

**\*\*\*Important Information for Prospective Applicants\*\*\***

**FAQ's for the USM MSW Program**

The following Q & A's provide information that is pertinent to USM School of Social Work (SSW) MSW applicants. Contained in these FAQ's are important facts about the program along with policies and important procedures. **Please read this material.** If you have questions that are not answered here, feel free to contact the SSW (207-780-4120).

**1. What is the focus/concentration of the MSW program at USM?**

The MSW program in School of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine prepares students for **advanced social work practice**. Grounded in a commitment to professional ethics, social and economic justice and the empowerment of client systems, advanced social work practice builds upon the generalist social work practice model and the ten core competencies, as outlined in the *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (2008) of the Council on Social Work Education. The competencies relate to: professional identity; ethical practice; critical thinking; diversity; human rights and social justice; research; human behavior and the social environment; social policy; evolving contexts of social work practice; and professional interventions at multiple levels.

**2. Do you offer Advanced Standing for MSW applicants with a bachelor's degree in social work?**

Yes. Students with a BSW degree from an accredited social work program who graduated *no more than 7 years ago* are eligible to apply for Advanced Standing. The Advanced Standing program allows individuals to complete the MSW degree in one year, if full time, and in two years, if part time. Make sure you indicate clearly on your application that you are applying for Advanced Standing (complete the MSW Program Selection Form in addition to the

regular graduate application, both found at, <http://usm.maine.edu/grad/admission.html>). To apply for Advanced Standing, you must also have earned a minimum GPA of 3.0 in your BSW program. If you are applying to the MSW program while you are still completing your BSW degree and you are accepted, you must anticipate *full completion of all degree requirements* by May of the year you are applying. All applicants in this situation are accepted conditionally and will not be allowed to matriculate in the graduate program until all degree requirements are met and degree is conferred officially.

**3. Are there other undergraduate degrees that can qualify applicants for advanced standing?**

No. Per our accreditor, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), advanced standing can be granted *only* to qualified applicants holding degrees from baccalaureate social work programs accredited by CSWE. So, you must have an undergraduate degree in social work specifically to apply to the advanced standing MSW program.

**4. I have worked in social services as a professional for many years and have a great deal of life experience. I also have a continuing education credits. Can I receive course credit for any of this?**

No. You cannot receive graduate credit for professional work or life experience or for continuing education courses. Work experience certainly strengthens your application, though, as this is factor considered in the applicant assessment process.

**5. Am I required to take the MAT or GRE as part of my application?**

No. The School of Social Work does not use these exam scores as part of application assessment.

**6. I am currently a matriculated student in an accredited MSW program. I have taken a number of classes there and I am considering transferring to USM. What do I need to do?**

The USM SSW does not take students in as transfers, per se, however, if you would like to attend USM, you are welcome to apply to the program by the admissions deadline (October 15<sup>th</sup>). If you have received a B grade or better in the foundation year MSW courses you have taken, and you are accepted into our program, it is likely that you can receive credit for those courses at USM. However, any credits you wish to transfer need to be approved by the MSW Coordinator who will request information from you about the courses (e.g., syllabi) to assess equivalencies to USM SSW courses. Students in your situation wishing to apply are encouraged to speak with the MSW Program Coordinator in advance to facilitate a smooth application process.

**7. I am not enrolled in an MSW program but I have taken some graduate classes as a non-matriculated student at another University in social work and in counseling. I wish to apply to the USM SSW, but can you tell me if these credits will be accepted for transfer?**

We can accept up to 6 credits only from outside of the USM SSW for transfer (unless you are a matriculated student from another accredited MSW program wishing to apply for transfer foundation year courses). Usually, these courses are applied as elective credits, with some exceptions (e.g., MSW courses that are deemed to be equivalent to our required foundation courses). Any courses you wish to be considered for MSW credit in our program must be approved by the MSW Program Coordinator. Courses accepted for credit must be relevant to the USM MSW curriculum and must have been taken within the past 7 years with a grade of B or better.

## **8. Is your MSW program accredited?**

Yes. The MSW at USM is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.

## **9. How much does it cost to attend USM?**

For information about tuition and fees for attending the MSW program, please see the Student Billing Office web page for current information: <http://usm.maine.edu/busso/tuition.htm>, or call (207) 780-5200.

## **10. How long does it take to complete the program full time? Part time?**

It takes two years for full time, including field placements each year. For part time, it takes four years, with field placements during years 2 and 4. For Advanced Standing, the full time curriculum can be completed in one year; part time advanced standing takes two years. The full curriculum is 61 credits (a little more than half of that for advanced standing). Sometimes, students are allowed to modify their part time plan and complete the program in 3 years, but any changes to your cohort plan must be approved by the MSW Coordinator.

## **11. If accepted, can I start part time and then change to full time at a later date?**

Since we are a small program, this is possible, but it depends on availability of space in the full time cohort when you request the change. This is assessed with the MSW Program coordinator on a case by case basis. The process for changing cohorts is to first develop a plan with the faculty advisor and then consult with the MSW Program Coordinator.

## **12. How do I decide between the MSW and a MA in counseling?**

The MSW provides a broader education than the counseling degree, and people with the MSW degree are prepared to work at all levels of practice, from the micro-clinical-direct service level to macro community-advocacy-policy level. SW differs in perspective from counseling in that humans are viewed in light of larger social systems, and this systemic lens is infused into the curriculum as a basis for understanding concerns on a micro level. Social work also has a social justice and empowerment orientation with an emphasis on the many forms of human diversity. So, for instance, in social work, students are required to take courses in social welfare policy and community practice as well as courses focusing on theories of human behavior at an individual level, social work practice with individuals, and multicultural practice. Social work views individuals, groups, communities as inextricably influenced by their immediate environments and the larger social/global system structures, processes, and social policies. At the same time, social work also covers theories and practice methods related to individuals. A counseling perspective focuses first on the individual from a developmental perspective and considers context secondarily. In social work, the individual and the context are viewed together and, as noted in the examples above, the MSW coursework reflects this philosophy. Your choice between the MSW and the MA in counseling depends on how your own philosophy fits with one or the other and what you hope to do with your degree. Social workers and counselors may end up working in some of the same clinical practice settings, but many MSW's are prepared doing work that is non-clinical as well. If you are deciding between these two degrees, you are urged to carefully consider your career goals and explore both of the programs.

### **13. Do you offer night classes for people who work full time?**

A number of required courses are offered in the evening (after 4 pm) to accommodate working student schedules. However, it is likely that you will not be able to take all classes for your degree after work hours. While we try our best to schedule as many late classes as possible, there may be some classes you'll need to take during day hours. If you are working full time, it is best if you have a schedule that will be flexible to give you time for classes, studying, paper writing, and fieldwork.

### **14. Do you offer any courses on-line?**

The majority of courses are offered in a live format currently, but we have several faculty members who offer courses on-line. Some of these courses are in "hybrid" format, where, for instance, during a given semester students come to campus for several live meetings with the rest of the course conducted on-line.

### **15. I am planning to apply to the MSW program but would like to take a course or two as a non-matriculated student. Is this allowed?**

Yes, you may take up to 9 credits at the USM SSW (3 courses) as a non-matriculated student. The particular courses offered to non-matriculated students are: SWO 501, Multicultural Social Work, SWO 504, Social Welfare Policy I, and SWO 505, Research I. It is strongly recommended that non-matriculated students take SWO 501 as the first course. Non-matriculated students are allowed to take these courses, space permitting, and can register once all matriculated MSW students are enrolled (for fall semester, non-matric registration takes place in August; for spring semester, late November). To register for a course, contact the department of Professional and Continuing Education at (207)780-5900. It is important to note that taking a course as a non-matriculated student does not guarantee admission to the program, should you apply;

however, taking a course and doing well is a positive addition to an application.

## **16. How do I apply to the MSW Program?**

The Office of Graduate Admissions Web site has all application information and materials:

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/grad/admission.html>. Applications are now completed on line and links to the materials needed are available at the above site. For the MSW program, you are required to submit an essay addressing the following questions (the essay instructions below are also available at the graduate studies web site):

In an integrated essay format (750 words in length), please address the following questions:

1. What are the reasons you want to be a social worker?
2. How do the mission and goals of the M.S.W. program at the University of Southern Maine School of Social Work fit with your career goals?
3. Describe your experiences with diversity, discrimination, and/or oppression.
4. What social issue is of particular concern to you, and why?

In addition to the application itself and the essay, applicants are required to submit a current resume, three recent letters of reference (academic and/or professional references), transcripts from all academic institutions you attended, and, if applying for advanced standing, your BSW field evaluation(s). The essay is critical in the application review process and you are encouraged to write it well and with care (see “Tips for a strong MSW application link” on the SSW website for more detail on the essay and the application review criteria). If you have questions you can call

Graduate Admissions at (207)780-4386.

**17. When is the application deadline?**

**The application deadline for fall admission is October 15<sup>th</sup>.**

This is a firm deadline. We do not have rolling admissions. Applications received after October 15<sup>th</sup> will not be reviewed. All students accepted into the program matriculate in the fall semester.

**18. Once I apply to the MSW program, how can I be sure all of my application materials have arrived in the Graduate Office?**

Applicants are responsible for tracking their own applications and making sure all materials are received and filed in accordance with application deadlines—you will not be contacted about missing application materials so it is important to monitor this yourself.

The University makes this easy for you, though. Once an application file is opened for you, prompted by the receipt your initial application form, you will be given an activation code that allows you to log onto Mainstreet to check the status of your application:

[https://peportal.maine.edu/psp/PAPRD89/EMPLOYEE/EMPL/h/?tab=PAPP\\_GUEST](https://peportal.maine.edu/psp/PAPRD89/EMPLOYEE/EMPL/h/?tab=PAPP_GUEST). Here it will tell you what has been received and what is missing and it is strongly recommended that you get your initial application form in early to initiate access to Mainstreet (versus waiting until just before the October deadline). Should you have difficulty accessing this information of Mainstreet, you can contact the Office of Graduate Admissions at: [gradstudies@usm.maine.edu](mailto:gradstudies@usm.maine.edu) or call (207) 780-4386 for assistance or to check the status of your application. It is important that you try to use Mainstreet first before making this contact because, given the high volume of applications coming into USM for graduate studies, you may not receive the most prompt response to your query from admissions staff at peak times of the admissions cycle. It is important that ALL applicant materials are received by the deadlines as we will not guarantee review of late applications,



so please check the status of your application often until you know all materials have reached your file.

**19. How long will it take to find out if I am accepted into the program once I apply?**

Once the Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> deadline has arrived, the Graduate Admissions office forwards all completed applications to the SSW Admissions Committee for review. The Admissions Committee begins reading the files and several meetings are scheduled over fall semester to review applications and make admissions decisions. By the end of the fall semester, the admissions process is finalized and the Graduate Admissions office begins to send decision letters to applicants. Applicants can expect to receive a letter sometime in early to mid-January at the latest. If accepted, you must respond to the offer by submitting a \$200 deposit to confirm your seat in the program by the deadline indicated in your letter.

**20. Who are the members of the Admissions Committee and how are applicants evaluated?**

The Admission Committee consists of SSW faculty members and professional staff. Each application file is assigned to two separate readers from this committee for thorough review. Using a rating form, each application is scored by these readers independently. The score is a total that is determined by adding the ratings on likert scales that assess the candidate's essay content, essay quality, reference letter quality/credibility, work experience, and, if applicable, undergraduate field work experience. The reviewer also assesses undergraduate performance and examines transcripts to ensure the applicant has the requisite undergraduate liberal arts foundation as well as introductory courses in sociology and psychology, and a statistics course. Once reviewers have assessed and scored applications, the Admissions Committee convenes to examine the rating scores of each reader for each applicant. A final rating is calculated and candidates are added to a pool. Once all

applications are read and rated, the final incoming class is selected based on the scores, so those with the highest ratings are admitted first until we reach our class capacity; others might be denied admission or placed on a wait list. The two-reader rating system keeps the application review process unbiased and fair to everyone. We rely solely on the materials you submit to us to make our decision. The success of your application relies heavily on its quality. For more information on submitting a high quality application, please visit the SSW website and click on the link “Tips for a strong application to the MSW program” (<http://usm.maine.edu/swo/>).

**21. If I am admitted to the program and need to wait to attend, can I defer my enrollment?**

Yes, you may defer your enrollment for ONE year. For example, if you are accepted for entrance in fall 2013 and you want to defer, you could then enter the program in fall 2014 without reapplication. After that, reapplication is required. In order to defer, you must first submit your request to the MSW coordinator in via e-mail or in a letter (Jeanette Andonian at [jeanette.andonian@maine.edu](mailto:jeanette.andonian@maine.edu)) that you would like to do this and you **MUST** submit your \$200 deposit to the Graduate Office to hold your seat for the following year. Without the written request and the deposit, you will not have deferment status, and if we don't hear from you, we will assume that you are forfeiting your acceptance offer.

**22. What are the eligibility requirements for application and can I apply to the program if my bachelor's degree is not related to social work?**

You do not need a social work degree to apply. We welcome applicants with different academic backgrounds. We do require a liberal arts foundation (18 credits in liberal arts courses), one introductory course both in psychology and sociology, and one

statistics course in some field. If you do not have all of these courses, you can still apply and may be accepted on the condition that you complete certain courses before beginning the program.

**23. If I have a GPA below 3.0 in my undergraduate work, should I bother to apply?**

We require that applicants have at least a 3.0 in undergraduate work. However, if your GPA is lower, you may still be reviewed and considered if other aspects of your application are very strong. For instance, if you have worked in a job related to social work and have done well with this, this would work in your favor as an applicant. If you write a strong essay and include high quality references that convey you are academically capable and skilled, that would serve you well also. If your GPA is lower than 3.0, you can still apply and we encourage you to provide other materials that will demonstrate your strengths and potential in the program and in the field. Some people with low undergraduate GPA's might take a course as a non-matriculated student—doing well in one of these courses (and perhaps securing a reference from the instructor) will aid your application.

**24. I am interested in graduate assistantships in the School of Social Work. How can I find out more about this?**

The School of Social Work typically has a limited number of assistantships available (from 1-3 in a given year, as funding permits) and this varies from year to year. If you are interested in being considered for one of these positions, make sure you indicate this on your application (there is a question about this on the application). You can contact the Office of Graduate Admissions for general information about assistantships or follow this link to learn more:

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/grad/graduateassistantship.html>. The selection of graduate assistantship recipients takes place during the spring semester before the beginning of the new academic year. If

more information is needed to consider you for a GA position, you will be contacted by the MSW Program Coordinator.

### **25. How does USM place students in field settings?**

The USM SSW Field Coordinators work closely with each student to secure a field placement that is both a good fit for the student and meets the criteria for a sound training experience. If accepted to the MSW program, one of the first steps to take after confirming your agreement to attend and submitting your \$200 deposit is to contact the Field Coordinator to begin the placement process (instruction for contacting field staff is included in acceptance letters). This involves scheduling a meeting to discuss your interests and following through with arranging interviews at sites identified as viable options for your training. Students who make this contact promptly have the widest variety of field placement options. The field placement process begins in January/February (thus, why we have an early application deadline). All field placements run from the beginning of all semester until the end of spring semester. We do not offer summer field placements.

### **26. Would I be allowed to do a field placement in my place of employment?**

Students are strongly discouraged from using their employment site for a field practicum because: (a) field placement is intended to expose students to a *new* learning experience and environment; (b) both the student and employment supervisor are apt to experience role confusion with the addition of a field practicum relationship; (c) the expectations of a placement relationship and a work relationship are different (field placement should be educationally focused rather than centered on agency service); (d) students might be less likely to take a critical/objective stance toward their agencies or to question agency policies.

This said, students are sometimes allowed to use a work site as a

field placement. We understand that students are often trying to work and complete their degrees at the same time. If a student wants to propose doing a worksite field placement, the following steps must be taken:

1. Students must first meet with the Field Coordinator or Field Associate to discuss the viability of such a proposal and to get a copy of the Placement at Place of Employment contract to complete as soon as possible. Completed contracts must be returned to the Field Coordinator before the placement can be explored as a potential site and officially approved.
2. The Field Coordinator or Field Associate assesses the employment site for field placement suitability, which includes the appointment of a qualified Field Instructor (someone other than the employment supervisor).
3. The agency must provide field instruction with an MSW who has two years post-masters practice experience.
4. The student's practicum roles must be different from regular employment, provide new learning opportunities and appropriate to the student's level of social work training.
5. The student must show how she/he plans to fulfill the placement hour requirements beyond her/his regularly scheduled employment time.

Advanced standing students may not use their current employment for their field placement. Two-year students may only use their current employment for one of their two placement years.

**27. Do you offer different tracks of study in the MSW program?**

While we do not offer distinct tracks per se, currently students can choose to specialize in direct or macro practice by tailoring their three required elective course choices in one area or another. All MSW students take courses in direct and macro practice, but those interested in direct practice will choose electives that are more clinically focused while those interested in macro practice will select electives in management, administration, or public policy. Elective choices are made in collaboration with faculty advisors who can ensure you are taking what you need to focus on one of these areas. Some electives are offered within the SSW, but students are free to take up to 6 credits outside of the program (e.g., Muskie School, Counseling Program, Business, etc.).

**28. With a degree from your advanced social work practice program, will I be eligible for the LCSW, the state's clinical license for social workers?**

The state social work licensing board ultimately makes the decisions about eligibility for clinical licensure, but our MSW graduates have been very successful in securing the LMSW-CC and later the LCSW. Our program offers clinical content to reach this goal. In fact, our graduates who pursue this level of license pass the required exam at a rate significantly higher than the national average. This tells us that not only are our students eligible for licensure, but they are well prepared to pass the exam once they complete our program.

**29. Can I find out in advance if certain courses offered at the School of Social Work are approved for licensure by the licensing board?**

Course approvals for licensure are not done by the School of Social Work. The licensing board reviews courses in the process of

candidate applications for licensure. It is strongly recommended that social work students maintain a file of syllabi for the courses they have taken in the event that the board requests more detailed information about a course when they apply for licensure. The MSW Coordinator conducts a workshop at the SSW each year to share information about licensure and help students prepare. The SSW does not represent the licensing board in any way and cannot guarantee the board's decisions about applications, but the MSW Coordinator will assist students by offering consultation and advice based on years of experience working with students pursuing licensure.

### **30. Where can I find more information about social work licensure in Maine?**

All licensure questions should be directed to the board itself, (207) 624-8609. The board web site is also a good source of information: [http://www.state.me.us/pfr/professionallicensing/professions/social\\_workers/index.htm](http://www.state.me.us/pfr/professionallicensing/professions/social_workers/index.htm)

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