The School of Social Work offers two graduate degrees: the Master of Social Work [MSW]—a terminal degree for social work practitioners—and the PhD, for those preparing for careers in research and teaching. We also offer the MSW/PhD.

**PHD AND MSW/PHD PROGRAMS**

**Mission**

Our program was established in 1998 in response to a shortage of doctorally-prepared and ethnically-diverse social work faculty in the United States and in Iowa. The shortage began in the mid-1980s when universities started to require the PhD for their existing faculty members and for new hires. Our program is the only social work doctoral program in Iowa, and it is critical to the research-intensive mission of The University of Iowa in the following ways: 1) It prepares students to conduct research that improves the lives of this country’s and Iowa’s most vulnerable populations, including the poor; children; people with disabilities; and older adults. 2) It is critical to attracting high quality faculty members to the School, who, in turn, raise the visibility and prestige of the School among our country’s 654 undergraduate and graduate social work programs through their research and external funding awards. Doctoral students also enhance faculty member’s research and they raise the prestige of the School when they secure positions in other social work programs. 3) It improves the quality of education for our BA and MSW students because it increases the number of classroom instructors and TAs who have taken doctoral level coursework and who often have many years of practice experience.

**Admission Processes and Criteria**

1. **Student demand and recruitment.** Between 1998–2002, we received a relatively small number of applicants and, on average, enrolled 2 students per year; however, since 2003, we received, on average, 11.6 applicants/year and enrolled, on average, 3-4 students/year.
2. **Criteria for selection.** We rate students on undergraduate GPA and GRE scores, prior research and teaching experience, and other indicators of research aptitude (e.g., publications). Because 2 years of post-baccalaureate practice experience is required for placement in a tenure-track position in schools of social work, we also consider years of practice experience. Because most applicants have completed a graduate degree, we rate graduate GPA.
3. **Success in enrolling high quality students.** Our selectivity since 2003 was 35.8% and our yield was 72.4%. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)—the accreditation body for social work programs—provided us with their most recent data on students entering doctoral programs in the US (2003-2006). Our program selects fewer applicants (35.8% versus 39.6%) and has a higher yield (72.4% versus 67.3%) than the majority of social work doctoral programs in the US. (Almost all social work doctoral programs are in research-intensive universities.) Our program may be different than other UI programs, because the Doctoral Studies Committee, faculty and staff prescreen applicants. Because many prospective applicants who inquire about the doctoral program do not realize that the PhD is a research-intensive program designed to prepare students for the professoriate—and not an advanced practice degree—we discourage them from applying to the PhD program. In 2007, for example, we surveyed prospective applicants (N=60) for 2005-2006 who contacted the DGS about the doctoral program but who did not apply (46.7% response rate: N=28). After talking with the DGS, 28.6% of respondents decided to apply to the MSW only, and 14.3% said they decided they did not want the PhD.
   - **Doctoral students’ verbal GRE scores** (M=514) were similar to the average for all UI graduate programs; students’ quantitative (M=549) and analytical GRE scores (M=558) and undergraduate GPAs (M=3.32) were lower than the average for all UI programs. All students had completed a research project prior to admission, completed a statistics course and, on average, had a 3.81 graduate GPA. To determine whether students’ scores improved over time, we compared our first five cohorts (1998–2002) with subsequent cohorts. Students’ quantitative (M=571) and analytical (M=564) scores and undergraduate GPAs (M=3.46) were higher for students entering 2003 and later.
4. **Success in enrolling a diverse student cohort.** Of our US born students admitted after 2003, 21.1% were African- or Latina-American, and 84.4% were women.
5. **Financial aid commitments to incoming and continuing students.** The School of Social Work has one of the highest rates of external funding in the CLAS and provides substantial support to doctoral students. 61.3% of our students received a research assistantship through a faculty grant, 100% received a SSW-funded (excludes faculty grants) or a Graduate College-funded research or teaching assistantship, and 32.3% received a fellowship or scholarship from an external source. Since 2003, 36.8% of our students received a financial award (SIF, incentive award for securing an external fellowship, or diversity tuition scholarship) from the Graduate College, and 52.6% received a travel award from an internal (excludes SSW) or external funding source. Students have also secured assistantships from several other departments, including medicine, public health, law, sociology and aging studies. Between 1998-2008, students were guaranteed a 50% assistantship or fellowship for 2 years. Almost all students in years 3–5 of the program had the equivalent of a 50% appointment. To compete with highly selective social work programs, beginning with cohort 2009, we increased our funding commitment to a 3-year minimum 25% guaranteed appointment.

**PhD Program Outcomes**

1. **Degree completion and TTD.** Our TTD for students entering the program between 1998-2005 (N=11) was 5.8 years. Our actual completion rate for students entering the program between 1998-2002 was 54.5% (theoretical=63.6%). Of
students entering between 2003-2009, 4 students have completed (all in less than 4 years), 3 withdrew, 3 were dismissed, and 13 are in progress. Of students who are in progress, 100% have met program benchmarks (e.g., completed comprehensive exam by the end of fall semester of their 3rd year). Our TTD may be higher than other programs because we require 101-120 sh to complete the MSW and PhD degrees and because our students are older (M=40.2 years at admission) and 35.5% have dependent children.

2. **Doctoral student fellowships, awards, honors and publications.** We began recording this information in 2000. As noted above, 32.3% of students applied for and received an external funding award, and 52.6% of students received a travel award. 63% of students admitted between 1998-2006 published in a juried journal, and 70.4% presented at a national conference. For the same reference period, on average, students published 2 juried articles or book chapters. Graduates, on average, had 4 juried articles or book chapters accepted for publication by program completion.

3. **Current doctoral student placements.** 54.5% of our graduates obtained a tenure-track position within one year of graduation; 18.2% were employed as researchers in government, 18.2% were agency executives, and 9.1% are unknown. These types of placements are consistent with our program mission.

**PhD Program Characteristics**

1. **Appropriate size of the doctoral program.** Given the size of the national pool of applicants, the number of faculty members who can provide intensive mentoring, the School’s need for TAs, projected available financial support (minimum award of 25% for five years), the average number of applicants to our program, and the quality of the applicant pool, the appropriate size of a cohort is four students. This is the size that was recommended by the CLAS when our program was established. A cohort of 4-6 students is typical among social work doctoral programs in the US.

2. **Rank.** Social work doctoral programs are not ranked in the US. Data on GRE scores, GPAs, placement type, TTD and completion rates are not available for social work doctoral programs. Our selectivity is better than most social work programs in the US.

3. **Strengths and weaknesses.** Our strengths include a relatively high placement rate in tenure-track positions, sufficient funding for our doctoral students, diverse students, students who are able to compete for external awards, and students who actively publish prior to graduation. Our program is distinctive in the region because it focuses on preparing scholars to conduct research on two vulnerable populations: children and older adults. Our curriculum is research-intensive, highly interdisciplinary, and efficient. Students complete substantial coursework in other departments and several core courses in social work. Because students are able to complete coursework in other departments, social work faculty are able to concentrate on mentoring activities, which include supervising students in teaching and research practica. To ensure that our doctoral-level seminars have an adequate number of students, 4 of our seminars are now open to our MSW students and to doctoral students in other departments. Similar to most programs, we need to decrease TTD. Given the small applicant pool in the US, we believe we can increase selectivity, currently a weakness, from 35.8% to 25% in the next 5 years.

4. **Opportunities for potential growth to improve program excellence.** We are a relatively young program. Newer programs need a sufficient amount of time to increase the size and quality of their applicant pool. To increase our pool, we increased the number of years of guaranteed financial support, and we hired a development/marketing coordinator in 2009. Part of her deployment is to market the doctoral program. To decrease TTD and increase completion rates, we initiated several programmatic changes beginning in 2005. We developed a 5-year strategic plan (2005); a development/marketing and recruitment plan (2008); a mentoring guide (2005) and MOU (2009); an advancement and dismissal protocol (2009); an admission’s guide and selection rules (2006); and workshops on securing funding, publishing and presenting at conferences (2005). We expect these initiatives to reduce TTD over the next 5 years.

**Conclusion**

Since 1998, the number of applicants to our PhD program has increased and quantitative and analytic GRE scores and undergraduate GPAs have improved. We expect to see an increase in selectivity and a decrease in TTD over the next five years. The shortage of social work faculty is expected to deepen, ensuring positions for our graduates in tenure-track positions in Iowa and nationwide (Anastas, 2006; Grodzki, 2005).

**MSW PROGRAM**

**Mission**

The MSW program 1) prepares students to shape the profession’s future by providing education in family-based, community-based, and culturally competent practice approaches using the person in environment framework; and 2) prepares competent professionals for autonomous practice and leadership within the professional community that includes advanced interventions at multiple system levels, supervision, program development, program administration, training, evaluation of practice, dissemination of new models of practice, and policy development. To address the need for social work practitioners across Iowa, and consistent with the outreach mission of the University, the MSW program is consistently offered in Iowa City, Des Moines, Sioux City and Quad Cities and is being offered in Ottumwa as a one-time 4 year cohort program (2007-2011). It is one of the first distance education social work programs in the nation and it is the longest serving and largest distance education graduate program in CLAS.
MSW Program Admission Processes and Criteria

1. Selection criteria: Applicants must have completed a bachelor's degree with a minimum GPA of 3.0; must demonstrate academic potential, proficiency in English, and appropriateness for professional social work education as demonstrated by a personal statement, essays, and letters of reference. We do not require the GRE.

2. Student demand & Recruitment: The table below provides application, acceptance and enrollment data for the past 5 years. Please note that the Iowa City (IC) and Des Moines (DM) programs admit students every year, whereas the Sioux City (SC) and Quad Cities (QC) programs are on a 3 year cycle. Ottumwa (OT) is a one-time event. Thus, in 2006, the lower applicant and admitted numbers are due to admitting in only two centers (rather than three). It is notable that there is an increase in number of applications and students accepted in 2007 and 2008 as compared to 2004 and 2005 when we also admitted to 3 sites. The 36% increase of applicants--when comparing 2005 and 2008-- is one indicator of increasing demand for the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>Accepted</th>
<th>% who were accepted and enrolled</th>
<th>Total Enrolled</th>
<th>GPA of enrolled</th>
<th>% Women enrolled</th>
<th>% Diverse enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004: IC, DM, QC</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>88 (72%)</td>
<td>59 (67%)</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005: IC, DM, SC</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>83 (61%)</td>
<td>56 (67%)</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006: IC, DM</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>85 (73%)</td>
<td>57 (67%)</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007: IC, DM,OT</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>110 (49%)</td>
<td>89 (80%)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008: IC DM, SC</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>87 (41%)</td>
<td>64 (73%)</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Success in enrolling the highest quality students admitted: GPA for those admitted who enrolled ranged from 3.4-3.46. In 2008, the GPA for those enrolled was 3.46 compared to 3.25 for those who did not enroll.

4. Diverse student cohort: A high proportion of the students (84-86%) in the program (2004-2008) are women. Ongoing efforts to recruit and retain ethnically and racially diverse students have yielded a recent increase (10% in 2008 and 11% in 2009) but it is still below our goal. We are particularly encouraged with the success of having five Native American women in the program. We continue to also focus on recruiting diverse faculty which is important to recruit and retain diverse students.

5. Financial aid commitments. There are no financial aid commitments made in general to the MSW students. However, they are allowed to apply for TA and RA positions. The School offers several scholarships and awards which are awarded competitively with specific criteria for each. The School of Social Work has supplemented the support available from CLAS and the Graduate College with fellowships.

MSW Program Outcomes:

1. Degree completion and time-to-degree (TTD): Program structure, mentoring, and student funding: We offer the MSW Program in three formats, a two year, 3 year, and a 4 year program, depending on program site. For example, in fall 2004, 88 students enrolled in the MSW program in three sites. Eighty-four completed the MSW with a maximum time to degree of 4 years and a 95% completion rate. Of these 88 students, 37 completed in two years, 37 in 3 years, and 10 completed on the 4 year plan. Among 36 students admitted full-time in 2006, 86% (N=30) completed the program within the two years. One student withdrew and the remaining students completed or will complete the program in 2010 on a modified schedule. The structured sequence of courses in the MSW Curriculum is carefully monitored by advisors, and students must get permission to deviate from the structured sequence. We believe this policy has contributed to high rates of degree completion in the program, even though most part-time students work; many of them full time.

2. Graduate Student fellowships, awards, honors and/or publications. Several of our MSW students have applied for and received fellowships from the Graduate College Office of Ethnic Inclusion, and International Programs Grants Office or from external funding agencies. The School awards four diversity scholarships annually (each for a two year period). In 2007-2008 we committed an additional $46,000 from School funds (generated by our distance education program) to provide tuition scholarships for students in our distance education programs and students participating in immersion trips. One student earned the prestigious NASW Gosnell Memorial Scholarship.

3. Placements. Sixty-seven percent of students surveyed as they exited the MSW Program in Spring 08 (IC and DM) stated that they were employed at that time. Forty-one percent expected to stay with their employing organization and 100% of them expected to receive a promotion as a result of earning the MSW. Fifty-four percent of MSW alumni currently reside in Iowa. As the largest and longest-running MSW program in Iowa, UI graduates comprise the greatest percentage of MSW practitioners in Iowa resulting in substantial impact on the well-being of Iowa’s most vulnerable populations: young children, people with disabilities and older adults. In a survey conducted in 2009, 82% of MSW alumni respondents reported being employed in a social work position and 70% reported being licensed (please note, not all states or positions require licensure).
MSW Program Characteristics:

1. **Appropriate size:** We plan carefully as we anticipate our faculty resources for teaching and advising, as well as for practicum opportunities and supervision. The delivery of our current program requires the use of adjunct faculty to teach electives and a few core courses. We plan to continue to offer our on-campus and distance education programs at their current levels of enrollment, although our program in Ottumwa will end with the current small cohort.

2. **Comparison with other similar programs:** The School has made great efforts to provide quality MSW education at four different sites accessible from all parts of Iowa: the MSW program is ranked in the top third of accredited MSW social work programs in the U.S. (US News and World Report).

3. **Challenges:** Currently the combined FTE for tenure track and clinical faculty teaching in the MSW program at all program sites is 11. Faculty losses in the past several years and anticipated retirements in the near future will require replenishment of teaching and scholarship related to diversity and cultural competence, social work practice and social welfare policy. Some core courses, and most electives, are now being taught by adjunct faculty. The current faculty to MSW student ratio is 1:16. As a professional school, we are required by our accrediting body, CSWE, to have a faculty/student ratio of 1:12. We continue to work to address this disparity and are encouraged with the opportunity to conduct a faculty search this year, although we also acknowledge approaching retirements for which we must plan.

4. **Strengths:** The School enjoys the status of being the largest and longest-serving MSW program in Iowa: it has been accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1951. It is the largest master’s program in CLAS. Our faculty and graduates provide leadership in all aspects of the Social Work profession across the state and the nation. Our curriculum continues to evolve to provide our graduates with the best theory and practice skills required to address the changing child welfare needs, the growing population of elders and a more diverse population in Iowa and the US. The School contributes to the University’s mission of outreach by providing the MSW program in three long-standing, distance education sites across the state in addition to the Iowa City campus, and is currently providing a one-time cohort in Ottumwa in response to a demonstrated need for MSW practitioners in that region of the state. The School also enrolls a diverse student body and has been recognized by The University for its work in the area of cultural competence and diversity. The School is currently developing an inter-collegiate certificate in multicultural education and culturally competent practice for graduate students, is initiating a Critical Cultural Competence Certificate for undergraduates at The University, has recently become the academic home for the Aging Studies Program and continues to provide state and national conferences/trainings on diverse populations. Students also have the opportunity to participate in service learning courses and travel seminars that promote the diversity goals of The University. School of Social Work students benefit from, and contribute to, the research mission of the School and The University with their contributions to numerous research studies.

Conclusion

The Mission of the School of Social Work reads, in part, “the School prepares highly qualified, culturally competent social work scholars and practitioners with a commitment to social justice and social work values and ethics.” Our MSW graduates represent the majority of social work practitioners in the state of Iowa. We admit highly qualified, diverse students into the largest graduate program in CLAS. The MSW degree is offered in five sites across the state: making it the largest distance education program in CLAS. There is strong demand for both MSW and PhD graduates. We anticipate that graduates will continue to find employment opportunities with the MSW degree as the need for professionally trained social workers continues to increase. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for employment in the field of social work is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014 especially in practice areas promoted in the curriculum of the School of Social Work: aging, child welfare, and diversity. With respect to our PhD program, we have strengthened the admissions process and have attracted more highly qualified students into the program in the last several years. Our selectivity rates, admission criteria, and size are similar to other Social Work PhD programs nationwide. The program satisfies several strategic goals of the UI. The national reputation of the School in such important research areas as child welfare/domestic violence, aging, and diversity/social justice is enhanced by the increasing quality of our PhD program and the research of our doctoral students. Our educational programs, at both the BA and MSW levels, are also enhanced by doctoral TAs for many courses. We attract and retain a diverse student body in both the MSW and PhD programs. We believe both programs are critical to The University of Iowa and reinforce the prestige of the School of Social Work. In doing so, we continue to attract more highly qualified students--and faculty--and maintain the viability of both graduate programs that offer service to the state and nation.