MSSW Program Overview

The mission of the MSSW program at WTAMU is to prepare advanced generalist practitioners who are equipped with an eclectic knowledge base, professional values, and a wide range of advanced skills to assume the professional responsibilities of change agents in our rapidly changing, culturally diverse, global society. She or he should enhance the social functioning and interactions of her/his client systems, help clients develop resources, alleviate human suffering in the pursuit of the improvement of quality of life and conditions of people living in the rural Texas panhandle region, the state, the nation, and the world.

The goals of the MSSW program at West Texas A&M University are to educate students who:

- Become Advanced Generalist Practitioners;
- Use a variety of theoretical perspectives;
- Develop their interventions at all levels of systems practice, and
- Are knowledgeable in the unique aspects of rural communities.

The goals of the social work program at WTAMU complement and support the mission of the program and are directly derived from that mission. To be effective change agents in a rapidly changing society, social workers must become advanced general practitioners, use a variety of theoretical perspectives, develop interventions at all levels of practice, and for our region of the country, they must be knowledgeable in the unique aspects of rural communities. All of these components work in concert with the knowledge base gleaned from the courses required, and with the self-awareness that is cultivated throughout the curriculum.

The proposed focus of advanced generalist practice is consistent with the mission and goals of the social work program. The goals, derived from the competencies, reflect the need to prepare practitioners who can practice across varying levels of practice. Advanced generalist graduates will be prepared to synthesize and apply a broad range of social work theories, determining those that best fit each specific client situation.

Graduates will be prepared with advanced practice skills which allow them to:

- differentially assess problems,
- employ specialized interventions,
- develop more rigorous evaluation techniques, and
- establish themselves as leaders with systems of all sizes and levels of complexity.

This diversity, built upon the generalist foundation, but with a greater depth, breadth and ability to work independently, will prepare them to be advanced generalist practitioners in rural social work. This concentration is consistent with the needs and the demographics of the large geographical area, mostly rural, surrounding the location of the WTAMU campus. The ability to work with individuals and families, with groups, and with communities is essential. Students will be prepared to assume their place as change agents working within these different levels of practice.
The MSSW program focuses on an advanced generalist practice model, within a rural context, allowing graduates to serve in multiple capacities within this largely rural region. Amarillo, Texas, where the program will primarily be housed, is the largest city in the Texas Panhandle with a population of approximately 200,000. Dotted throughout the Panhandle, however, are many small towns that have great difficulty finding qualified masters level social workers. The foundation and advanced generalist curriculum is designed to educate our MSSW students to work in varied capacities throughout the Texas panhandle.

The advanced generalist curriculum builds on the generalist curriculum which is the focus of the Foundation courses in year one of the MSSW program. The generalist practice foundation teaches students to serve diverse client systems using a systems perspective that focuses on the person-in-environment fit and addresses individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities within our rural context. This broad focus is varied enough that the problem as well as the strengths, capacities and resources determine the practice approach which is best suited to the specific situation. The generalist practice foundation uses a problem solving focus and a broad base of knowledge and skills based in the values of the social work profession.

Based on this foundation, the advanced generalist practice model in a rural setting is the focus of the second, or concentration year of the MSSW program. This focus provides a greater depth, breadth and independence as the student gains specialized knowledge across problem areas and practice settings learning to use a larger selection of diverse interventions across multiple practice levels. The advanced generalist practice model uses a variety of advanced assessment skills and helps the student learn to differentially assess more complex problems with a variety of systems, and then to use specialized, evidence-based interventions with these systems. Students learn to evaluate their interventions at all levels and to share the knowledge they gain through this evaluation with other professionals. Finally, students are prepared to take leadership roles in their rural communities using skills gained in areas such as program development; administration and supervision; policy analysis, creation and implementation; research development and utilization; and professional development and mentoring.

The proposed MSSW program relies heavily upon experiential education at all levels. The program at WTAMU has integrated experiential education far beyond the final internship; students are required to gain hands-on experience in all practice classes as well as in several others. Foundation year first-semester courses include SOCW 5383 (Social Work Methods); SOCW 5381 (Social Policy and Planning); and SOCW 5380 (HBSE) for a total of 9 hours. These courses provide a solid underpinning for the courses to be offered in the second semester of the three-semester foundation year. The courses to be offered next include SOCW 5310 (Group & Community Processes); SOCW 5321 (Diverse Populations); and SOCW 5488 (Field Instruction I) for a total of 10 hours. Finally, the third semester foundation-year courses include SOCW 5362 (Social Research); and SOCW 5498 (Field Instruction II) for a total of 7 hours. Because of the rural nature of our area, some of these courses may be offered through online instruction or through video-conferencing. The 26 hours of foundation courses are designed to be offered across three semesters, allowing students to work while pursuing their MSSW.

The following foundation-year courses provide experiential learning as an integral component of the learning objectives in the course: SOCW 5383 (Social Work Methods), SOCW 5310 (Group & Community Processes), SOCW 5488 (Field I), and SOCW 5498 (Field
II). Much of the learning will take place through the program’s existing agency, West Texas Family and Community Services (WTFCS), housed in downtown Amarillo. Through this agency, prior to field practicum, students learn to do intakes, referrals, case management, run psychoeducational groups, and create and implement community-based projects.

The advanced standing, or second-year curriculum, will offer the following courses: SOCW 6380 (HBSE II); SOCW 6321 (Racism, Discrimination & Practice Methods with Diverse Populations); and SOCW 6331 (Practice I: Individual and Group Practice), for a total of 9 hours. Courses for the second semester include SOCW 6341 (Practice II: Community & Organizational Practice); SOCW 6362 (Research Methods in Social Work); and SOCW 6397 (Applied Social Work Practice I) for a total of 9 hours. Third semester courses include SOCW 6310 (Foundations of Social Welfare); SOCW 6398 (Applied Social Work Practice II); and a free elective to be chosen by the student in conjunction with their academic advisor. These courses total 9 hours. The final semester of the second-year courses include SOCW 6399 (Applied Social Work Practice III); SOCW 6320 (Integrative Seminar); and a free elective for a total of 9 hours. Therefore, the second year totals 36 hours and spans four semesters. These courses will also offer many opportunities for experiential learning through WTFCS, along with well-planned field practica experiences that will enhance the coursework that students are engaged in. Students in field will focus on individuals and families, group work, and macro or community-based practice, rotating through these experiences during their field internship courses. A student may spend their field internship in one agency, focusing on each of these areas during a given semester, or may be placed in two or three agencies (sequentially) in order to gain the most experience.