

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

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The goal of the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare Ph.D. program is to prepare students to become leaders nationally and internationally in advancing social work practice and policy through research, teaching, and scholarship. Our students graduate from the program with the critical knowledge and skills they need to become innovative stewards of the discipline who generate and disseminate knowledge as researchers, scholars and educators. The school is known nationally and internationally as a prime innovator in the Strengths Perspective for social work practice. Ph.D. students have played a key role in advancing this work to its 21st century applications.

Program Highlights

- Creative, critical thinking about social work practice, social policy, and guiding theoretical frames
- Advanced quantitative and qualitative research skills
- Opportunities for innovative scholarship and for the development of teaching skills
- Student-centered educational approach
- Financial support and mentoring for students
- Appreciation for human diversity and the development of a global perspective
- Racial, social, economic, and environmental justice focus
- Study Abroad opportunities

Ph.D. students are immersed in the excitement and creativity in the profession — how professionals come to know what they know, how they put that knowledge into practice and how it affects social justice.

Consider Our Program

The Ph.D. program (<https://socwel.ku.edu/phd/>) (<http://socwel.ku.edu/academics/degrees/phd/overview/>) offers effective options for building knowledge by initiating systematic inquiry into methods, forms, and outcomes of social work practice and social welfare policy. We are dedicated to educating scholars who desire to build knowledge for the profession through quantitative, qualitative, theoretical, or conceptual analyses, and historiographic investigations. Demand for our Ph.D. graduates is high. Our alumni are engaged in teaching, research, and administrative endeavors and are found in faculty positions at premier research universities and at smaller colleges and universities throughout the United States and abroad.

Curriculum

Ph.D. courses prepare students as scholars with conceptual and methodological sophistication.

- The history and philosophy course focuses on the intellectual history, current status, and innovation of social work ideas, ideologies, and theories.
- In the research sequence, students learn both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, designs, advanced modes of analysis, theory for research, appropriate applications, and research design which centers racial and social justice.

- The policy course provides the opportunity to analyze policies of interest to the student and how policies impact populations of interest. Students develop and apply a critical perspective when considering human problems, strengths, and strategies for change and transformation.
- Integrative papers and electives help students develop deep understanding in areas of special interest.
- A required course as well as teaching seminars for GTAs prepare students to be effective educators.
- The dissertation involves advanced and focused research into a topic selected by the student, based on quantitative, qualitative, historical, conceptual, or other methods of inquiry.

GTA & GRA - Teaching and Research Opportunities

Our Ph.D. program contributes significantly to the model of strengths and community-based research, service, and education developed by the School. Under the direction of faculty members, many Ph.D. students work on research projects and serve as teaching assistants. For example, doctoral research assistants work in such areas as aging, asset-building, child welfare, criminal justice, diversity issues, domestic violence, health and disability, child and adult mental health, poverty, social policy, substance misuse, and LGBTQ+ populations.

It is part of the School's mission to focus on teaching, inquiry, and practice that benefit populations who have been oppressed by our systems and institutions. The School is committed to diversity, inclusion, and multicultural perspectives. Many of the faculty are involved in research and service projects which aim to achieve direct and positive impacts on Black, Indigenous and people of color as well as other oppressed groups. Ph.D. students work with faculty to bring these projects to life.

Admission Criteria & Requirements

Criteria used in judging applications include the applicant's potential for excellence in academic performance, professional practice experience, and potential for contributions to knowledge-building for social work. We take a holistic approach to admissions, attending to the various strengths and areas for growth of each prospective student.

Required

- Master's degree in social work or related field.
- Graduate grade-point average of 3.5 or higher.
- Personal statement of scholarly and research interests in social work practice and why the candidate wishes to pursue their Ph.D. at KU.
- Three letters of reference.
- Completion of a basic statistics course within the past two years with a grade of B or higher. If the applicant has not completed this requirement, they must include a written statement showing how it will be met before entering the program, or indicate they plan to apply for a waiver of this requirement based on extensive research experience.
- Completion of the online graduate application (<https://graduate.ku.edu/application-process/>).
- Students whose native language is not English must follow the policy for English Proficiency Requirements for Admission to Graduate Study. (<http://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/english-proficiency-international-students/?num1.5>)

Preferred

- Undergraduate grade-point average of 3.0 or higher preferred.
- MSW degree preferred. Applicants with master's degrees related to social work and affiliation with social work activities and values are considered.
- Two years of social work or related practice; two years of post-master's professional social work experience preferred.

Application Timeline and Procedure

Ph.D. admissions are considered every other year. Application information and deadlines may be found on the program website (<https://socwel.ku.edu/phd-apply/>). Applications are not reviewed until all materials are received. Late applications are considered only on a space-available basis.

Learn more about the admission process (<https://socwel.ku.edu/phd-apply/>).

International Students

International students from all regions of the world are encouraged to apply. For more information about international student applications and resources and regulations contact International Support Services (<http://www.iss.ku.edu/>) and the Applied English Center (<https://aec.ku.edu/>).

Ph.D. Degree Requirements

The program requires a minimum of 64 credit hours, as follows:

- 37 credit hours of required coursework.
- 9 credit hours of electives.
- An integrative paper.
- A comprehensive examination process.
- Completion of a dissertation.

In fulfilling the elective hours, students may take graduate-level courses in any substantive area or research skills necessary for successful completion of their goals. Students can take electives in social science or other relevant graduate disciplines. They may also complete Independent Study under faculty direction and/or choose from one of the study abroad courses offered by the School.

Beyond course work, students complete one integrative paper under the guidance of a faculty committee. This demonstrates their ability to integrate knowledge and skills across the curriculum areas in relation to a theme of inquiry developed by the student in their chosen specialization. After the integrative paper is completed, students complete an oral comprehensive exam (dissertation proposal defense) and then undertake and complete an approved research project, and write and defend the doctoral dissertation.

Required course work (<https://socwel.ku.edu/phd-curriculum/>) can be completed in 2 years. Additional time is needed to complete the integrative paper and dissertation. The program can be completed in 4 years of focused work. Prior to the semester in which the comprehensive exam is held, all Ph.D. students must complete a minimum program engagement equivalent to two (2) full-time semesters. This may be accomplished through either of the following:

- Two (2) semesters (fall and/or spring) of full-time enrollment in KU coursework, as defined by University Policy.

- At least 18 hours of enrollment in KU coursework spread out over several part-time semesters.

Summer enrollment is not required but may be counted toward the (18) part-time pre-comprehensive hours

Code	Title	Hours
PhD Courses		
SW 911	PhD Seminar I	1
SW 912	PhD Seminar II	1
SW 975	Racial Equity and Social Justice in Research and Practice	3
SW 976	Practice and Politics of Writing	3
SW 978	Research Design and Methods	3
SW 979	Methods of Qualitative Inquiry I	3
SW 980	History and Philosophy of Social Work	3
SW 981	Advanced Quantitative Research Methods I	3
SW 982	Social Welfare Policy	3
SW 983	Advanced Quantitative Research Methods II	3
SW 985	Theory for Social Work Research	3
SW 987	Teaching Social Work: Philosophy and Methods	3
SW 989	Methods of Qualitative Inquiry II	3
SW 990	Graduate Research	1-9
SW 999	Dissertation	1-9

The program requires a minimum of 64 credit hours.

Year 1

Fall	Hours Spring	Hours
SW 911	1 SW 911	1
SW 978	3 SW 979	3
SW 980	3 SW 983	3
SW 981	3 SW 985	3
10		10

Year 2

Fall	Hours Spring	Hours
SW 912	1 SW 912	1
SW 975	3 SW 976	3
SW 982	3 SW 987	3
SW 989	3 Elective	3
10		10

Year 3

Fall	Hours Spring	Hours
Elective	3 SW 999	1-9
Elective	3	
SW 990 (Integrative Paper)	1-9	
7-15		1-9

Year 4

Fall	Hours Spring	Hours
SW 999	3 SW 999	9
3		9

Total Hours 60-76