

## **Department of Social Work Undergraduate Policies and Processes 2017 – 2018**

The University of Vermont Undergraduate College serves as the primary resource for our students. Students can find the course requirements and a sample program of study for social work majors in that catalogue by clicking on the link below.

<http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/educationandsocialservices/socialwork/socialworkbs/>

The policies and processes that guide our collaborative work together as a whole UVM Community can be found on the UVM Institutional Policy Website by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.uvm.edu/policies/>

However, there remain some specific department/program policies and processes that we want to have available for students. Keep in mind that students are responsible for knowing and following these policies.

### **BSW Program Mission Statement**

The BSW Program through its teaching, scholarship, and public service prepares undergraduate students for entry level generalist social work practice. With a particular emphasis on social, economic, and environmental justice, students and faculty work together to consider and practice from a deeply relational and strengths-oriented methodology. In order to consider long-lasting change at all levels, students and faculty explore and question methods and policies that have long been taken for granted as “truth” and offer opposing referents that consider issues of social difference, power, oppression, and human rights. Students are prepared through coursework and field experiences to see their practice in the context of working within the most intimate (individual) relationships to the most far-reaching (global) relationships and with all levels in between.

### **BSW Program Goals**

The program goals are identified below and are carried out by our faculty, field instructors, and our work with community partners.

1. Ensure the undergraduate social work community includes and draws upon the experiences of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and field instructors as we carry out our joint commitment to social work education and the creation of a department culture that is welcoming, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating.
2. Facilitate teaching and learning experiences with students across multiple subject areas and fields of practice but always in the context of strengths.
3. Provide teaching and learning experiences with and for students to understand the historical social change and social justice mission of our profession by focusing their work with people who are vulnerable and for whom issues of justice have impacted their lived experiences.
4. Prepare students for generalist social work practice with people who are devalued, marginalized, or underserved.
5. Foster awareness of social work from a global perspective and its implications for practice with people from diverse backgrounds.
6. Teach and support students to contextualize social work theory, policy, research, and practice in relation to change at all levels of generalist practice.
7. Work together to guide students through their development as self-reflective practitioners.
8. Create environments where students can examine practices, policies, and activities through a critical social construction lens and make practice decisions from their participation in that process.
9. Integrate and bring into focus the uniqueness of the human needs of our Vermont communities and the social work practice opportunities within those communities.

## **Admissions Processes and Benchmarks**

There are two avenues that are available for students to declare social work as their major. The first is to declare upon admission to the University and the second is to transfer into social work after enrollment. If students decide to transfer into social work from another major, they have two benchmarks they must meet:

1. They must have a cumulative GPA of 2.3 or better
2. They must contact the Students Services Office within the College of Education and Social Service to apply

Once transfer students apply and are accepted to the Undergraduate Social Work Program, they will be connected with a faculty member who will serve as their academic advisor. Together students will chart their course throughout their work toward the Bachelor's of Science in Social Work degree.

## **Previous Work and Life Experience**

The faculty views life experience and previous work experience as valuable and helpful to prospective students. Nevertheless, the BSW Program **does not waive** its academic requirements, including field requirements, for these experiences.

## **Professional Development and Behavior**

Professional conduct for social work can be defined as the standard behaviors and tenets of practice that are commonly expected of social workers as prescribed by the profession and the state. These tenets and prescriptions are encoded in the NASW Code of Ethics (2017); the accreditation policies and standards of the Council On Social Work Education (2015); licensing regulations, rules of evidence, and other related laws and regulations of the state in which a social worker practices.

As one of the central sources of defining the ethical tenets of U.S. social work, the NASW Code of Ethics is presented to each new student during the Foundations of Social Work Class (SWSS 002). During their participation in the Undergraduate Social Work Program, students are also provided with other guides for professional conduct including ethical decision-making frameworks, international human rights declarations and conventions, and readings about particular aspects, case examples, and practice implications of the philosophy, values, and ethical obligations of the profession and the Program.

Among the professional values that are central to social work ethics are: respect for others; personal integrity; a commitment to human rights, social and economic justice, and social change; an openness to growth and change; and an appreciation of human diversity. Students are held accountable for learning the standards of ethical practice in social work, and for identifying with them as professionals. The following professional conduct policy clarifies the expectations of students and faculty in the Undergraduate Social Work Program. Adherence to this policy is considered an essential aspect of students' academic performance in the Program.

The department takes a strong stance regarding professional behavior. Students see evidence of this in five different places. 1) The Department's Professional Conduct Policy, 2) The Faculty Review of Students, 3) The use of a student self-report along the program's professional behavioral rubric, 4) Discussions in student advising sessions, and 5) Throughout the professional social work curriculum. The first three are described in more depth below.

## ***Professional Conduct Policy***

It is the policy of the Undergraduate Social Work Program that students and faculty are to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics and the values of the social work profession and the Department of Social Work. Further, it is expected that they will demonstrate this professional conduct in all settings (formal and informal) related to their membership in the Department and the profession, including the University, the field agency, and the community. Likewise, it is expected that they will apply this standard in all interactions (formal and informal) with staff, students, faculty, and others with whom they come into contact through their involvement in the M.S.W. Program.

This policy is established as an academic standard of professional social work education and as such is treated in the Undergraduate Social Work Program as a criterion for evaluating academic and field practicum performance. Rather than separating professional conduct from academic performance, students should understand that the Undergraduate Social Work Program takes its cues from related case law and social work scholarship that indicate that these are one and the same.

## ***Faculty Review of Student Progression***

**Goal:** To review students' academic performance and professional conduct in a regular and ongoing manner in order to recommend promotion or to engage in a planning process to address concerns.

### **Process:**

1. The B.S.W. Program Committee will meet at the end of each semester to conduct this review and make these recommendations.
2. Students will have knowledge of this protocol through a once-a-semester e-mail correspondence, reminders in introductory classes, and through a written statement located in the B.S.W. Program Bulletin.
3. During the review itself, each student's name will be read and one of three responses are possible:
  - a. No concerns – promotion is immediately recommended.
  - b. Minimal concerns – promotion recommended with support plan to be worked out between course instructor(s) and advisor.
  - c. Serious concerns – promotion is not recommended and there is a formal committee/subcommittee response.

### **Formal Committee/Subcommittee Response to Serious Concerns:**

1. This meeting will take place within ten (10) working/business days of the B.S.W. Program Committee Meeting in which the non-promotion recommendation was made.
2. The student will be notified immediately in writing of this recommendation and will be given the opportunity to meet with the committee for discussion. Students will also be given an opportunity to bring a "support person" to the meeting, if desired.
3. The discussion will include:
  - a. Why promotion is not being recommended,
  - b. Student response to the recommendation,
  - c. Open discussion and suggestions for a plan to address concerns,
  - d. Identification of the faculty person(s) to support the student in carrying out his/her plan,
  - e. Confirmation that a notation will be made in the student's academic file.

## **Professional Behavioral Rubric**

The purpose of this rubric is for students to consider the values of professional behavior in social work in the context of their own professional presentation. It also provides students with the opportunity to talk with their academic advisors about areas of strengths and challenges for them. Advisors will ask students to complete this rubric annually. Below are the 15 primary points of the self-evaluation.

1. Attendance for both classes and outside academic meetings
2. Punctuality and engagement with material
3. Respect and support in all relationships
4. Communicate directly with faculty about attendance and assignments
5. Demonstration of self-awareness
6. Demonstration of awareness and responsiveness to diversity and difference
7. Demonstration of collegiality and collaborative interactions
8. Demonstration of clear and strong oral communication/expression
9. Demonstration of clear and strong written communication/expression
10. Demonstration of reliability, dependability, and taking initiative
11. Responsive to feedback from faculty and colleagues
12. Knowledge of and adherence to the Department of Social Work Professional Conduct Policy
13. Knowledge of and adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics
14. Demonstrate physical presentation (dress) appropriate for professional work environments
15. Demonstrate responsibility in using Social Work Department communication strategies— student and faculty mailboxes, UVM email accounts, & the BSW Student listserv.

## **Requests for Exceptions**

Students interested in requesting an exception to program policies or procedures (i.e. taking courses out of order) are to consult with their advisors. Initially, the advisor's role in this process is to assist the student to clarify the nature of and reason for the request. As part of this discussion, the advisor ensures that the student understands the policies and procedures in question and their rationale. If the student decides to make a formal request, the advisor explains the process for doing so and the responsibilities of the faculty members who will be involved (including the advisor).

If a student decides to pursue a **request for an exception**, the advisor's responsibilities involve carefully and respectfully assisting the student to follow the designated process while simultaneously representing and interpreting the Program's and profession's integrity and multiple accountabilities. The advisor acts as a conduit and provider of information, a facilitative participant in the consideration of the request for both the student and the faculty, and a recorder of the process and the results. These responsibilities ensure that all parties are heard and that their perspectives and choices are understood. Ultimately, they are intended to contribute to the student's development as an ethical, effective social worker who can work within policies and toward change of policies.

The process for formally pursuing an exception involves the student writing a letter detailing the following: the formal request, the rationale, and the implications for his/her completion of the Program to the appropriate coordinator (Undergraduate Program Coordinator or Field Education Coordinator). This written request must be received at least **six weeks prior to registration** for enrollment in the semester for which the request would go into effect, with exceptions for rare emergency situations. The advisor helps the student determine which coordinator should receive the request. Upon receipt of the written copy of the request, a copy is filed in the student's advisement folder.

The coordinator weighs the individual needs and preferences of the student with curricular coherence and the integrity of the Program. The coordinator may choose to consult further with the student, the

advisor, and the student's classroom instructors or other faculty members with information specific to the request. The coordinator may make a decision independently or in consultation with the B.S.W. Program Committee. Requests for which no precedence has been agreed by the Undergraduate Program Committee, including requests for waivers of pre-requisite courses, to take courses out of sequence, or other changes in policy, need to be presented to the Committee for discussion and decision. Decisions are communicated to the student in writing within four weeks of the coordinator receiving the written request. Students who propose to complete pre-requisites for senior year in between completing the field readiness review process and the start of fall term must show proof of having met the requirements before they can begin their field assignments in the fall.

### **Request for Change in Academic Advisor**

If a student would like to request a change in advisor assignments, the student should speak to their current advisor first. Once this discussion occurs, the student submits a letter to the Undergraduate Program Coordinator formalizing the request. The Coordinator considers the rationale for the request, making a decision on a case-by-case basis, according to the policies of UVM, the Department, and the profession. The Coordinator may consult the advisor, advisee, or other faculty members for additional information. If a preference exists regarding the assignment of a particular faculty member, it should be indicated in the letter of request. The Undergraduate Program Coordinator takes this preference into account, but is not obligated to grant it due to the multiple considerations involved in advising assignments (i.e., workload distribution across the faculty, the University's mutual agreement process, and the circumstances surrounding the request).

### **Appeals and Grievances**

The students and faculty within the Department of Social Work are encouraged to settle differences they may have with the person(s) directly before engaging in formal approaches to resolving these differences. Care is taken to ensure that this effort is not used as a way to stall or undermine the student's right to appeal. Additionally, if the student feels or believes that it would be inadvisable to attempt resolution on their own without a formal process, they can begin the formal process immediately.

#### ***Appeals***

Appeals at the Department level must have merit relating to the application of a policy and/or must seek to introduce new and relevant information into the decision process that was not considered previously. Typically, appeals pertain to the following matters: (a) admission decisions (i.e., the decision not to admit an applicant), (b) decisions resulting from application of University, College, or Department policies (i.e., a professor's failure to use the grading criteria that were specified in a course syllabus at the beginning of a semester, or a decision that conflicts with written policy), and (c) denial of requests for a waiver of policies or practices. Please keep in mind that grades are not subject to appeal unless the application of the evaluation procedure or process is deemed to be prejudicial, capricious, or erroneous. The grade appeal process is university wide and can be found here: <http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/gradeappeals.pdf>

When a student decides to initiate an appeal, it must be received from the student *in writing* within five business days of the decision that is being appealed. If the nature of the decision requires that it be appealed sooner than this, the student puts the appeal in writing via electronic mail and adds a phone call to the appropriate faculty member to notify him/her of the decision to appeal. The written appeal is to clearly indicate: (a) the decision(s) being appealed, (b) the grounds on which the appeal is being made, and (c) the specific outcome being sought. Along with this, the student is asked to include any new information that, in his/her judgment, was not considered at the time the decision, or last denial,

was made.

Unless compelling reasons prevent this, the appeal is directed first to the individual or committee whose decision is being appealed (i.e., a classroom instructor, a field instructor, a faculty field liaison, a coordinator, or the B.S.W. Program Committee). The individual who receives the appeal must respond to it in a timely manner, adequate to considering relevant information and to implementing any actions that are decided upon. During an academic year, appeals are considered within fourteen days of their receipt. Occasionally, a longer period may be taken due to circumstances (i.e., institutional recesses or key decision makers' prior scheduling commitments, such as traveling out of state).

If the appeal involves a faculty member on the B.S.W. Program Committee, that person shall recuse him/herself from the decision-making process.

The merit of the appeal is considered using the criteria outlined above. Once an appeal is reviewed and a judgement rendered, the resulting decision is conveyed in writing to the student and copied to the academic advisor as well as the individual or committee named in the appeal.

In letters of acceptance, students are informed of the actions which will be taken, by whom, within what time-frame, and any other pertinent information. In letters of denial, students are advised of the next avenue of appeal that may be taken.

Appeals denied by a classroom instructor or faculty advisor are taken to the B.S.W. Program Coordinator and then to the B.S.W. Program Committee. Those denied by the Field Education Coordinator are taken to the Field Education Committee. Students may appeal a coordinator's decision to the Chair/Director of the Department. If the Chair/Director denies the appeal, the student may opt to direct it to the Student Affairs Committee working on behalf of the Dean of the College of Education and Social Services. University and Program policies hold sway in decisions regarding a student's appeal. Hearings of appeals by institutional members outside the Department (i.e., the Student Affairs Committee) are typically restricted to a review of whether the Department or Program followed its own established practices.

### ***Grievances***

Grievances involve taking issue with the substance of a policy or a practice. They fall into three categories: 1) violations of due process, 2) decisions that have no rational basis or that represent an abuse of authority or discretion, and 3) violations of fundamental rights. In accordance with University policy, students have formal procedures for the appeal and resolution of grievances, beginning with their own department.

The procedure for filing a grievance is the same as that outlined for filing an appeal (see above). A student may appeal the B.S.W. Program Coordinator's decision by petitioning the Chair/Director in writing. If the issue still cannot be resolved, the student can present the grievance in writing to the CESS Student Affairs Committee who will act on behalf of the Dean of the College of Education and Social Services.