

PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work

Student Handbook

Master's Program in Social Work

2026–2027

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction.....	3
A Welcome from the Department of Social Work.....	3
Introduction to the Student Handbook	3
About the Department of Social Work	3
The MSW Program at PLU	5
MSW Program Overview	5
MSW Program Mission	5
MSW Program Objectives and Competencies.....	5
Generalist Competencies — First Year	6
Specialized Competencies — Second Year	7
The MSW Curriculum	11
Curriculum Overview	11
Course Descriptions.....	12
Course Sequencing	15
Program Policies	16
Admissions Procedures.....	16
Transfer Credits.....	16
Advising	17
Student Organizations	17
Accommodations.....	17
Academic Performance.....	17
Academic Integrity	18
Late Assignment Policy	18
Criminal Background Checks and Arrests	19
Grading Policy.....	20
Standards for Social Work Practice.....	21
University Grade Dispute Policy and Procedures	25
Program Academic and Professional Performance Review.....	27
Continuation Policy.....	28
Dismissal from the MSW Program.....	28
Appendix A: NASW Code of Ethics.....	30
Summary of Major Principles	30
Appendix B: MSW Program Assessment Plan	31
Appendix C: Non-Academic Dismissal Behaviors.....	32
Appendix D: University Policies, Procedures, and Resources.....	34
Equal Opportunity Policy	34
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).....	34
Accommodation of Persons with Disabilities	34
Resources and Services	34
Appendix E: Curiosity Mindset and Offering Feedback	35
What Is Curiosity in Social Work?	35
Curiosity as a Mindset	35
Curiosity as a Communication Tool	36
Complaining vs. Offering Feedback	36
Appendix F: Handbook Review Documentation.....	37

Introduction

A Welcome from the Department of Social Work

We are pleased that you are interested in pursuing a career in Social Work and that you have chosen to study at Pacific Lutheran University. Welcome! Our undergraduate and graduate programs in social work are dedicated to the principle that, as professionals, we should strive to improve the quality of individual and community life through the enhancement of social justice and opportunity.

Graduates of the Master’s Program in Social Work are prepared for advanced clinical practice with individuals, families, and groups, with a focus on health and behavioral health. Our graduates are employed in social service agencies throughout the region. They are also employed and provide leadership throughout the state, as well as in other parts of the country and in international positions.

Our faculty bring years of experience as social workers, educators, consultants, and agency administrators. The faculty and staff are committed to maintaining a quality educational program, to meeting the needs of our students, and to providing leadership and service to the profession and community.

Accreditation Status

Pacific Lutheran University’s MSW is pursuing accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education and has entered into candidacy. All students who begin the program as of fall 2024 will graduate from a fully accredited program. We look forward to having you as a student in our program and hope you will find it a challenging and rewarding experience.

Introduction to the Student Handbook

This handbook provides a concise summary of the MSW program for students admitted into the regular standing (24 months) and advanced standing (14 months) programs. It provides information about the program’s curriculum, the Council on Social Work Education’s standards for social work education, degree requirements, policies, and procedures. It is intended to supplement, not replace, regular meetings with your academic advisor.

Important Action Required

After you’ve read the handbook, please fill out the handbook review document in the appendices and return it via the QR code by the date indicated by the Program Director.

About the Department of Social Work

REPUTATION

The BSW program has existed at PLU since 1974. Social workers in the community respect and support PLU’s program. A Program Advisory Council, made up of local service providers and student representatives, helps to strengthen this relationship between the community and the social work program. The MSW program admitted its first cohort of regular and advanced standing students in fall of 2024. The MSW program is a clinical program, with a focus on health and behavioral health.

INTERACTION WITH FACULTY

Because both the BSW and MSW are small programs, students get to know the faculty well and often have the opportunity to work closely with faculty on special projects, research, conference presentations, and

community and campus activities. The relatively small class sizes allow for increased interaction with other students as well as faculty.

ACCREDITATION

The baccalaureate social work program at PLU has been continuously accredited by the Council on Social Work Education since 1975. The MSW program entered candidacy for accreditation in 2024. Graduating from an accredited program offers several advantages to students, including:

- A curriculum that is competency-based and consistently updated
- For BSW programs: allows for advanced standing at many graduate schools of social work, enabling completion of the MSW in less time. For MSW programs: allows for state licensure.

GLOBAL EMPHASIS

Recognizing that human needs and the applicability of the skills of social workers extend beyond the boundaries of this country, the curriculum incorporates a broad understanding of social policy, human behavior, and social work practice theories and skills. Students are encouraged to take a global perspective in framing individual, family, and community issues and solutions.

The Tacoma/Pierce County area provides a rich, culturally diverse environment for study and practice. The social work program seeks to provide content and experiences that enhance students' ability to practice in the 21st century, including activities in the classroom, in the community, and across the globe.

The MSW Program at PLU

MSW Program Overview

Both the BSW and MSW programs are housed in the Department of Social Work in the College of Health Professions. The mission of the MSW program aligns with PLU's and the Department of Social Work's missions as well as the value base and purpose of the profession as stated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

CSWE on the Purpose of Social Work

"...promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally."

— CSWE EPAS, 2022

MSW Program Mission

The mission of the Master's in Social Work Program at Pacific Lutheran University is to prepare skilled, ethical, professional service-oriented leaders and change agents who work toward just, equitable, and empowerment-based service provision, policies, and systems on local and global levels. The program emphasizes critical consciousness, critical thinking, scientific inquiry, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive theories and methods to promote social, economic, and environmental justice and advance human rights and well-being, particularly in underserved and marginalized communities.

The mission and objectives of the MSW program are based on the purpose and values of the social work profession, such as integrity, dignity and worth of humankind, respect for human diversity, the significance of human relationships, and the importance of viewing problems and solutions through a person-in-environment lens. The mission and objectives of the MSW program articulate how students will be prepared to competently and effectively engage in change work in various political, geographical, socioeconomic, and other settings.

MSW Program Objectives and Competencies

Graduates of the MSW Program:

- Will demonstrate advanced professional and ethical behavior, including ethical decision-making, using reflection & self-regulation, demonstrating professional demeanor, and applying interventions from anti-racist and anti-oppressive lenses.
- Will be able to identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to services; assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to health services; and apply advanced critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.
- Will be able to provide effective advanced clinical practice with individuals, families, and groups; evaluate their practice by collecting and organizing data and applying critical thinking to interpret data; applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment and other theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data and implementation of evidenced-based practices in health settings; and will be able to engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice.

Program Structure

To achieve the mission and objectives of the program, students of the regular standing program complete 60 credit hours of courses that focus on foundational and advanced clinical social work, along with 960 hours in a practicum placement over three semesters. Students in the advanced standing program (who hold a BSW degree) complete 36–40 credit hours of advanced specialized courses along with 640 hours in a practicum placement. The curriculum is organized into generalist foundation courses and advanced specialized courses. An emphasis on ethics, values, professionalism in practice, a person-in-environment foundation for practice, and the importance of research-informed practice and practice-informed research can be found throughout the curriculum.

Generalist Courses	Specialized Clinical Courses
<p>First foundation year for the regular standing program. Courses offer foundational social work theory and skills, research methods, and the foundational practicum placement, where students begin to integrate knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes into practice.</p>	<p>Second year for regular standing; entire curriculum for advanced standing students. Focus on anti-racism and anti-oppressive practices, assessment and intervention in mental health and substance use disorders, and advanced practice and policy work in health and behavioral health settings. Students engage in advanced clinical practicum placements over two semesters.</p>

Practicum Experience

The practicum is considered the “signature pedagogy” in social work education. The hours spent in the practicum placement offer students opportunities to integrate coursework with hands-on experience and learn from MSW-level practitioners. Students have many options to choose from for their placements, including health and behavioral health agencies in Tacoma and Pierce County.

Program Competencies

CSWE sets competencies in its [Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards](#) document that accredited programs follow to ensure that graduates are prepared for generalist and specialized practice. The MSW program at PLU has a set of generalist competencies for the first year and specialized competencies in the second year that build and expand on the generalist competencies. Each course in the program incorporates these competencies so that by the end of the program, students have met all competencies and are prepared for advanced clinical practice.

Generalist Competencies — First Year

CSWE sets the competencies that accredited BSW and MSW programs follow to ensure graduates are prepared for generalist and specialized practice.

- 1 Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
- 2 Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice
- 3 Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice
- 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 Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Specialized Competencies — Second Year

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers in clinical practice identify as professional social workers and actively represent and model the values and perspectives of the profession. Clinical social workers utilize the values and ethics of the profession as a foundation for their work to ensure that the systems in which they practice and the colleagues with whom they work are serving people in the most effective ways possible. When faced with an ethical dilemma, they know how to approach ethical decision-making with the goal to resolve the dilemma in a way that serves clients and changes systems to better serve them. Clinical social workers demonstrate the effective use of self in therapeutic and professional relationships and consistently engage in self-reflection regarding their knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to ensure they practice ethically and competently and continue to learn and improve their skills as a practitioner.

Clinical social workers:

- Understand the ethics of rapidly changing technology, particularly in health and behavioral health settings, and how it can harm or help different populations disproportionately.
- Are able to effectively function on interdisciplinary teams to articulate and represent the views of the social work profession.
- Understand the use of self and how to utilize it in therapeutic and professional situations.
- Advocate for ethical, evidence-based interventions, policies, and systems that increase equity and accessibility to services for all people, particularly disenfranchised consumers.
- Identify one's strengths and limitations as a professional social worker and utilize supervision and other support to address limitations or issues that may affect the quality or effectiveness of one's professional practice.

Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Clinical social workers understand that safety, empowerment, self-determination, and equitable access to services and various systems are fundamental values of the profession. They actively work toward ensuring that the environments and systems with which people interact promote positive health, mental health, and overall well-being and eradicate racism, sexism, and other discriminatory practices that erode that well-being. Clinical social workers actively engage in activities such as education, advocacy, and effective clinical practice at various levels to ensure human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice is supported.

Clinical social workers:

- Advocate for human rights in clinical settings as well as in other settings where policy, laws, and systems may impinge on the rights of others and the services they have access to.

- Employ effective methods to address individual and systemic social, racial, economic, and environmental injustice.
- Educate service consumers, lay people, and other professionals about the deleterious effects of individual and systemic social, racial, economic, and environmental injustice.
- Utilize evidence-based interventions and models such as trauma-informed approaches, empowerment and strength models, and ecosystems theory to conceptualize and intervene with problems that impede human rights and different facets of justice.

Competency 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice

Clinical social workers serve as models for how to employ anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices and perspectives to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are promoted. Clinical social workers employ these practices and perspectives in their therapeutic relationships, but also in ways that support positive change in systems and policies that affect people at an individual level. Clinical social workers know how to effectively engage colleagues and systems, particularly those that are large and bureaucratic, to promote ADEI efforts that benefit consumers of services.

Clinical social workers:

- Articulate and employ anti-racist and anti-oppressive models and interventions in practice.
- Actively educate others (clients, colleagues, lay persons) on the importance of promoting anti-racist, diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices, policies, and systems.
- Serve as role models for anti-racist and anti-oppressive change agents.
- Advocate for anti-racist, diverse, equitable, and inclusive services, policies, programs, and systems.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Clinical social workers are adept consumers and generators of research. They understand and value the important role that research plays in their professional practice. Clinical social workers know how to critique the quality of research, understand the ethical implications of research, can apply research to their own practice, and stay abreast of new developments in practice. Clinical social workers also are able to use research methods to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and adapt their practices based on the outcome of their research.

Clinical social workers:

- Are active consumers of research on health, behavioral health, and other areas of practice to develop clinical skills and interventions.
- Understand research methods to critically think about how studies are designed and carried out and how results are applied.
- Can design and undertake research to evaluate and improve interventions, services, policies, and systems that better and more effectively serve consumers of services.
- Use their research skills to educate others about and advocate for improved interventions, services, policies, and systems.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Clinical social workers understand the importance of policy in their practice. They can articulate the effect that policy has on those they serve, the systems in which they and their client's interface, and the ways in which policy can perpetuate disparities, discrimination, oppression, and inequities in access to and the quality of services. Clinical social workers can conduct policy analysis, apply analysis to their practice, and utilize analysis to advocate for policy change that promotes the well-being of clients and systems.

Clinical social workers:

- Understand the important role that policy practice plays in clinical social work.

- Can conduct policy analysis to inform practice and system change.
- Advocate for policy change to make services more accessible, equitable, and inclusive.
- Educate colleagues, lawmakers, administrators, and the public on the effect that policy can have on the health and well-being of people.
- Know how to critically analyze policy for ethical dilemmas it may pose and disparities in how it's applied, which can affect populations differently.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, and Groups

Clinical social workers have a deep understanding of the engagement process with clients and why the engagement process is important in therapeutic relationships. Clinical social workers possess the skills to effectively engage with individual clients as well as with families and groups. Clinical social workers reflect on their skills to continually learn and improve and seek feedback and continued learning on their engagement skills.

Clinical social workers:

- Can skillfully and authentically convey warmth, empathy, and positive regard for their clients and utilize other interpersonal skills to build trust and relationship with clients.
- Understand how to employ the use of self to connect with clients therapeutically.
- Can conceptualize client issues from a person-in-environment, ecosystems, and strengths lens to engage with clients.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, and Groups

Clinical social workers understand the importance of the assessment process in effective therapeutic work with individuals, families, and groups. They know how to access, apply, and evaluate various assessment models and tools and how to evaluate the effectiveness of their own assessment methods. Clinical social workers understand how bias and other oppressive factors can infiltrate and affect assessment; thus, they are self-reflective of their work and are able to critically evaluate assessment methods for bias and other oppressive factors that may hinder assessment and harm clients.

Clinical social workers:

- Understand the importance of assessment in the therapeutic process.
- Know how to access and employ a variety of assessment methods and choose appropriate methods based on the client situation.
- Understand how to consistently evaluate the assessment process to revise the process for the best therapeutic outcomes.
- Are aware of how bias can affect the assessment process and effectively use self-reflection to evaluate how their own biases may impact their work.
- Utilize anti-racist, anti-oppressive lenses and tools in the assessment process.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, and Groups

Clinical social workers are skilled at choosing and using a variety of interventions in their work with individuals, families, and groups. Clinical social workers stay abreast of research and innovation in interventions and engage in ongoing education on new modalities. Clinical social workers know how to critically think about interventions in terms of their effectiveness, but also any ethical or other concerns interventions might bring in their applications with various populations and problems. Clinical social workers know how to utilize self-reflection and supervision to assess their own competency in utilizing various interventions.

Clinical social workers:

- Know how to effectively intervene with individuals, families, and groups using a wide variety of evidence-based interventions.
- Utilize various resources such as research, trainings, colleagues, and supervision to stay abreast of new interventions and applications.
- Critically evaluate interventions for effectiveness, ethical applications, and appropriateness for different populations and problems.
- Utilize self-reflection and supervision to continually evaluate their practice and engage in ongoing education to ensure competency in intervention work.
- Know their strengths and limitations with regard to interventions and when to refer clients.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, and Groups

Clinical social workers understand the value of evaluating their practice with individuals, families, and groups. They know how to approach and carry out evaluation and how to use results to improve their practice and the profession. Clinical social workers utilize resources such as research, supervision, consultation, and training to improve evaluation skills. They engage in regular evaluation to continually improve their practice.

Clinical social workers:

- Are able to evaluate their own practice with individuals, families, and groups.
- Know how to evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions and approaches to therapeutic work.
- Are able to use a range of resources (e.g., self-reflection, supervision, research, consultation) to evaluate practice.
- Are advocates for evaluation of practice and ensuring that the profession engages in consistent evaluation to improve the effectiveness of and access to services.

Each competency is demonstrated through performance of practice behaviors. Practice behaviors are each measured or “benchmarked” through formative and summative assessments at least twice during the student’s program of study. Each course syllabus identifies the competencies and practice behaviors students will study and specifies which will be recorded as benchmarks. A chart showing each competency and the course(s) in which students become aware of, apply, and/or demonstrate the practice behaviors is contained in Appendix B.

The MSW Curriculum

Curriculum Overview

The first year of the MSW curriculum provides a professional generalist social work foundation that is transferable to different settings, populations, and problem areas. The curriculum provides content in a number of areas that are essential to generalist social work practice. Students learn about:

- Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) – empirically based theories and knowledge focusing on interactions among and between individuals, groups, societies, and economic systems, locally and globally; theories and knowledge of biological, sociological, psychological, cultural and spiritual development across the lifespan; the range of social systems in which people live (individual, family, group, organization, community) and the ways such systems and their policies promote or impede health and well-being.
- Social Work Theory and Practice – the integration of theories, values, skills, knowledge to enhance the well-being of people and to help ameliorate the environmental conditions that affect people adversely; approaches to and skills for practice with clients from differing backgrounds and with systems of all sizes; focus on strengths, capacities, and resources of client systems in relation to broader environments; skills to engage clients in working relationship; identifying issues, problems, needs, resources, and assets; collecting and assessing information; use of communication skills, supervision and consultation; identifying, analyzing, and implementing empirically based interventions designed to achieve client goals; applying empirical knowledge; evaluating program outcomes and practice effectiveness; developing, analyzing advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; promoting social and economic justice.
- Research – demonstration of critical thinking as well as applying research knowledge to practice; an understanding and appreciation of a scientific, analytic and ethical approach to building knowledge for practice and to evaluating service delivery in all areas of practice; familiarity with quantitative and qualitative methodologies; ability to develop, use and communicate empirically based knowledge; use of research knowledge to provide high quality services, initiate change, improve practice, policy and service delivery.
- Practicum Education – supervised social work practicum which provides opportunities to apply classroom learning in an agency setting; reinforces identification with the purposes, values, and ethics of the profession; fosters integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge; promotes development of professional competence; systematically designed, supervised, coordinated and evaluated.

The second year of the MSW program provides students with specialized, advanced clinical courses to prepare students for practice. Students learn about:

- Advanced clinical courses: Courses in mental health assessment and intervention and substance use disorder provide students with content and practice in advanced practice in health and behavioral health.
- Advanced clinical and policy courses in health and behavioral health. Several courses focus on health and behavioral health issues, policies, and practices to prepare students for practice in these settings.
- Practicum Education – advanced supervised social work practicum which provides opportunities to apply classroom learning in an agency setting; reinforces identification with the purposes, values, and ethics of the profession; fosters integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge; promotes development of professional competence; systematically designed, supervised, coordinated and evaluated.

Content that cuts across and is an important aspect of all courses includes:

- Ethics and Values – knowledge about professional social work values and their ethical implications; principles of ethical decision making; developing awareness of one’s own personal values analyzing ethical dilemmas and the ways these affect practice, services, and clients; developing, demonstrating, and promoting the values of the profession.
- Anti-racist, anti-oppressive, diversity, equity, inclusion, human rights, and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice content – understanding, affirming, and respecting people from diverse backgrounds, including, but not being limited to race, culture, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, disability, age, religion; emphasis on interlocking and complex nature of cultural and personal identity; recognition of diversity within and between groups that influence assessment, planning, intervention, and research; learning how to define design, and implement strategies for effective, culturally relevant practice. Learning about patterns, dynamics, and consequences of discrimination, economic deprivation, and oppression; examining the factors that contribute to being at risk; identification of how group membership influences access to resources and strategies to redress risk factors; understanding of distributive justice, civil and human rights, and the global interconnections of oppression; learning strategies to combat discrimination, oppression, and economic deprivation and to promote social, racial, economic and environmental justice.

Course Descriptions

Generalist Courses (Year 1 — Regular Standing)

SOCW 505 — Human Behavior and the Social Environment

This course is designed to introduce students to human behavior in the social environment through a critical race lens as students begin to explore theory and practice with diverse clients in diverse settings. Using a lifespan development framework, students explore theories, issues, practice considerations, and policies at local, state, federal, and global levels that affect individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Concepts of power, privilege, oppression, human rights, and social justice are explored in terms of their effects on service delivery, clinical and policy practice, social change, and the well-being of clients at all levels. With a foundation in the ecological systems and person-in-environment perspectives, students will understand how to integrate clinical and policy practice to become change agents at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

SOCW 510 — Social Work Theory and Practice I

This course provides a foundation and background for social work clinical and policy practice for individuals and families. Students will be introduced to the history of social welfare and social policy as well as the development of the social work profession in the United States. Students will learn about foundational theories and processes for generalist clinical and policy practice (e.g., socio-systems, strengths perspective, problem-solving, policy advocacy) with individuals and families. Content on working with diverse populations will be integrated to assist students in developing clinical and policy practice skills using various anti-racist and anti-oppressive lenses. This course also will assist students in developing a professional self with an integration of social work values and ethics. Skill building will be practiced using role plays, videos, and written assignments in preparing students for their practicum experience in the spring semester.

SOCW 515 — Social Work Theory and Practice II

Students will build on concepts provided in Social Work Theory & Practice I to explore clinical and policy practice with groups, organizations, and communities. Students will learn about foundational theories and processes for generalist clinical and policy practice (e.g., group process, community organization,

policy formulation and analysis) with mezzo and macro groups. Content on working with diverse populations will be integrated to assist students in developing clinical and policy practice skills using various anti-racist and anti-oppressive lenses. Students will continue developing a professional self with an integration of social work values and ethics.

SOCW 532 — Social Work Research Methods

Social work relies on careful collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to critically think about and answer theoretical, empirical, applied, and policy-related research questions. This course will introduce students to methods of data collection and analysis in social work and provide students with tools to engage in this central component of scientific inquiry. This course lays the foundation for social research, including an introduction to the scientific method and ethics. Students will learn about several of the most commonly used methods of research in social work, including experiments, surveys, interviews, program evaluation, single-subject design, content analysis, and analysis of secondary data, as well as how these methods contribute to the improvement of services and policies. Research design, conceptualization, and sampling will be covered. Students will apply methods in course assignments and will demonstrate their cumulative learning through preparation of a research proposal using one of the methods.

SOCW 576 — Foundation Practicum Experience I

This generalist course offers students opportunities to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Students are assigned to a practicum setting and participate under social work (practicing MSW-degreed social worker) supervision and mentorship in the delivery of social work services. In collaboration with the practicum instructor and supervisor, students will set learning goals tied to the nine CSWE competencies, which include activities such as completing intakes; developing social histories; interviewing; developing intervention plans; and applying critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice. The experience requires a minimum of 320 clock hours. Along with practice in the community, students attend a regular classroom seminar, which provides students with the opportunity to integrate the content in their courses with their practicum experience learning activities. The seminar provides students with an opportunity to explore, question, and process their experiences in their placements.

Specialized/Advanced Courses (Year 2 — Regular Standing & Advanced Standing)

SOCW 525 — Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Equity in Social Work

In this course, human diversity is broadly explored and defined to include race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and ability. The course content looks critically at privilege and the ways in which a society's cultural practices and structure may oppress, marginalize, and alienate some while enhancing power and privilege of others. Students will explore how awareness of these factors influences delivery of social work practice in healthcare and mental healthcare settings.

SOCW 535 — Advanced Social Work Foundation*

This course is provided for incoming students into the advanced standing program. The course provides a review of the central social work theories, values, and skills that enhance the understanding of social work assessment and intervention at multiple system levels. Students will also review research methods as well as history and policy underlying the social work profession and social work practice. **For students who meet certain criteria for advanced standing.*

SOCW 555 — Social Work in Health Care

This course builds on generalist social work theory and practice with a look at advanced assessment and intervention skills in healthcare settings across micro, mezzo, and macro practice settings. Theory will guide assessment and intervention selection for social work practice in healthcare settings. Issues of diversity and equity in practice will be addressed to meet the needs of multiple constituencies.

SOCW 560 — Mental Health Assessment and Intervention

This advanced course helps students develop a multi-dimensional assessment and intervention framework for clinical social work practice. This course builds on Social Work Theory & Practice from a Racial Justice Perspective and focuses on bio, psych, social, and spiritual assessment, and intervention at the individual and family levels, and includes work with children, youth, adults, and older adults. The DSM-5-TR classification system is discussed within the context of social work values and ethics. Several empirically based assessment tools and intervention techniques that are grounded in social work practice are explored to meet the needs of clients and families from diverse backgrounds.

SOCW 565 — Substance Use Disorder Assessment and Intervention

This course provides a broad understanding of the stages, processes, and effects of substance use disorders, the social and psychological dynamics of substance use disorders, and the social worker's role in prevention, intervention, and aftercare, including recovery and relapse prevention. Students will also learn specific interventions for substance abuse treatment, such as motivational interviewing (MI) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

SOCW 570 — Comparative Health Care

Students will have the opportunity to visit and learn about health care in another cultural context (abroad or locally). They will explore different cultural meanings attached to health and well-being, see how health care policy is implemented in other contexts, and learn about access to and quality of health care in varied local and global settings.

SOCW 573 — Policy Practice and Advocacy in Health Care

The course builds on policy content offered in the foundation year and in selected specialist year courses. The course provides students with knowledge, skills, and abilities for understanding the interrelationship between developments in health policy, the health care delivery system, and social work practice. Diversity, inequality, and social and economic justice are continuing themes of study in the specialist year.

SOCW 586 — Advanced Practicum Experience II

Students are assigned to a practicum setting (e.g., healthcare, mental healthcare, or social service agency) and participate under social work (practicing MSW degreed social worker) supervision and mentoring in the delivery of social work services. Building on their foundational skills, students will begin to practice advanced social work skills of assessing, intervening with research informed practices, and assessing interventions with individuals, families, and groups. The experience is a minimum of 320 hours. Along with practice in the community, students attend a regular classroom seminar, which provides students with the opportunity to integrate the content in their courses with their practicum experience learning activities. Students develop a plan to monitor and evaluate their advanced clinical practice in their advanced practicum experience setting. The seminar provides students with an opportunity to explore, question, and process their experiences in practicum-related advanced clinical social work practices.

SOCW 596 — Advanced Practicum Experience III

Students continue their advanced clinical practicum experience under social work (practicing MSW degreed social worker) supervision and mentoring in the delivery of social work services. Building on

their advanced practice skills, students will continue to practice advanced social work skills of assessing, intervening with research informed practices, and assessing interventions with individuals, families, and groups. The experience is a minimum of 320 hours. Along with practice in the community, students attend a regular classroom seminar, which provides students with the opportunity to explore, question, and process their experiences in practicum-related advanced clinical social work practices. Students have the opportunity to prepare and present a capstone project to document their learning and skills related to the specialized competencies of the program. Students will also develop a professional resume and explore the MSW job search and licensure process.

Course Sequencing

The course sequencing for the MSW program is as follows (shaded areas denote sequencing for advanced standing and the second year of the regular standing programs):

Fall	J-Term	Spring	Summer
505 Human Behavior & the Social Environment 510 Social Work Theory & Practice I	Elective	515 Social Work Theory & Practice II 576 Foundational Practicum Experience I	532 Social Work Research Methods 525 Anti-Racism, Diversity, & Equity in Social Work Practice 535: Advanced Social Work Foundations*
Fall	J-Term	Spring	Summer
555 Social Work in Health Care 586 Advanced Practicum Experience II Elective	570 Comparative Health Care	560 Mental Health Assessment & Intervention 596 Advanced Practicum Experience III	573 Policy Practice & Advocacy in Health Care 565 SUD Assessment & Intervention

Program Policies

Admissions Procedures

Admission to the MSW program is based on a holistic review of the applicant's academic preparation, work and volunteer experiences, and potential contributions to the classroom experience, the social work profession, and social justice. Review of applications and acceptance into the MSW program is determined by faculty evaluation by the MSW Graduate Admissions Committee. Application deadlines can be found on the program's website. Review of MSW applications is based on the following requirements:

Regular Standing (2-year program)

1. An earned baccalaureate degree from a college or university accredited by a recognized regional accrediting organization;
2. Undergraduate cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher;
3. Open to all non-social work majors.

Advanced Standing (1-year program)

1. Bachelor's degree in social work from a [CSWE/CASWE/ISWDRES-evaluated accredited program](#);
2. Applicants who graduated from a CSWE-accredited BSW program within 7 years from the time of application to the MSW program may opt to waive the bridge course (SOCW 535) offered in the first summer of the program*;
3. GPA in social work courses of 3.0 or higher and cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. Applicants with a GPA below a 3.0 may also be considered. Applicants with less than a 3.0 GPA are encouraged to provide additional information related to the context of their GPA in the application.

Current PLU undergraduate social work majors with a GPA of 3.0 or higher in social work courses, an A- (90%) or higher in both practicum courses, and an 80% or better on the professional behavior assessment in the final practicum class, will have guaranteed graduate admission to the MSW program. Current PLU social work minors with a cumulative 3.0 GPA may apply to the MSW program (regular standing) by submitting a resume and personal essay.

** Those who earned their BSW degrees 8+ years upon the time of applying for the MSW degree, and who have not been working at least part-time in a social services-related field for every year since earning the BSW degree, must take the bridge course (SOC 535) the first summer term. These applicants may also be asked to schedule an interview with program faculty members. All other students (in both the regular and advanced standing programs) may access content in the bridge course upon request for review purposes.*

Transfer Credits

For the regular standing (2-year) program, up to 18 credits may be transferred into PLU's MSW program. For the advanced standing (1-year) program, up to 12 credits may be transferred into PLU's MSW program. All transferred courses must fulfill PLU MSW course requirements and learning outcomes and must have earned a grade of B- or higher. Transfer credits for social work courses must be from another CSWE-accredited MSW program. Transfer credits for elective courses are permissible if they were taken for graduate credit and can be shown to meet PLU's MSW program's learning outcomes. Students may not receive credit for life experience or previous work experience, nor have any practicum experience or courses waived on this basis.

Transferring credits is not automatic nor guaranteed. To request consideration of transfer credits, please submit a statement to the MSW Director that includes the course(s) you are requesting to transfer, including grades earned, which courses in the PLU curriculum you would like to replace, and how you think the courses you are transferring meet the learning outcomes of the replacement courses (or the program in the case of electives). Include the syllabi of the course(s) you are requesting to be transferred. If requesting transfer of social work courses, offer documentation (via a website reference or letter of support) that the social work courses are from a CSWE-accredited program. Requests will be reviewed after students are admitted to the PLU MSW program and are considered on a case-by-case basis by the MSW Director.

Advising

Each social work student is assigned to a faculty advisor in the MSW program. This advisor is a resource person for you and can be consulted about issues relating to your academics or your career options and goals. Your academic advisor will help you monitor your progress toward the fulfillment of graduation requirements and post-graduation preparation and plans. Advising meetings will occur at least once a semester; students may make additional advising appointments at any time by contacting their advisor directly. Advising topics such as resume preparation and state licensure processes will also be addressed in the practicum seminar.

Student Organizations

MSW students are encouraged to participate in student organizations that support professional development and community engagement.

- The PLU Social Work Student Association (SWSA) provides opportunities for networking, advocacy, and social connection.
- The Student Advisory Council (SAC) offers opportunities for students to shape the program and engage with other MSW students.
- NASW has elected state-wide positions for MSW students as well as committees that students can join. NASW also offers scholarships.
- Phi Alpha Honor Society is for students who have an overall GPA of 3.0, and a 3.25 GPA in required Social Work classes. Phi Alpha also offers scholarships for MSW students.

Accommodations

No otherwise qualified student shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the MSW program. A student with a disability may be protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and be eligible for reasonable accommodation to provide equal opportunity to meet academic criteria for professional behavior and scholastic performance.

Any otherwise qualified student with a protected disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must notify the [Office of Accessibility and Accommodation](#) and provide documentation as needed. The Office of Accessibility and Accommodation makes recommendations for accommodations. The MSW Program will review academic performance criteria in light of individual student circumstances to explore issues of appropriateness and accommodation. An initial assessment, subsequent plan, use of outside experts, and periodic checks between the MSW program and the student are appropriate courses of action in making accommodations.

Academic Performance

MSW students must maintain an overall grade point average of 3.0 (B) or better to graduate from the program. For those students whose overall GPA drops below 3.0, a level 1 or 2 review will be initiated (see Academic and Professional Performance Review section). If the student does not achieve an overall 3.0 GPA

in the subsequent semester, or as outlined by the performance plan, he/she/they face dismissal from the program.

Students must receive a C or better for the courses to be considered “passed.” Students must receive a B or better in all practicum courses. Grades lower than a B in any semester of practicum result in a referral for a level 1 or 2 review of the student’s overall program performance and may result in the student needing to repeat a semester of practicum.

A student can repeat one class (Practicum or other course) in a graduate program. Note: Students with more than one “F” on their transcripts cannot graduate from the MSW Program.

Indicators of Academic Performance

Indicators of academic performance in the MSW program may include but are not limited to the following:

- Feedback or reference letters from faculty, work supervisors, or supervisors of volunteer human service activity or other practicum experiences.
- Feedback from agency-based or faculty practicum instructors.
- Observation of classroom, volunteer, or practicum behaviors.
- Performance in oral and written assignments, examinations, social work skills labs, or other appropriate coursework.
- Student personal statements or self-assessments.
- Interviews with faculty or other professionals.
- Taped interview situations (audio or video).
- Feedback from students, staff, university, helping professionals, or community.
- Feedback from faculty in other social work programs that students may have attended.
- Signed confidentiality statements, scholastic honesty statements, contract to adhere to NASW Code of Ethics, other contracts between the program and the student.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a core value of the MSW program. Students are expected to complete all assignments honestly, give proper credit for sources used, and uphold the standards of academic honesty as defined in the PLU Student Code of Conduct. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarism – representing another’s work as one’s own
- Fabrication – falsifying data, citations, or other academic work
- Cheating – unauthorized use of materials or assistance during exams or assignments
- Facilitating academic dishonesty – helping others to engage in academic misconduct

Students found to have violated academic integrity policies will be referred for a performance review, which may result in a failing grade, suspension, or dismissal from the program.

Late Assignment Policy

The Social Work Department has adopted a policy governing late assignments. Completing work in a timely manner is an important social work value, however we recognize that students have complex demands, and that on occasion assignment extensions may be appropriate. The following policy had been adopted across all MSW courses. Students must formally request an extension on an assignment prior to the due date and time. This request must be in writing (email is fine).

Assignment extension requests must include the following details:

1. Identifying the problem that prevented you from meeting the due date, & requesting a 1:1 faculty meeting if needed.

2. A proposed new completion date and time.

It is expected that students will only occasionally need to request extensions, so a pattern of repeated requests may result in your faculty scheduling a meeting with you to discuss time management strategies.

Finally, extension requests on work due on the last day of the semester cannot be approved for an extension due to grading timelines. Students unable to complete work by the last due date can approach faculty and request an incomplete grade; however, this is not guaranteed and is awarded at the discretion of faculty.

Students who submit late work without following the process described above will be penalized at the rate of 5% of the value of the assignment for each 24 hours, up to 4 days. Thus, the maximum grade the student could earn would be 80%.

Criminal Background Checks and Arrests

Before beginning the practicum placement, students need to be cleared through the Washington State Patrol background check. Additionally, many placement settings may require additional background checks as part of the onboarding process. Any criminal record (infraction, charge, misdemeanor or felony) may make a student ineligible for placement in certain agencies. Students are advised that a lack of disclosure about a criminal background during the agency interview process may result in a denial of placement at some agencies. It is strongly recommended that students with any level of criminal background openly discuss the specific situation with their designated program Field Coordinator during their pre-placement field meeting so they can get a better understanding of the potential challenges of placement, on a case-by-case basis.

Students may be ineligible for placement, or terminated from an agency, if criminal background information comes to light without prior disclosure. The Practicum Coordinator can provide insight to students as to potential opportunities and barriers to securing a field practicum site but cannot guarantee placement or choice of placement. Information disclosed will be used only for the purpose of determining appropriate field options. Please note: If a student cannot be placed, they will not be able to continue in the MSW Program.

In the event a student is arrested or charged with a new offense or is convicted during the program, the student is required to disclose this information to the MSW Program Director and the Practicum Coordinator within 48 hours of arrest, charge, or conviction. Students may be terminated from the program if an arrest or charge comes to light without immediate disclosure.

Failure to provide the required disclosures or notices will be deemed as deception and will be handled as a form of academic dishonesty in addition to any other violations. Arrests, violations, and/or convictions that violate university and/or department policies or standards could result in sanctions. Please see the NASW Code of Ethics, “4.04 Dishonesty, Fraud and Deception.”

Students who are arrested, charged, or convicted during the program are not permitted to return to the practicum placement until further notice. The student will be referred for a level 1 or 2 review for an initial review of the situation. The student assumes the risk involved with disclosing information and thus may choose not to disclose information. However, if the student chooses not to disclose information, the Student Review Committee will not be able to determine a course of action based on the program guidelines and the NASW Code of Ethics.

If a student is charged with a new offense, the student will most likely be required to take a leave of absence until the case has been resolved and a decision has been made by a court of law. A student may be

permitted to complete classroom course work for the current semester. Once the outcome of the specific case or circumstance has been determined, it is the student's responsibility to inform the MSW Program Director and the Practicum Coordinator. At that time, the student will undergo a level 1 or 2 review again for consideration of specific factors and implications related to the social work profession and his/her ability to return to the program and practicum.

Grading Policy

Grades are assigned according to the following scale:

Grade	Points	Percentage
A	4.0	94–100%
A-	3.7	90–93%
B+	3.3	87–89%
B	3.0	83–86%
B-	2.7	80–82%
C+	2.3	77–79%
C	2.0	73–76%
F	0.0	Below 73%

Minimum GPA Requirement

Students must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 to remain in good standing. A grade below B in any required course may result in an academic review.

A	<i>Students consistently demonstrate, both in oral and written work, excellence and originality in content, arrangement, style, format and mechanics. Students are informed as they critically and appropriately seek to master the discipline of Social Work, its concepts, theories, and perspectives. Students will not only demonstrate increasing and sustained social work competence, but will also excel in the creative, critical, and argumentative aspects of speaking and writing.</i>
B	<i>Students' work demonstrates competency and mastery in all graded criteria, but lacks the originality of thought and style which characterizes an A student.</i> Students' work consistently demonstrates advanced quality and content. Students' ideas are based firmly on course material. Students demonstrate some ability for original thought and critical thinking.
C	<i>Students' work demonstrates competency of course materials. Work is acceptable in all graded criteria.</i> Students' work is of average quality and content. Students' ideas and work may exhibit problems with tangents, presentation, and organization. Students' work lacks the vigor of thought or expression that characterizes a B or A student.
D	<i>Students' work demonstrates some competency and is below average quality in most areas of grading.</i> Students' work is sloppy, needs specific attention to course content and oral/written work. Students' ideas may be expressed incorrectly and ineffectively. Students have played with the course materials, but have not tried to achieve mastery or competence.

F	<i>Students' work demonstrates no competency or mastery of course material and is consistently below acceptable quality in all areas of grading. Students show little or no learning during the course or in course related activities. Students fail to state and sustain main ideas and concepts.</i>
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Standards for Social Work Practice

Social work is a relational profession. Due to the nature of professional social work practice, the MSW Program has different expectations for students than do non-professional programs. How students conduct themselves—with peers, instructors, field supervisors, clients, and the broader learning community—is inseparable from their professional development. Professionalism at PLU is not simply a matter of following rules; it reflects the values, ethics, and relational skills that define effective social work practice. Standards are linked to students' abilities to become effective social work professionals and are provided so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address academic performance concerns. The ultimate goal of the Standards is to help students have a successful experience in the MSW program.

Since becoming a professional is a gradual process, not all criteria are expected to be met at all times. Those who teach and supervise students, along with program administrators, will assess student academic and practice performance and apply their professional judgment to determine if standards are being met during a student's educational career. Professional judgment is the capacity to assess a situation by applying the values and knowledge of the social work profession, combined with a professional's own experience and practice wisdom. It also represents the application of knowledge, values, and skills to making decisions in a helping process. These expectations include the classroom, practicum, and off-campus university-related activities.

To meet its responsibilities to provide quality professional education and to ensure that its graduates can function in a wide variety of professional situations, the MSW program evaluates the academic performance of its students in four general areas: Basic abilities to acquire professional skills; Mental and emotional abilities; Professional performance skills; and Academic performance. Meeting the criteria for academic achievement is necessary but not sufficient to ensure continued enrollment in a program. Both professional behavior and academic performance comprise academic standards. Students are expected to be cognizant of skills in these areas, to self-reflect on areas that may need attention and growth, and to incorporate feedback from others into their professional practice. Below are examples of skills in each area.

Foundational Abilities Necessary to Acquire Professional Skills

Communication Skills: Demonstrates sufficient written and oral skills to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.

Written Skills: Writes clearly, uses correct grammar and spelling, and applies appropriate writing style, including American Psychological Association (APA) referencing, appropriate source citation, and documentation. Demonstrates sufficient skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and complete all written assignments adequately as specified by faculty.

Oral Skills: Communicates effectively and sensitively with other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates sufficient skills in spoken English to understand content presented in the program, to adequately complete all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of practicum placement experiences, as specified by faculty.

Interpersonal Skills: Demonstrates the interpersonal skills needed to relate effectively to other students, faculty, staff, clients, and professionals and to fulfill the ethical obligations of the profession. These include

compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, and demonstration of respect for and consideration of others. Takes appropriate responsibility for own actions and considers the impact of these actions on others.

Cognitive Skills: Exhibits sufficient knowledge of social work and clarity of thinking to process information and apply it to appropriate situations in classroom and practicum. Demonstrates grounding in relevant social, behavioral and biological science knowledge and research - including knowledge and skills in relationship building, data gathering, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of practice. Exhibits ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge and apply that knowledge to professional practice.

Physical Skills: Exhibits sufficient motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placement with or without accommodations. (See section on Accommodations for Disabilities for clarification.)

Stress Management: Demonstrates ability to recognize and deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. Handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

Emotional and Mental Capacities: Uses sound judgment. Seeks and effectively uses help for medical or emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and professional performance. Engages in counseling or seeks out support and help if personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties do any of the following:

-
- Compromise scholastic and other performance;
 - Interfere with professional judgment and behavior; or
 - Jeopardize the best interests of those to whom the social work student has a professional responsibility (as outlined in the current Code of Ethics by the National Association of Social Workers).
-

Professional Commitment: Exhibits a strong commitment to the goals of social work and to the ethical standards of the profession as specified in the NASW Code of Ethics. Demonstrates commitment to the essential values of social work that include the respect for the dignity and worth of every individual and his/her rights to a just share of society's resources (social justice).

Professional Behavior: Exhibits behaviors that are in compliance with program policies, institutional policies, professional ethical standards, and societal laws in the classroom, university community, field and community. Appearance, dress, and general demeanor reflect a professional manner. Shows potential for responsible and accountable behavior by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work, respecting others, being prepared, punctual, and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements, and positively accepting supervision and criticism.

Works effectively with others, regardless of level of authority. Advocates for himself/herself appropriately and responsibly and uses proper channels for conflict resolution. Shows a willingness to receive and accept feedback and supervision positively, as well as use such feedback to enhance professional development. Communicates proactively when challenges arrive, engages with faculty, supervisors, peers, and clients with honesty, care, and mutual regard, and maintains appropriate relational, physical, and digital boundaries in all settings.

Self-Awareness: Exhibits knowledge of how one's values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, assumptions, reactions, and past experiences affect thinking, behavior, and relationships. Accurately assesses one's own

strengths, limitations, and suitability for professional practice. Shows awareness of self and how one is perceived by others. Reflects on one's own limitations as they relate to professional capacities. Is willing to examine and change behavior when it interferes with working with clients and other professionals. Approaches uncertainty and discomfort with curiosity rather than avoidance and uses strong reactions such as frustration, over-identification, and discomfort as data for growth.

Ethical Obligations: Current behavior and classroom performance demonstrate adherence to the ethical expectations and obligations of professional practice, noted in the NASW Code of Ethics.

Ethical behaviors include:

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- Comprehension of another individual's way of life and values. Empathic communication and support of the client as a basis for a productive professional relationship.
 - Appreciation of the value of diversity. Effective and nonjudgmental relation to and work with others who are different from oneself. Appropriate service to all persons in need of assistance, regardless of the person's age, class, race, religious beliefs, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and/or value system. No imposition of personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on clients.
 - Demonstration of respect for the rights of others. Commitment to clients' rights to freedom of choice and self-determination.
 - Maintenance of confidentiality as it relates to human service, classroom activities, and field placement.
 - Demonstration of honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials.
 - Demonstration of clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with clients, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways; or participate in dual relationships where conflicts of interest may exist.
-

Expectations for Professional Communication: Students are expected to communicate in ways that are specific, constructive, and oriented toward resolution. This means moving from complaint—vague expression of dissatisfaction—to feedback, which names a specific event, describes its impact, and proposes or invites a path forward.

Before raising a concern, students are encouraged to pause and reflect through a lens of curiosity. This means holding initial interpretations lightly, considering the context, which may not be fully visible, and approaching the other person as a collaborator rather than an adversary. Self-reflection questions before initiating a conversation can be useful and include:

-
- What specific event am I responding to—and what am I feeling about it?
 - What assumptions am I bringing to this situation? What might I be missing?
 - What outcome am I hoping for, and what would a resolution look like?
 - Is this the right moment—am I calm enough to be heard, and is this the right setting?
-

A curiosity mindset does not mean suppressing legitimate concerns. It means entering difficult conversations with openness and a genuine interest in understanding—not just being understood. This orientation tends to produce better outcomes for everyone involved.

Concern Resolution Process: The following process applies to concerns involving instructors, field supervisors, peers, agency staff, or other members of the PLU Social Work learning community. Students are expected to follow these steps in order, beginning with the person most directly involved.

Step 1 — Direct Conversation

Whenever possible and safe to do so, raise the concern directly with the person involved. This is the most respectful and effective first step, and it is the professional standard expected in social work settings.

Before initiating the conversation:

-
- Name a specific event: Identify a concrete, observable situation rather than a general pattern.
 - Describe the impact: Use “I” statements to explain how the situation affected you, your work, or the learning relationship.
 - Make a request: Ask for something specific, or invite a conversation about what might change.
 - Avoid blame language: Steer clear of “you always” or “you never” framing.
 - Choose the right moment: Select a time and place that allows for a calm, private conversation.
-

This step applies to concerns involving a field practicum supervisor, a peer, a course instructor, or a co-worker in a practicum setting.

Step 2 — Faculty Advisor

If a direct conversation does not resolve the concern, or if the nature of the concern makes a direct conversation inadvisable (for example, due to a significant power imbalance or a concern about safety), bring the matter to your faculty advisor.

Your advisor can help you:

-
- Think through the situation and your options
 - Prepare for or facilitate a follow-up conversation
 - Determine whether the concern requires further escalation
 - Connect you with appropriate support resources
-

Come prepared to describe the specific situation, what steps you have already taken, and what outcome you are seeking.

Step 3 — Department Chair

If the concern remains unresolved after consultation with your advisor—or if the concern is sufficiently serious that it warrants program-level attention—it should be brought to the Social Work Department Chair. At this level, please observe the following guidelines: Put the concern in writing. A written account helps ensure clarity, accuracy, and a fair review process.

Your written statement should include:

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- A description of the specific event(s), including dates and context
 - A clear statement of how the situation affected you or your learning
 - A summary of prior steps taken to resolve the concern
 - What resolution or outcome you are requesting
-

Speak only for yourself. Use first-person language throughout. Describe your own experience, observations, and perspective. Do not speak on behalf of other students, make claims about others’ motivations, or include second-hand information unless it is directly relevant and clearly identified as such. The chair will

review the written concern, meet with relevant parties as appropriate, and communicate next steps promptly.

Important Considerations:

Safety exceptions: If a concern involves a threat to safety, harassment, discrimination, or other serious misconduct, students may contact their advisor or the department chair directly, without first attempting a direct conversation.

Retaliation is prohibited: Students who raise concerns in good faith will not be penalized. Any form of retaliation should be reported immediately to the department chair or PLU’s Office of Student Life. This process is collaborative, not adversarial. The goal at every step is understanding and resolution—not blame or punishment. Students are encouraged to approach each step with the same curiosity and care they would bring to any professional relationship.

University processes: This policy operates alongside, and does not replace, formal PLU academic or conduct processes where applicable.

Please see Appendix F for information on building a curiosity mindset and offering feedback.

University Grade Dispute Policy and Procedures

PLU is dedicated to fair and accurate appraisal of student coursework. When a disagreement over a final grade in a course occurs, the student should first pursue informal grade dispute resolution with the course instructor. If the informal procedure is unsuccessful, students may undertake the university’s formal grade dispute resolution procedure. However, no formal grade dispute procedure may be pursued when the course grade in question is less than one full letter grade (i.e., disagreements over A- versus B+). Additionally, this procedure allows for the review of student work to ensure that it is consistent with the course syllabus and/or assignment or exam grading rubric, but does not allow for disputing the content of a syllabus.

Informal Grade Dispute Procedure

Process: A student who disputes a grade must first attempt to do so through an informal grade dispute procedure. This procedure involves discussing the reason for the grade with the instructor who assigned the grade. The student must request an opportunity to discuss the grade via PLU email.

If no resolution is forthcoming after discussions with the course instructor, or if the instructor is away from campus or no longer employed at the university, the student may take the dispute to the instructor’s supervisor (chair, associate dean, or dean) who will attempt to resolve the matter informally. To find the supervisor, look for the list of “Academic Unit Heads” on the Office of the Provost website.

Timeline: Students who wish to dispute a grade may start the informal process as soon as the grade in question is posted on Banner, and must do so no later than 20 business days (days during which the university is open for business) after the final grade is posted there. This timeline ensures availability of instructor records for review if needed.

While students may take up to 20 business days to initiate the informal process, they should be mindful of how the grade in question might affect their continued progress in their academic program when determining their own timeline for starting the process (for example, if the course is a prerequisite for a class they are registered to take the following term, they should launch the process as soon as possible).

If the dispute is not resolved through the informal process within 10 business days from the date the student-initiated contact with the course instructor, students can initiate a formal grade dispute procedure. See process description and timelines below. Please be advised that instructors may not be available for immediate response for a host of reasons (especially during breaks between terms or while leading study-away courses).

Formal Grade Dispute Procedure

Timeline: If a grade dispute is not resolved through the informal process within 10 business days from the date the student initiated contact with the faculty member requesting a discussion about the disputed grade, students can initiate a formal grade dispute procedure. The formal procedure must be initiated within 5 business days after the conclusion of the informal process. It is the student's responsibility to contact the faculty member's college dean via PLU email to begin the process within this time frame. The college dean may dismiss a grade dispute if the stated timelines in this procedure are not followed. To find the college dean, look for the list of "[Academic Unit Heads](#)" on the Office of the Provost website.

Student Support: Throughout the formal grade dispute process, the student may rely on a support person from the current PLU community to help them submit paperwork and/or join them in attending any meetings that should arise. While the support person may attend meetings as an observer, they may not participate in the proceedings or argue on the student's behalf.

Submitting Materials for Reviewing Dispute: The student's dispute must be submitted in writing via PLU email, with full explanation and supporting materials, to the instructor's college dean.

Within 3 business days of receiving these materials, the college dean shall request the materials described above from the faculty member assigning the grade. The instructor who assigned the grade will be asked by the college dean to provide a copy of the course syllabus. If the disputed course grade results from a disputed grade on a specific assignment/exam in the course, the instructor will also be asked to provide to the college dean a grading rubric and/or an explanation for why they assigned the grade in question for that assignment. The college dean will provide copies of these materials to the student.

Initial Review by College Dean: After relevant materials have been provided by the student and instructor, the college dean will conduct an initial review of the case to determine whether the complaint involves an alleged violation of the Academic Integrity Policy or other university policies, such as those related to discrimination. Grade disputes arising over alleged violations of the university's Academic Integrity Policy are considered by an Academic Dishonesty Hearing Panel (ADHP). Issues involving discrimination are considered by the University Dispute Resolution Committee. Previous decisions, including those from ADHP or UDRC processes, will not be reconsidered through the grade dispute process.

If the college dean determines that the dispute is appropriate for the formal grade dispute procedure, they will convene a review panel.

Convening of Review Panel: After determining that the dispute is appropriate for a formal grade dispute procedure, the college dean will convene a review panel composed of three faculty: two faculty members from the same or closely related discipline as the course instructor (from the same department/unit, when possible), and a faculty member from the same college but from outside of the department/unit. The panel will receive the materials collected by the college dean as described above.

The panel may consult with subject matter experts, the instructor who assigned the final grade, and/or the student as needed.

This panel will review the case and resolve the dispute by arriving at a decision about the student's final course grade.

Communication of Decision: Following its convening, the review panel should make every effort to come to a decision regarding the student's dispute within 10 business days. The review panel will communicate their decision to the college dean, who will communicate the decision to the student and course instructor. If a change of grade is required, the college dean will facilitate that process.

Appeal to the Dean: If either the student or course instructor believes that the grade dispute process failed to follow the appropriate procedure or neglected to include relevant details, and if they believe that these procedural violations materially affected the decision of the review panel, they may file a limited written appeal with the college dean within 5 business days of the notification of the outcome of the review panel. In this limited appeal, the student or faculty member should describe the procedure that they believe was not followed and/or the relevant details not considered, as well as information they have that supports these claims.

The dean will review the written material, conduct any investigation that they believe is necessary, and, in consultation with the provost, make a decision within 5 business days as to whether material procedural error occurred. This decision of the college dean is final and not subject to further appeal.

ACTIVITY	TIMELINE
Initiate <u>informal</u> dispute with faculty member.	After final grade is posted on Banner and up to 20 business days from the date of posting.
If no resolution to informal dispute after 10 business days, initiate a <u>formal</u> dispute with the college dean.	Initiate formal dispute within the next 5 business days after conclusion of informal process.
College dean confirms case is appropriate for formal dispute policy.	Within 3 business days of receipt of formal grade dispute materials from student and faculty member.
College dean convenes review panel.	Within 3 business days of receipt of formal grade dispute materials from student and faculty member.
College dean receives recommendation from review panel, and communicates decision to the student and faculty member.	Generally, within 10 business days of receipt of decision from review panel.
Appeal of committee's decision by student or instructor.	Within 5 business days of the notification of the outcome of the review panel.

Program Academic and Professional Performance Review

Level 1 Review

When a faculty member or practicum supervisor has concerns regarding a student's academic or professional performance, the person with the concern will meet with the student to resolve the concerns. If the issue is not resolved, the student's academic advisor will be contacted to help address the concern and collect additional information. Documentation will be kept by the advisor. If the issue is still not resolved,

the advisor will make a referral to the MSW faculty for a level 2 review. If the concern is of a very serious nature, it may be necessary to go directly to a level 2 review, as determined by the Program Director.

Level 2 Review

A level 2 review involves the faculty members of the MSW program and the student. The student will be notified via email of the review within five business days of the referral and will receive documentation about the referral. The student will be asked for their preferred day, time, and modality (in person or via videoconference). The meeting will take place between two and 10 business days after the student has been notified.

After the meeting, the faculty members will discuss the situation and make one of the following recommendations:

- Recommend that the student remain in the program with no conditions and consider the situation resolved.
- Recommend the development of a performance plan, in consultation with the student, that will help the student rectify the situation. The student will be considered to be on probation with the program. At the specified date, a review of the plan will be conducted. Depending on the outcome, the student will either be removed from probation or dismissed from the program.
- Recommend that the student be dismissed from the program.

Continuation Policy

Students are subject to the University requirements that are in effect when they enter the University, but they must follow the MSW program requirements in effect when they are admitted to the program. The following procedures and policies should guide your program planning and course sequencing:

- Students may not challenge (credit by examination) courses within the MSW program.
- Life experience may not be used for Practicum Experience. Likewise, Practicum Experience credit may not be transferred from a non-accredited institution.
- Social work courses from other accredited institutions will be reviewed and may be accepted on a course-by-course basis toward the MSW at PLU.

To remain in the program, a student must: 1) maintain an overall 3.0 grade point average and 2) demonstrate behavior that is consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics and University [Code of Conduct](#). See *Standards for Social Work Practice* section.

To be admitted to the Practicum Experience sequence, students must:

- have completed prerequisite courses;
- have demonstrated the ability to successfully meet academic requirements (based upon GPA);
- have demonstrated the capacity to deal with potential stresses in practicum situations;
- have demonstrated ethical conduct.

Dismissal from the MSW Program

Academic Dismissal

Academic performance is measured by maintaining a 3.0 GPA in the program and academic integrity. Students who fall below this grade point average and/or engage in behaviors that are considered against academic integrity policies will be referred for a level 1 or level 2 review, depending on the situation. The result of this review could be academic dismissal.

Students who wish to contest a dismissal may appeal to the Dean of the College of Health Professions and may follow the Pacific Lutheran University Grievance Policy.

Non-Academic Dismissal

Non-academic performance refers to those interpersonal behaviors, skills, and values that are the vehicle for a student's work with peers, faculty, and clients. Faculty anticipate and nurture the demonstration or development of compassion, empathy, genuineness, the purposeful use of self, warmth, creativity, initiative, leadership, active listening, flexibility, good judgment, interpersonal skill, self-awareness, and knowledge.

Non-academic behaviors, values, and conditions that impede the ability of the students to successfully practice social work include, but are not limited to, values which conflict with the NASW Code of Ethics, unresolved mental illness, behaviors that degrade or devalue others, distracting personal habits, significant difficulties in communication, and poor work habits. A list of behaviors that enhance or impede social work practice can be found in Appendix C.

Appendix A: NASW Code of Ethics

Summary of Major Principles

The following codified ethical principles should guide social workers in the various roles and relationships and at the various levels of responsibility in which they function professionally.

Core Values and Ethical Principles

Service	<i>Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.</i>
Social Justice	<i>Social workers challenge social injustice.</i>
Dignity and Worth of the Person	<i>Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.</i>
Importance of Human Relationships	<i>Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.</i>
Integrity	<i>Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.</i>
Competence	<i>Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.</i>

Ethical Standards

- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients — Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and provide service to clients only in the context of a professional relationship based on valid informed consent, privacy and confidentiality.
- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues — Social workers should treat colleagues with respect and respect confidential information shared by colleagues. Social workers should seek advice and counsel of colleagues and/or refer clients to other professionals when it is in the best interest of the client.
- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings — Social workers who provide supervision or consultation should have the necessary knowledge and skill and provide fair and considerate evaluation of others.
- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals — Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination, dishonesty, fraud, or deception.
- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession — Social workers should work toward the maintenance and promotion of high standards of practice and promote and facilitate evaluation and research.
- Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society — Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs.

Find the Code of Ethics in its entirety: [socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics](https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics)

Appendix B: MSW Program Assessment Plan

The MSW program builds upon CSWE’s 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Upon graduation, students enter the field of social work as advanced clinical practitioners.

Generalist Curriculum Assessment

Learning Outcomes C = Course Content M = Measured Benchmark	SOCW 505 Human Behv & Social Env	SOCW 510 SW Theory & Prac I	SOCW 515 SW Theory & Pract II	SOCW 532 SW Res Methods	SOCW 576 Found Practicum Exp I
C1: Ethical & Professional Behavior	C	C	C	M2	M
C2: Human Rights & Justice	C	C	C	M2	M1
C3: Engage ADEI in Practice	C	C	C	M2	M1
C4: Practice-Informed Research	C	C	C	M2	M1
C5: Policy Practice	C	C	C	M2	M1
C6: Engage Ind/Fam/Groups	C	C	C	M2	M1
C7: Assess Ind/Fam/Groups	C	C	C	M2	M1
C8: Intervene Ind/Fam/Groups	C	C	C	M2	M1
C9: Evaluate Practice	C	C	C	M2	M1

Appendix C: Non-Academic Dismissal Behaviors

The Social Work program creates a learning environment where students enhance or develop knowledge, values and skills for social work practice. The behaviors listed in the first column are examples of those behaviors supported and encouraged in students. The second column includes behaviors that faculty will bring to the attention of students when observed.

Behaviors that Enhance Social Work Practice	Behaviors that Impede Social Work Practice
Ability to identify and resolve personal or family situations that affect professional practice	Preoccupation with personal problems impairs professional practice
Ability to do individual or team problem solving in stressful situations	Inability to control reactions or exercise self-discipline when in stressful situations
Warm, genuine and compassionate manner with clients and peers	Inability to demonstrate warmth, genuineness or compassion with clients or peers
Acceptance of authority where appropriate as well as skills to resolve problems with authority figures	Inability or unwillingness to work with persons in positions of authority
Healthy detachment supports focus on the concerns and problems of the client	Inability to separate personal experiences from concerns and problems presented by clients
Reflective and self-evaluative approach to learning and practice	Extreme defensiveness prevents self-critical examination of professional performance
Ability to hear and process the critical comments of clients and colleagues non-defensively	Inability to hear and process the critical comments of clients and colleagues
Demonstrate the social work ethics that value the worth and dignity of every person and their right to self-determination	Impose personal values, political beliefs, religious preferences or lifestyle choices on clients
Use the policies and procedures of the agency in tandem with standards of ethical conduct in working with clients	Misuse or abuse authority with clients
Ability to offer one's insights and work interdependently with clients, in peer supervision, and in team decision making	Inability to offer one's insights and to work interdependently with clients, in peer supervision, and in team decision-making
Respect for boundaries of clients, colleagues, faculty, supervisors and agencies	Failure to respect the boundaries of clients, colleagues, faculty, supervisors and agencies
Respect for norms of professional practice in use of words and gestures	Use of words, phrases or gestures that are in bad taste or known to offend clients or peers, including name-calling
Value diversity in work with clients, colleagues, and the human service community	Demonstrating prejudice, bias, or discrimination against groups or individuals
Communicates and solves problems directly	Making sarcastic, insulting, or disrespectful comments about colleagues or clients
Careful, critical and balanced discussion of ideas or professional opinions	Failure to respect the ideas or professional opinions of others

Seeks and uses supervision from faculty and agency personnel appropriately	Unwillingness to seek or use supervision from faculty or agency personnel or misuse of supervision resources for personal matters
Careful compliance with the norms and practices of the agency with regard to written documentation and communication	Non-compliance with norms and practices of the agency with regard to written documentation and communication
Comes to class, practicum, and group meetings with work completed and ready for discussion	Lack of preparation for appointments with clients and agencies, meetings, class and group work
Familiar and compliant with university and agency policy and procedure	Unfamiliar and/or non-compliant with university and agency policy and procedure
Observes and respects the client's right to privacy and any other rights clients may have	Failure to observe confidentiality with clients or failure to protect client rights

Appendix D: University Policies, Procedures, and Resources

Equal Opportunity Policy

Pacific Lutheran University is committed to providing equal opportunity in education for all students without regard to a person's race, color, national origin, creed, religion, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, or any other status protected by law. The university community will not tolerate any unlawful discrimination, harassment, or abuse of or toward any member of the university community.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), PLU has adopted policies and procedures to protect the privacy of education records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their education records, and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data through informal and formal hearings.

Students who believe information in their education records is inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of privacy rights may request in writing that the office which contains those records amend them. If the records custodian refuses to amend the record, the student has the right to a hearing. Questions and concerns should be directed to the Registrar's Office.

Accommodation of Persons with Disabilities

Pacific Lutheran University will not discriminate against any student because of the presence of a mental or physical disability. The University is committed to providing access to University facilities according to the recommendations and requirements of the ADA. Where a student with a disability is able to perform essential academic/program requirements, the University may be obligated to provide reasonable accommodation.

Resources and Services

The following resources and services are available to MSW students at PLU:

- [Admission and Academic Records](#)
- [Campus Ministry](#)
- [Center for Student Success](#)
- [Counseling, Health, and Wellness Services](#)
- [Department of Campus Safety](#)
- [Department of Residential Life](#)
- [Office of Accessibility & Accommodation](#)
- [Office of Student Financial Services](#)
- [Pierce County Domestic Violence Services](#)
- [Pierce County Sexual Assault Center](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)
- [Title IX Coordinator](#)

Appendix E: Curiosity Mindset and Offering Feedback

What Is Curiosity in Social Work?

Curiosity is not just a personality trait. In social work, it is a professional practice — a deliberate way of approaching people, problems, and your own assumptions. When you bring genuine curiosity to your work, you signal to clients, colleagues, and communities that their experience matters and that you do not already have the answers.

Curiosity operates on two levels in social work practice:

- As a mindset: the internal orientation you bring to every interaction — a commitment to not-knowing, to staying open, and to resisting the pull of premature conclusions.
- As a communication tool: the observable behaviors — the questions you ask, the way you listen, the pace you keep — that make curiosity visible and felt by the people you work with.

Curiosity as a Mindset

Not-Knowing as a Starting Point

One of the most important shifts in social work training is learning to tolerate not-knowing. This does not mean being uninformed — it means holding your knowledge lightly enough to let the person in front of you teach you something you did not expect. Every client, family, or community is an expert on their own life. Your job is not to arrive with a diagnosis or a solution. Your job is to understand their experience well enough to think with them, not for them.

Approaching Each Person as Unique

Expertise can work against you. The more experience you accumulate, the easier it is to slot people into patterns you've seen before — and stop actually listening. Ask yourself before each interaction: What do I think I already know here? What might I be wrong about?

Suspending Judgment

Curiosity and judgment cannot fully coexist. When we judge — even silently — we stop being curious. Suspending judgment does not mean abandoning your values or your professional ethical obligations. It means creating enough internal space to understand before you evaluate. It means asking “What led to this?” before “What is wrong with this?”

Curiosity About Your Own Reactions

A curious mindset also turns inward. Strong reactions — discomfort, frustration, over-identification, boredom — are data, not just noise. When something in a session or a reading or a field placement pulls at you, curiosity asks: What is this about? What does my reaction tell me about my own values, history, or assumptions?

Reflective Practice Prompts

- What assumptions did I bring into this interaction?
- What surprised me — and why did it surprise me?
- Where did I feel the urge to redirect, fix, or move on quickly?
- What do my reactions tell me about my own values or experiences?
- What would I want to understand better if I had more time?

Curiosity as a Communication Tool

Asking Open Questions

Open questions invite exploration rather than confirmation. They cannot be answered with yes, no, or a single word. They signal that you are interested in the person’s perspective, not just checking a box.

Closed Question	Open Alternative
<i>Did you have a good week?</i>	How has this week been for you?
<i>Are you feeling better?</i>	What has shifted for you since we last talked?
<i>Do you want to change?</i>	What does change look like from where you’re standing?
<i>Was that hard?</i>	What was that like for you?
<i>Do you have support?</i>	Who do you turn to when things get difficult?

What Gets in the Way of Curiosity?

Curiosity does not come automatically, especially under pressure. Common barriers include:

- Anxiety to perform: When you are focused on saying the right thing, it is hard to listen for what the person actually needs.
- Premature problem-solving: Jumping to solutions before fully understanding the problem is one of the most common rookie errors — and one of the hardest to unlearn.
- Confirmation bias: We tend to notice evidence that fits what we already believe and overlook what does not. Curiosity is the antidote.
- Vicarious trauma and burnout: It is hard to be curious when you are exhausted or overwhelmed. Self-care and supervision protect your capacity for curiosity.
- Cultural assumptions: Our own cultural backgrounds shape what feels “normal” or “concerning.” Curiosity about cultural context is an ethical obligation.

Curiosity is not about having the right questions. It is about being genuinely interested in the answers — even when they complicate what you thought you knew.

Complaining vs. Offering Feedback

Both can be honest. Only one moves things forward.

COMPLAINING	FEEDBACK
<p><i>Expression without direction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focused on the problem or the feeling ● No specific change is requested ● Often vague or global (“always,” “never”) ● Listener is implicated, not invited ● Relief is the goal, not resolution 	<p><i>Expression with a direction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Names a specific behavior or event ● Describes the impact clearly ● Offers or invites a path forward ● Listener is a collaborator, not a target ● Change is the goal

Appendix F: Handbook Review Documentation

You are asked to read the handbook in its entirety and confirm that you have read and understand its contents using the form below. If there is anything you do not understand or need to discuss, please make an appointment with your academic advisor for review.

Submission Deadlines

Advanced Standing students: June 15th

Regular Standing students: September 15th

Complete the review form [here](#) or use the QR code provided to access the form.