

SOCIAL WORK, PH.D.

Saint Louis University's Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Social Work is designed for people who want to shape the future of social work through research, teaching, leadership and policy. As a doctoral student in the School of Social Work, you will develop the skills and scholarly foundation needed to generate new knowledge, contribute to social work education and inform programs, policies and systems that shape communities.

At SLU, you are known, supported and challenged. You will learn from world-renowned research faculty who are leading scholars in their fields, and faculty work closely with you to help you refine your research interests, build advanced scholarly skills and move confidently through the program. Small class sizes foster a collaborative learning environment where you engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and faculty and become an active participant in a vibrant scholarly community.

Curriculum Overview

Saint Louis University's Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Social Work is a 48-credit program that provides rigorous training in research, theory and interdisciplinary scholarship. It is designed for social workers and related professionals who want to advance knowledge, influence policy and practice, and pursue careers in research, teaching, leadership and advanced professional roles.

The doctoral curriculum is organized into three phases:

Phase 1: Core Doctoral Curriculum

In your first year, you will complete required coursework in theory, research methods and data analysis. This phase builds the foundation needed for high-level scholarly work and prepares you to design and evaluate research.

Phase 2: Advanced Study and Synthesis Project

In your second year, you will take elective courses aligned with your research interests and professional goals. You will also complete a synthesis project that brings together key theoretical, methodological and substantive issues in your area of study. This project serves as a bridge between coursework and your dissertation.

Phase 3: Comprehensive Exams and Dissertation

In this last phase, you will complete written comprehensive exams, develop and defend a dissertation proposal, and carry out original research leading to the completed dissertation.

Research Opportunities

Building on the foundation of required coursework, you develop an individualized plan of study that reflects your intellectual interests and professional goals. Your plan is shaped largely through elective coursework and participation in mentored research.

You may select courses from across the University, allowing you to draw on multiple disciplines and tailor your doctoral training. This flexibility supports work in areas such as criminology, public health, education, psychology and other related fields.

You also complete a dissertation project aligned with your academic and professional goals, producing original research that contributes to the field of social work and related disciplines.

Careers

SLU's Ph.D. in Social Work prepares you for an academic career or for work as a social work research scientist in practice or policy settings. You graduate with a strong interdisciplinary and methodological foundation that supports research, teaching and leadership across a range of professional contexts.

Tuition

Tuition	Cost Per Credit
Graduate Tuition	\$1,450

Additional charges may apply. Other resources are listed below:

Information on Tuition and Fees (<https://catalog.slu.edu/academic-policies/student-financial-services/tuition/>)

Miscellaneous Fees (<https://catalog.slu.edu/academic-policies/student-financial-services/fees/>)

Information on Summer Tuition (<https://catalog.slu.edu/academic-policies/student-financial-services/tuition-summer-current/>)

Scholarships and Financial Aid

Most doctoral students receive funding in the form of a graduate research assistantship for full-time students or a tuition scholarship for students retaining their employment. These awards are competitive and are based on prior academic performance, research potential and fit with the program. Awards are determined upon admission into the social work Ph.D. program.

Newly accepted doctoral students and students in the first year of a program may also be eligible to apply for University-wide diversity, dissertation or presidential fellowships. Find more details on fellowship applications here.

Learning Outcomes

Program Objectives

- To select, prepare and graduate individuals for careers in academia, private and public research, and consulting organizations.
- To provide students with expert skills in research design, methods and dissemination.
- To train future researchers in an apprenticeship model in which students are matched, on admission, with mentor(s) in their chosen fields of study who have an active research agenda.

Learning Objectives

- Students focus on the core knowledge, skills and abilities that are expected of all individuals receiving the Ph.D. degree. This set of knowledge, skills and abilities includes the multidisciplinary, scientific fields of social work and criminology and criminal justice, and the research design, methods and dissemination techniques that facilitate scholarly contribution to one of these fields.

- Students should focus on a specific research topic and include both methodological and topical knowledge. Courses in this second set are usually taken outside the School of Social Work.

Core Program Competencies

The specific knowledge and skills provided in the Ph.D. social work program are based on a set of core competencies. These competencies reflect the expectations of accrediting bodies as well as the faculty.

- Critically evaluate and identify gaps in current scientific knowledge and develop alternative explanations and research strategies.
- Design, conduct and defend dissertation research that expands scientific knowledge.
- Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of a specific area of research in your discipline.
- Communicate effectively about scientific information for diverse audiences through scientific publications, lay documents and grant applications.

Requirements

Admission Requirements

Applicants must hold a master's degree in social work or a closely related field.

Application Requirements

- Application form
- Transcript(s)
- Three letters of recommendation
- Résumé or curriculum vitae
- Interview with the faculty program director
- Statement of purpose (two-three pages, single-spaced) detailing research interests, career goals and fit with current faculty research
- Writing sample such as a published article, course paper, agency technical report or a grant proposal

Requirements for International Students

All admission policies and requirements for domestic students apply to international students. International students must also meet the following additional requirements:

- Demonstrate English Language Proficiency (<https://catalog.slu.edu/academic-policies/office-admission/undergraduate/english-language-proficiency/>). SLU's Ph.D. program requires a TOEFL score of 92 or higher or equivalent PTE Academic score.
- Academic records, in English translation, of students who have undertaken postsecondary studies outside the United States must include:
 - Courses taken and/or lectures attended
 - Practical laboratory work
 - The maximum and minimum grades attainable
 - The grades earned or the results of all end-of-term examinations
 - Any honors or degrees received.

- Credential Evaluation Reports (such as the WES, The Evaluation Company (TEC), or Scholaro) are required.

If admitted to the School of Social Work, the International Office (<https://www.slu.edu/international-services/>) will require additional documentation to issue an I-20. Questions about these requirements can be directed to internationalservices@slu.edu.

Application Deadline

Fall Admissions

- February 1

Review Process

The admissions committee considers several factors to determine eligibility: academic achievement, strength of the undergraduate program, application information, personal statement, work experience, any graduate degrees earned, letters of recommendation, motivation and a commitment to a research career. The undergraduate and graduate GPA is weighted with other criteria in the admissions process.

Program Requirements

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
SWRK 6000	Foundations of Theory Development in Social Work	3
SWRK 6010	Principles of Statistics & Data Analysis	3
SWRK 6020	Research Design & Measurement	3
SWRK 6030	Multivariate Data Analysis	3
SWRK 6040	Research Area Synthesis	3
SWRK 6050	Advanced Social Work Data Analysis	3
Methods Courses		9
Select three courses with the "Social Work, PhD - Methods" attribute		
Elective Courses		9
Select three courses with the "Social Work, PhD - Elective" attribute		
Dissertation		12
SWRK 6990	Dissertation Research	
Total Credits		48

Non-Course Requirements

Written Exam

As required by the Office of Graduate Education, the doctoral program administers written examinations following successful completion of the doctoral course series, the methods core coursework and the required elective courses. The written examinations are structured to assess the student's knowledge and skills in the foundational, contextual, methodological and analytical skills needed of all social work researchers.

The written examination assesses students' achievement of the doctoral competencies covered within the general and concentration curricula and also reflects their expertise in a specific area of research. The written examinations combine two components:

1. Foundation (theory, methods, statistics) material
2. Research area

The written exam is conducted by a committee of three faculty members who are likely to compose the dissertation committee. Questions are approved by the director of the doctoral program. The exam takes place across two sequential days and can be arranged anytime during the school year. The written exam should reflect competencies covered in the doctoral course series and reflected topically in the research area synthesis. As such, questions can be generated that focus on a research area but are also tied to theoretical and methodological issues.

Oral Examination

The oral examination is intended to focus on the proposal of the dissertation. The presentation usually consists of a statement of the problem, literature review and the research design prepared for the investigation. The exam is structured to assess the student's comprehensive knowledge of prior literature, ability to integrate knowledge across the discipline, and ability to design an appropriate research approach that significantly expands this body of knowledge. This is when the student presents a proposal for what they intend to do prior to actually starting their research.

The oral examination must follow the written exams and is normally scheduled after the student completes all structured academic coursework.

Defense of the Dissertation

Upon completion of the dissertation, students publicly present and defend their dissertation before their dissertation committee.

Continuation Standards

Students must maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.00 in all graduate/professional courses.

Roadmap

This roadmap is just one example of a semester-by-semester plan of study for this program. There are other plans students can and do take. The plan of study for each particular student is established in consultation with each student's academic advisor; *this roadmap does not replace academic advising appointments.*

Roadmap notes:

- This Roadmap assumes full-time enrollment unless otherwise noted.
- Courses/Milestones marked with an "!" are critical and must be completed in the semester listed in the Roadmap to ensure a timely graduation.
- Course availability and sequencing are subject to change.

Course	Title	Credits
Year One		
Fall		
SWRK 6000	Foundations of Theory Development in Social Work	3
SWRK 6010	Principles of Statistics & Data Analysis	3
Select one course with the "Social Work PhD Elective" attribute ²		3
Credits		9
Spring		
SWRK 6020	Research Design & Measurement	3
SWRK 6030	Multivariate Data Analysis	3

Select one course with the "Social Work PhD Methods" attribute ¹		3
Credits		9
Year Two		
Fall		
SWRK 6050	Advanced Social Work Data Analysis	3
Select one course with the "Social Work PhD Methods" attribute ¹		3
Select one course with the "Social Work PhD Elective" attribute		3
Credits		9
Spring		
SWRK 6040	Research Area Synthesis	3
Select one courses with the "Social Work PhD Elective" attribute ²		3
Select one courses with the "Social Work PhD Methods" attribute		3
Credits		9
Year Three		
Fall		
Completion of Written Exam, Teaching Experience, and Workshop from Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning		
SWRK 6990	Dissertation Research	3
Credits		3
Spring		
Completion of Oral Exam, Teaching Experience, and Workshop from Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning		
SWRK 6990	Dissertation Research	3
Credits		3
Year Four		
Fall		
SWRK 6990	Dissertation Research	3
Credits		3
Spring		
Completion of Dissertation Defense		
SWRK 6990	Dissertation Research	3
Credits		3
Total Credits		48

¹ Behavioral Science, Epidemiology, Biostatistics, or other approved research methods courses with the "Social Work PhD Methods" attributes.

² To be determined by the student and mentor based on the needs for the overall plan of study. Can be taken in departments inside or outside of the School of Social Work.

Program Notes

Students are encouraged to participate in teaching practicums that prepare them to teach their own course in either the B.S.S.W. or M.S.W. program or in the applied behavior analysis and criminology degree programs. Further, there are numerous professional development workshops that provide students with opportunities to develop their unique professional skills outside formal coursework or research.

If the student plans an academic career, it is valuable to obtain teaching experience. These experiences can be obtained by assisting a faculty member with a course or by independent teaching. In addition, the Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning offers workshops and a certificate in teaching that can be obtained while being a doctoral student.

Contact Us

For admission questions contact:

Social Work School Graduate Admissions Office
ssw (sswadmissions@slu.edu)admissions@slu.edu
(SSWadmissions@slu.edu)
314-977-2752

For program questions contact:

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