

The advisement process requires students to do the following:

1. Meet with their advisors at least once during the semester to discuss their class schedule, excluding the registration period. It is the student's responsibility to be clear as to program requirements for social work courses and to know what the professional foundation requirements are.
2. Meet with their advisors at least once per semester for professional advisement. Professional advisement focuses primarily on evaluation of the student's aptitude and potential for social work and on assessment of the student's strengths and weaknesses which are likely to affect professional practice.
3. Meet with their advisor anytime they are experiencing problems. Each faculty member maintains posted office hours during the working day for student access. If students need assistance and their advisor is not available, one of the other advisors should be consulted.
4. Students are expected to take courses in proper sequence in order to prevent any delays in graduation. In the event a deviation from the cohort is deemed necessary, students are required to seek academic advisement and must be willing to accept responsibility for any difficulties in completing the degree on schedule.
5. If a student decides to change his/her program of study, withdraw from school, or drop a course, it is the student's responsibility to notify the advisor.

## **Retention**

All students are required to maintain GPA of at least 3.0. Should the student's cumulative GPA fall below that mark, a period of one semester will be allowed to correct the deficiency. At the discretion of the Department Chair, MSW Director, Dean of the College of Professional Studies, and the Dean of Graduate Studies, this period may be extended one additional semester. All students who fall below a GPA of 3.0 for one semester, and all students who earn a grade of "D", or "F" will be automatically referred to meet with the program retention committee the following semester.

## **Non-Retention**

Because the Department of Social Work is a professional course of study, it has an obligation to the profession, to recipients of service, and to students to specify its criteria not only for admission to the Department, but also its criteria for non-continuation. Advisement provides the usual mechanism for decisions about retention. Through professional advisement, the student and faculty advisor explore together the student's motivation, aptitude, and suitability for the profession.

It may be necessary, on occasion, to advise students to reconsider their preference for social work. In such a case, upon the recommendation of the Faculty Advisor, the Chair of the Department of Social Work calls a meeting of the Social Work Retention Committee for a determination. Basis for a decision of non-retention includes one or more of the criteria listed below:

1. Academic performance below acceptable level. A cumulative grade point average falling below 3.0 is unacceptable. Likewise, satisfactory performance must be obtained in Field Internship.
2. Failure to complete prerequisite course work which impedes progress.
3. Detrimental or inappropriate behavior in a professional relationship. Such behavior, which may be evidenced in academic or field performance, includes lack of insight or sensitivity to the impact of one's behavior on others or a style of communication which would adversely affect the helping process.

4. Violation of certain standards of the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. These standards specify requirements for the social worker in professional relationships and encompass responsibilities with respect to conduct, values and attitudes. In particular, students will note the applicability of standards which speak to conduct and deportment in one's capacity or identity as a social worker, and the social worker's ethical responsibilities to clients and colleagues.

Students may also be dismissed from the Program for the following behaviors:

1. Cheating (includes on examinations and papers)
2. Plagiarism
3. Dishonesty

If a decision about retention is reached which is unacceptable to students, they may initiate an appeal following the procedures outlined for student grievances.

### **Good Standing**

To be in good standing with the Social Work Program, students must maintain:

- a. A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better in all course work. A grade less than "C" or 2.0 is considered failing in a social work course. Students may not receive a grade of "C" in more than two courses.
- b. Reasonable progress toward completing program requirements.

### **Early Warning Procedures**

When it is recognized that students are performing below the expected standards in a course or in the field, the faculty member shall inform the Faculty Advisor. The Faculty Advisor shall then request a conference with the students to discuss their performance and submit a copy of the conference report to the Department Chair within seven (7) days. If performance does not improve by the time agreed upon, one subsequent semester of enrollment in the program after the cumulative grade point average falls below a 3.0, students may be (dismissed from the MSW

Program and must reapply for admission) subjected to applicable University and/or department retention policies and procedures.

### **University and Department of Social Work Grievance Procedures**

In the event students feel their rights have been abridged within the Department of Social Work, they can begin the conciliation process as follows:

1. In complaints related to field placement, students should follow the grievance procedures discussed in the Field Internship Manual.
2. In all other matters (e.g. “Non-Retention”), the student shall consult first with the Faculty Advisor. All further appeals should be made to the Department Grievance Committee.
3. If there is a discrepancy in specific academic courses, the student shall talk first with the instructor. The faculty advisor may be consulted.

Students who are not satisfied after conferring with the Instructor and/or Faculty Advisor shall submit a signed, dated, written statement of grievance to the Instructor directly involved in the complaint. The Instructor may meet with the student again, but must respond in writing to the student’s complaint within one week after receiving the complaint. The student then has one week in which to appeal the Instructor’s decision in writing to the Chair of the Department of Social Work or the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Chair and/or the Dean has one week to respond to the student. If a student is not satisfied with this decision, further appeals should be made to the Department Grievance Committee. These procedures are also available in the Office of the Department Chair.

### **Professional Development**

Students of the Master of Social Work Program will be given opportunities to participate in planning conferences hosted by the Department of Social Work at Mississippi Valley State University. They will also be given the opportunity to attend conferences held at other venues and by other academic/human service institutions. Graduate students will participate in the various advisory, academic and professional committees that are a part of the Department of Social Work at Mississippi Valley State University. Through this participation, graduate students



will have the opportunity to give input into the development and implementation of policies affecting academic and student affairs.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (Special Needs Policy)**

Students who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Coordinator at 662-254-3446.

It is the policy of the Department of Social Work to accommodate students with disabilities pursuant to federal and state law. Students, however, must self-identify with the ADA Coordinator at MVSU. Any student registered at the University with a disability and who needs special accommodations should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course.

### **Non-discrimination Policy and Sexual Harassment Policies**

Students are admitted to the Master of Social Work Program without regard to race, creed, color, class, national origin, age, disability, marital status or sexual orientation. Students who feel that they are victims of discrimination may file a grievance with the Chair of the Department of Social Work. If they are dissatisfied with the results at that level, they may appeal to the Dean of the College of Professional Studies. If they are still dissatisfied with the results, they may appeal to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs. No actions will be taken against students for filing grievances in the prescribed manner. All policies relating to employees' rights to freedom from sexual harassment are also extended to students. Sexual harassment policies also apply to field internship experiences.

Mississippi Valley State University is committed to adhering to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Any student who feels that he/she has a disability which makes it difficult to conduct their studies in the Master of Social Work Program may contact the Disabilities Officer for Mississippi Valley State University. The office is located in the Center for Excellence in Student Learning.

### **Student Organization**

The MSW Student Social Work Organization provides students with opportunities to get involved with important social issues, foster communication and engagement between students, faculty, and administrators in the Department of Social Work. The MSW Student Organization coordinates fund raising events, organizes volunteer activities, host special events with guest speakers, and sponsors social activities that are of interest to students. This organization also allows students to advocate for their own interests and to give input into policy formulation and implementation in the Department of Social Work. Anyone admitted for graduate social work studies at Mississippi Valley State University is eligible for membership. The organization consists of four officers: 1) President; 2) Vice-President; 3) Treasurer; and 4) Secretary. The organization's members set dues at the beginning of each year and also set the club's agenda. A member of the graduate faculty will act as the organization's advisor.

### **Mississippi Social Work Licensure**

Students are required to take the social work licensure examination during the last 15 hours of course requirements; no later than by April 15 of each year. Students can obtain licensure application and other necessary forms in addition to valuable licensure information by going to Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage & Family Therapists webpage [www.swmft.ms.gov/web.nsf](http://www.swmft.ms.gov/web.nsf) or contact via telephone at (601) 987-6806.

### **Communication**

An e-mail account is available free of charge to MVSU students. This MVSU account will be the official contact used for all Department of Social Work correspondence. Much correspondence is conveyed to students via email so the account should be checked frequently. Students are asked to ensure that the Department of Social Work has a current e-mail address, mailing address, and telephone number. The success of our degree program depends partly on our ability to foster ties to our students, alumni and the larger community. Students can update their contact information by informing the Master of Social Work Program administrative assistant, in writing, of any changes.

## References

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