

About the MSSW Program at West Texas A&M University

The program is not fully online; however, it is designed for working students with classes offered during the evening. The program is approximately 1/3 online, 1/3 face-to-face, and 1/3 hybrid.

The MSSW Program at West Texas A&M University was initially accredited by the Council on Social Work Education in 2013. The program is designed to meet the needs of agencies and clients in the Texas panhandle. The MSSW program is based 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 is 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 was designed to educate MSSW students to work in varied capacities throughout the Texas panhandle.

The Foundation courses, offered the first year of the program for students without a qualifying degree in social work, teaches the generalist practice perspective. This focus is on serving diverse client systems using a systems perspective, emphasizing the person-in-environment and addressing individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities within a rural context. This broad foundation allows the future practitioner to explore problems as well as the strengths, capacities and resources needed to 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 core values of the social work profession.

Based on this foundation, the advanced generalist practice model in a rural setting is the focus of the concentration year of the MSSW program. Students who are granted Advanced Standing begin their coursework with the concentration courses. The concentration courses provide a greater depth, breadth and opportunities for growth as the student gains specialized knowledge across problem areas and practice settings. They learn 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 within 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 MSSW program relies heavily upon experiential education at all levels, integrating experiential education far beyond field practicum; students are required to gain hands-on experience in all practice classes as well as in several others.