

PhD FAQs



What is the purpose of the PhD Program?

The UA Social Work PhD program focuses on the education of social work researchers and scholars. Most graduates hold academic positions in departments of social work. The program does not prepare students for advanced social work practice. Several universities around the country now offer a Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) degree to prepare students for advanced practice.

What is the application deadline?

The priority deadline for each fall cohort is February 1 of the same year. Applicants should apply by that date to be eligible for fellowships and other funding opportunities. Late applications will be considered under special circumstances.

When and where are courses offered? Social work PhD courses are offered during the day on Mondays and Tuesdays on campus in Tuscaloosa. The PhD course curriculum involves courses in our School of Social Work, as well as electives in areas other than social work. The electives, which are generally taken in year two of the program, can be offered on any days, and at any times.

Do you have a part-time program?

We do not have a special part-time program. Assistantships require full-time registration, and UA Graduate School requires two semesters of full-time course work. However, the PhD Program Director can help to design special part-time course plans for at least part of the PhD curriculum.

Are courses offered online?

None of the required doctoral-level social work courses are offered online. Some electives could be offered online.

How long does it take to complete the PhD program?

The length of time varies by student. Most students take 4 to 5 years. Required course work takes 2 to 2.5 years. After completing required course work, students take a comprehensive exam and then move to dissertation work.

Is financial assistance available?

Yes! Students admitted to the PhD program are generally offered funding for three years. Funding involves tuition, health insurance, and a stipend of about \$1,500 per month during the academic year. The funding comes in exchange for about 20 hours of work per week as a research or teaching assistant. In addition, we will help eligible students apply for competitive university fellowships and scholarships.

Are GRE scores required to apply? How important are the scores in admissions decisions?

GRE scores are not required from applicants who already hold an MSW. Applicants to the concurrent MSW/PhD program must submit GRE scores.

How many applicants do you admit? How large are cohorts?

We generally enroll about five students each fall, which is about a quarter of all applicants.

Must I have an MSW to apply?

An MSW is not required for admission to the PhD program, but it is currently required before graduating from the program. To facilitate funding, course work, and field placement coordination, we encourage students to complete an MSW before entering the PhD program. On rare occasion, a “concurrent” MSW/PhD program is offered for exceptional applicants.

Must I have two-years post-MSW practice experience to apply?

Post-MSW practice experience is not required, but having it will strengthen your application and could help enrich your research. Students lacking post-MSW practice experience can face barriers if they choose to pursue a career in social work education or academia.

Can I maintain a full-time job while completing the PhD?

We offer assistantships because we have learned that students are unlikely to be successful in the PhD program while working full-time. University rules prohibit students from working full-time while receiving assistantships. Students who accept a full assistantship may work a maximum of 20 additional hours per week. We strongly advise against attempting to maintain a full-time job. The program requirements are demanding. Plus, engagement in lectures and other training opportunities on top of the program requirements enrich the doctoral program experience. To be successful, we urge you to make the program a top priority.

What kind of assistantships are available?

Students with assistantships are matched with faculty members to assist with research. Such opportunities are an important supplement to course work and independent research, and can often lead to conference presentations and publications. In addition, students have opportunities to assist faculty members in teaching, and to teach courses independently.

What are the strengths of the UA social work PhD program?

Our program has many strengths, including:

- Strong faculty commitment to student success
- Financial support through assistantships and other sources
- Small class sizes with courses taught by social work faculty members
- Opportunities to conduct research with faculty members and to work with faculty and other students on conference presentations and manuscripts
- Generous support for travel to academic conferences
- Good preparation for teaching, including a special course on social work education and opportunities to teach independently.

In addition, we have a PhD Program suite with a computer and cubical space designated for each student.