



MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Updated Summer 2024

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Welcome to the Master of Social Work Program at Northern Kentucky University! The policies and procedures provided in this handbook pertain to the Master of Social Work (MSW) Program. This handbook should be used in conjunction with the NKU Graduate Catalog available on the NKU website at catalog.nku.edu.

Mission Statement of the Master of Social Work Program (MSW)

is appropriate for advanced social work practice and consistent with Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)



- 2.1.2. Identify areas of concern regarding any aspect related to their educational experience and communicate the concern to the appropriate person in the program.
- 2.1.3. Use their advisors as resources who can make appropriate referrals to other services as needed.
- 2.1.4. Register for classes as outlined on their approved course of study or

3. The curriculum educates social work practitioners who are ethical, critical thinkers engaged in ongoing inquiry, and lifelong learning.
4. Faculty promotes and supports research and knowledge development to promote social justice; and, to improve the effectiveness of social work practice, policies, and programs.
5. Faculty engage students in leadership activities that contribute to the social work profession, Northern Kentucky University, the region, and the global community to advance social and economic justice.

There are nine program professional competencies to be demonstrated by MSW students before graduation. These competencies are outlined in CSWE, Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards, 2015 and provided below.

1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
4. Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice
5. Engage in Policy Practice
6. Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
7. Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
8. Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
- 9.

F. Academic Accountability. *Commit yourself to learning to communicate in a professional context.*

Components:

- a.) Do your own work, and take credit only for your own work. This includes paraphrases and citations and giving credit where credit is due.
- b.) Acknowledge areas where improvement is needed, and actively work to address those areas.
- c.) Complete work in a timely manner, and incorporate time to review your own work and any needed resources before submission.
- d.) Seek out and benefit from constructive feedback. This includes peer review, instructor reviews, and utilization of the campus writing center.

G. Commitment to Diversity. *Strive to become more open to people, populations, ideas, and creeds with which you may not agree. Embrace diversity as a positive component of our society.*

Components:

- a.) Maintain speech and professional interactions that are respectful and kind.
- b.) Exhibit a willingness to serve with and learn about and from diverse clientele, colleagues, and communities.
- c.) Demonstrate an understanding of how values and culture interact, and an active engagement with evolving standards and expectations.

H. Communication. *Strive to improve non-verbal, verbal, and written communication skills. These skills are essential in our professional interactions.*

Components:

- a.) Present yourself in a positive and appropriate manner. This includes professional appearance and means that you should not wear offensive or inappropriate attire in a professional setting.
- b.) Actively maintain communication with classmates, instructors, and members of the NKU community. Self-isolation and a lack of communication are impediments to professional development.
- c.) Practice positive, constructive, respectful, and professional communication skills in non-verbal, verbal, and written communication. This includes but is not limited to: in-person interactions, class discussions, and email correspondence.
- d.) Actively demonstrate appropriate body language, empathy, and listening skills in professional interactions.
- e.) Check NKU email regularly throughout the week and respond to faculty emails within 1-2 business days to avoid missing important information.

I. Social Justice. *Strive to deepen your commitment to social justice for all persons.* Components:

- a.) Develop and demonstrate an understanding of how personal and institutional factors impede the experience of social justice.
- b.) Strive to learn about and participate in social justice initiatives.
- c.) Seek and embrace learning opportunities about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Your course instructor can provide links and information regarding available campus services to support students, such as the NKU Writing Center.

Progression Requirements for Professional Performance Issues.

In addition to meeting the academic standards set forth above, students are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical, responsible, and professional manner. To this end, they are expected to adhere to the standards of professional ethics and practice set forth by the MSW Program and the National Association of Social Workers.

Students are expected to follow the appropriate channels for addressing concerns they may have during their time in the program. If a student has a concern about a course, they must address this concern directly with their professor first to try to resolve the concern. If this does not yield a solution, then the student can contact their MSW Program Director. If this does not yield a solution, then students can contact the Director of the School of Social Work.

Unacceptable behavior is inconsistent with the behavior described by the School of Social Work at NKU, as mandated by the Code of Ethics and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). In determining whether the behavior is acceptable or unacceptable, consider how you would feel or react if you were on the receiving end of the behavior in question. The information below provides further guidance on what is unacceptable behavior in the School of Social Work at Northern Kentucky University. This behavior is unacceptable towards peers, faculty, field supervisors, or any other person or entity with which you are interacting as a social worker/social work student. Examples of Unacceptable Behavior which are considered unacceptable in the School of Social Work at NKU include (but are not limited to) the following:

- a) Aggressive or abusive behavior, such as making threatening gestures or engaging in actual violence or assault
- b) Verbal abuse, such as yelling, screaming, or using abusive or offensive language
- c) Bullying, harassment, stalking, or intimidation
- d) Being under the influence of illicit drugs or impaired by alcohol
- e) Unwelcome physical contact including that of a sexual or threatening nature
- f) Teasing, name-calling, or ridicule
- g) Engaging in malicious gossip or complaints
- h) Producing abusive or harassing notes, emails, telephone calls, text messages
- i) Belittling the opinions of others
- j) Responding poorly to constructive feedback. This includes yelling at instructors, approaching

- k) Using offensive gestures and behavior
- l) Stealing or misuse of university resources
- m) Engaging in inappropriate technology or social media use (see Social Media statement above)

Student Remediation and Retention.

When the School of Social Work Faculty become aware of an academic and/or professional dispositional issue exhibited by a student, an appropriate faculty member will first discuss the concern(s) raised with the student directly. Examples of such concerns include deficiencies in the areas of academic performance, clinical effectiveness or judgment, or interpersonal functioning.

- b. Specific behaviors required of the student;
 - c.
 - d. Consequences for not meeting the expectations and behaviors outlined in the PDP.
5. As soon as is practical, the student and the issuing faculty will meet to discuss the PDP.
- a. The issuing faculty and the student will sign the PDP form to verify their understanding of the presented concerns, the required remedial actions, and the schedule for completing them.
 - b. Both the student and issuing faculty will receive copies of the signed PDP, and a copy will be
6. If the student fails to show reasonable progress in meeting the conditions of the PDP, as determined by the issuing faculty, the student will be required to attend a review meeting to include the issuing faculty, the academic advisor, and the MSW Program Director.
7. After such a meeting with the student, the issuing faculty and academic advisor will consult the full School of Social Work faculty regarding the development of alternative remedial strategies and/or evaluation of the MSW Program.
- a. If a new or revised PDP is developed, the new PDP will be signed by the student, the issuing faculty, and the academic advisor, and progress towards completion will be monitored.
 - b. If the SSW faculty determines that a new or revised PDP will not likely help remediate the concerns raised, the student will be informed that they will be dismissed from the MSW Program and cannot enroll in social work courses, even as a non-degree seeking student.
8. The student will be informed of the decision to dismiss them from the MSW Program in writing. The writing will include notice of appeal rights and that they may petition for reinstatement into the program after 12 months. The policies and procedures for pursuing an appeal of such a decision are available here: <http://scra.nku.edu/policies/student-rights.html>

NOTICE: Faculty will initiate the Professional Performance Evaluation protocol at any time for students who engage in illegal or unethical activities or for students whose professional performance is deemed to present an immediate threat to the well-being of others. In such cases, and depending upon the nature of the concern, the Social Work Faculty may recommend dismissal from the MSW Program without the opportunity for student remediation.

After a period of 12 months, a dismissed student may petition for reinstatement into the program. In order to petition for reinstatement, the student must reapply to the MSW program and complete the following additional requirements:

1. Submit an essay (1-page minimum) describing what change and/or growth has occurred that will help them to be successful in the program
2. Submit 2 letters of recommendation from supervisors/employers
3. Engage in an interview with the School of Social Work faculty

Recommendation Letter Etiquette

Professors take the writing of recommendation letters very seriously, and they have the same expectations of their students. Recommendations reflect not only the quality of the student but also the integrity of the

professor and Northern Kentucky University. Please adhere to the guidelines below and the Student Recommendation Request Form (Appendix D) when requesting a recommendation from your professor.

1. Choose a faculty member who knows you well, preferably in a variety of contexts. Employers, scholarship committees, and graduate schools review many recommendation letters, so the more specific a letter is, the more effective it will be.
2. Make a formal request to your professor (by email or by appointment), asking if they would be willing to write a letter or fill out a form on your behalf.
3. Provide your professor with information about yourself and what you are applying for. The more professors know about you and what you are applying for, the more easily they can tailor the letter toward a specific audience. Please review the Student Recommendation Request Form in appendix D and prepare the outlined materials for your professor.
4. Ask early. Contact your professor or make an appointment to discuss the recommendation at least three weeks in advance of the deadline – preferably a month or more, especially if you need multiple letters. This timeline does not include university holidays and breaks, when many faculty are not on contract with the university, so please plan early. Professors have very busy schedules and need ample time to write an impactful letter.
5. Never assume that the professor will be willing to write a letter. Always ask first, even if the professor a reference on an application, even if no letter is required.
6. Professors have the right to decline to provide a recommendation if they feel that they are not best suited to provide the recommendation, or if the student did not adhere to the guidelines when requesting the recommendation.
7. If a professor agrees to provide a recommendation, students may request that the professor send them an email to confirm that the letter has been sent.

Field education is an integral part of the Master of Social Work curriculum. Field education is an internship that takes place in selected agencies and organizations, located throughout Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati, which represent a broad range of social services. Field placements are approved based on the quality of their professional practice, commitment to social justice and to addressing social work problems, interest in participating in professional education, ability to make qualified MSW personnel and resources available to assure the learning opportunities are available so that field students can demonstrate competencies in field. MSW field supervisors are responsible for teaching and supervising MSW students in their field placements. The MSW Field Director is administratively responsible for field education.

Foundation coursework prepares the social work student to enter their initial field experience with the generalist knowledge and skills necessary to apply and carry out core social work competencies with individuals, families, groups, communities, and orga

Northern Kentucky University
Criteria for Professional Performance Evaluation

School of Social Work

Student Name: _____

A. Accountability. *Maintain a strong presence in all courses and demonstrate preparedness and engagement with course materials and feedback.*

Components:

a.)

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| B. | Did not address faculty members by professional titles. | | Did address faculty members by professional titles. | | Addressed faculty members by professional titles and requested clarification when uncertain of titles. | |
| C. | Did not provide feedback and engagement in a constructive and supportive manner. | | Did provide feedback and engagement in a constructive and supportive manner. | | Provided and solicited consistent feedback and engagement in a constructive and supportive manner. | |
| D. | Did not demonstrate professionalism and kindness in all professional communications. | | Did demonstrate professionalism and kindness in all professional communications. | | Modeled consistent professionalism and kindness in all professional communications. | |
| E. | Did not approach conflict in a positive and cooperative manner. | | Did approach conflict in a positive and cooperative manner. | | | |

D. Competence. *Apply yourself to all of your academic pursuits with seriousness and conscientiousness, and according to the timelines and expectations established by your instructors.*

Components:

a.)

| Components | Description | Place check below if the assessment is | Description | Place check below if the assessment | Description | Place check below if the assessment |
|-------------------|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. | Did not participate in courses with the appropriate books, materials, and syllabus, including locating and accessing additional materials as warranted. | | Did participate in courses with the appropriate books, materials, and syllabus, including locating and accessing additional materials as warranted. | | Successfully participate312.13 59B' | |

- b.) Demonstrate commitment to positive, respectful, and honest interactions.
- c.) Self-evaluate responsibility and commitment on a regular basis, and address any identified areas for improvement.
- d.) Maintain integrity when completing all coursework.

Please enter a checkmark next to the most appropriate assessment for each component included below.

| Components | Description | Place check below if the assessment is | Description | Place check below if | Description | Place check below if the assessment |
|-------------------|---|--|---|----------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| A. | Did not maintain professionalism in interactions with peers, instructors, and campus and community partners. | | Did maintain professionalism in interactions with peers, instructors, and campus and community partners. | | Modeled consistent professionalism in interactions with peers, instructors, and campus and community partners. | |
| B. | Did not demonstrate commitment to positive, respectful, and honest interactions. | | Did demonstrate commitment to positive, respectful, and honest interactions. | | Consistently modeled and demonstrated commitment to positive, respectful, and honest interactions. | |
| C. | Did not self-evaluate responsibility and commitment on a regular basis. Did not address any identified areas for improvement. | | Did self-evaluate responsibility and commitment on a regular basis. Did address any identified areas for improvement. | | Actively and consistently completed self-evaluation of responsibility and commitment on a regular basis. Did address any identified areas for improvement. | |

b.) Acknowledge areas where improvement is needed, and actively work to address those areas.

c.) C wnlis

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|--|--|
| D. | Did not seek out and benefit from constructive feedback. This includes peer review, instructor reviews, and utilization of the campus writing center. | Did seek out and benefit from constructive feedback. This includes peer review, instructor reviews, and utilization of the campus writing center. | Actively and consistently sought out and benefitted from constructive feedback. This includes peer review, instructor reviews, and utilization of the campus writing center. | |
|----|---|---|--|--|

G. Commitment to Diversity. *Strive to become more open to people, populations, ideas, and creeds with which you may not agree. Embrace diversity as a positive component of our society.*

Components:

- a.) Maintain speech and professional interactions that are respectful and kind.
- b.) Exhibit a willingness to serve with and learn about and from diverse clientele, colleagues, and communities.
- c.)

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| D. | Did not actively demonstrate appropriate body language, empathy, and listening skills in professional interactions. | | Did actively demonstrate appropriate body language, empathy, and listening skills in professional interactions. | | Actively and consistently demonstrated appropriate body language, empathy, and listening skills in professional interactions. | |
| | | | | | | |

I. Social Justice. *Strive to deepen your commitment to social justice for all persons.*

Components:

- a.) Develop and demonstrate an understanding of how personal and institutional factors impede the experience of social justice. b.) Strive to learn about and participate in social justice initiatives.
- c.) Seek and embrace learning opportunities about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Please enter a checkmark next to the most appropriate assessment for each component included below.

| Components | Description | Place check |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| C. | Did not seek and embrace learning opportunities about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. | | Did seek and embrace learning opportunities about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. | | Actively and consistently sought and embraced learning opportunities about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. | |
|----|---|--|---|--|--|--|

- e.) Approach conflict in a positive and cooperative manner.
- f.) Actively include team members and classmates in class activities and discussions.

C. Confidentiality. *Treat any personal information that you learn about a peer, instructor, or client as strictly confidential, unless consultation with an appropriate faculty member is necessary.*

Components:

- a.) Maintain confidentiality with any information shared with you.
- b.) Use professional judgment when considering a disclosure of information that is very personal in a class or team setting. This time is not to be used for your own therapy or treatment. If you are struggling with challenges, please see the instructor privately for information regarding additional campus resources.
- c.) Never use the names of clients or share identifying client information in a classroom or team setting.

D. Competence. *Apply yourself to all of your academic pursuits with seriousness and conscientiousness, and according to the timelines and expectations established by your instructors.*

Components:

- a.)

- e.) Approach conflict in a positive and cooperative manner.
- f.) Actively include team members and classmates in class activities and discussions.

C. Confidentiality.

Components:

- a.) Do your own work, and take credit only for your own work. This includes paraphrases and citations and giving credit where credit is due.
- b.) Acknowledge areas where improvement is needed, and actively work to address those areas.
- c.) Complete work in a timely manner, and incorporate time to review your own work and any needed resources before submission.
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H. Communication. *Strive to improve non-verbal, verbal, and written communication skills. These skills are essential in our professional interactions.*

Components:

- a.) Present yourself in a positive and appropriate manner. This includes professional appearance and means that you should not wear offensive or inappropriate attire in a professional setting.
- b.) Actively maintain communication with classmates, instructors, and members of the NKU community. Self-isolation and a lack of communication are impediments to professional development.
- c.) Practice positive, constructive, respectful, and professional communication skills in non

- 6.) Successful completion (earn an A or B grade) of the course. You cannot register for this course until you have successfully completed the first, second, and third requirements in this section. Any grade of C or lower in the course will result in your automatic and permanent removal from the MSW program. Consistent with our program policy, you will only have one more opportunity to successfully complete this course because you have failed the course once.

I understand and agree to the conditions of this document. Any breach of this agreement constitutes grounds for being removed from the social work program. I understand that I can appeal this plan *prior* to signing the agreement/plan. I understand and agree to all of the conditions of this document. If I do not follow through on completing all of the tasks outlined in this contract within 1 year, I understand that I will be terminated from the social work policy and am clear that there are certain behaviors that, if violated, will supersede this agreement and may result in immediate removal from the program (e.g., ethics violations).

Date Student Signature

Date Faculty Representative

Appendix D: Student Recommendation Request Form

Student Recommendation Request Form

Thank you for contacting me regarding a recommendation letter. In order for me to consider this request, please share the following with me in *one single email* at least three weeks prior to the due date for your recommendation (this excludes university holidays and breaks):

1. Please fill out the attached table for each program for which you would like to request a recommendation letter.
2. Please send me a copy of your updated resume.
3. Please send me any other relevant information or materials.
4. Please include this additional information in your email to me:
 - a. what classes you took with me as the course instructor
 - b. when those classes were (semester/year)
 - c. what your grade was for each of the classes that you took with me
 - d. any notable interactions that you had with me during our time working together
5. Please also include a list of 3-5 positive things that I could highlight about you and your work, with at least 2 of those things being directly observable by me (such as your collaboration on a team project).

I am so excited for you with this next step! Thank you for reaching out, and please stay in touch.

Sincerely,

| Specific program to which you are applying | Program website | Program focus | Deadline for recommendation letter | Information regarding how to send my letters in, either via email (if so, please include the address) or snail mail (if so, please include an addressed, stamped envelope). | Why you are a good fit for this program and focus | Specific courses and projects that you have worked on that evidence your fit for this program (please list in this table) |
|--|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---|---|---|
|--|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---|---|---|

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|-----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1.) | | | | | | |
| 2.) | | | | | | |
| 3.) | | | | | | |