
COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY 
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
DOCTORAL PROGRAM CURRICULUM

The curriculum at Columbia is designed to set our doctoral students apart as scholars who will examine highly complex human problems in depth, arriving at new knowledge and solutions with a rigorous and exacting mind. Through concentrated coursework, tutorials, and exams culminating in the dissertation, students achieve a systematic, intellectual grounding in the theory and history of social welfare, extensive training in research methods and statistics, concentration in a social work method specialization, and integrated exposure to social or behavioral science and theory.

Successful completion of the Doctoral Program requires approximately two full-time years of coursework, plus time for independent tutorials, exams, and dissertation work. Required coursework is taken both within the School of Social Work and in other social and behavioral science disciplines. All students also conduct an intensive individualized research practicum with a faculty supervisor en route to their independent research conducted during the dissertation phase. Overall, the curriculum is characterized by a rigor and scope specifically designed to prepare our doctoral students to be leading authorities in their chosen areas of study.

The Social Work Method Concentrations

Each prospective student applying to the Doctoral Program selects a social work method concentration. There are three concentrations from which to choose:

- ◆ Advanced Practice
- ◆ Social Policy & Policy Analysis
- ◆ Social Policy & Administration

Each method is comprised of a unique sequence of core method courses, so the choice of method should be tailored to one's scholarly interests and future career plans.

Advanced Practice: This method is advised for students who are preparing for careers as direct practice researchers, teachers or other leadership tracks who wish to remain involved in practice and programming. The relationship between research and its application to direct practice is a major theme throughout the advanced practice courses.

The three-course advanced practice sequence includes:

- The Changing Contexts of Social Work Practice
- Seminar in Advanced Social Work Practice
- The Ecosystems Perspective on Practice

The sequence explores a broad range of issues, including the following:

- Contemporary issues in social work practice: theories, current ideological debates, comparison of practice approaches, etc.
- Learning how practitioners think about their practice: patterns of knowledge utilization, uses and limits of outcome research for practitioners, alternative research paradigms.
- Integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches
- Making research more relevant to practitioners

Social Policy & Policy Analysis: This method is appropriate for students preparing to teach and/or conduct research in the formulation of social policy or policy analysis.

The two-course social policy & policy analysis concentration consists of:

- Seminar in U.S. Social Policy
- Seminar in Social Policy Analysis

Some of the major tenets of the policy track include:

- Developing a background in U.S. social policy: development, expenditures, impacts, major sectors, trends and issues, the policy debate, analytical paradigms, major research studies
- Learning about different types of policy analysis and their relation to specific social problems, including cost-benefit analysis, cost effectiveness analysis, and micro-simulation.
- Experience with and debates about the uses of policy analysis in government at different levels and in different fields.

Students who select the social policy and policy analysis concentration must also complete a minimum of two courses in microeconomics. These courses may count toward an advanced research and/or social/behavioral science course requirement.

Social Policy & Administration: This method is recommended for students who, in addition to preparing to teach and/or carry out research in social policy, wish to specialize in management of social programs.

The two courses in this sequence are:

- Seminar in U.S. Social Policy
- Social Administration and Management

In addition to the development of a background in U.S. social policy, the sequence also involves:

- Researching the roles of managers and organizations in the policy implementation process.
- Understanding management tasks in human service organizations.

Those unsure of which method to specialize in may wish to seek assistance from a faculty member with whom you would be interested in working with. Faculty members and their major research interests can be viewed in the accompanying document concerning CUSSW faculty or at the following web address: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/phdprogram/faculty/cussw.html>

Degree Requirements

A prototypical student's route to the Ph.D. in Social Work requires the completion of between 45 and 48 or more academic credits:

1) Doctoral Program Proseminar (0 credits)

Required of all degree candidates. The proseminar introduces incoming students to the research process and a range of research studies as well as the faculty conducting them at Columbia. This course is taken throughout the first year.

2) History and Philosophy of Social Welfare (3 credits)

Required of all degree candidates. Taken in the first semester, this course provides a historical and philosophical perspective on social welfare institutions, concepts, issues and trends, and the development of the social work profession in this context.

3) 2-3 courses in a social work method (6-9 credits)

As described above, these courses form the framework of the student's introduction to and mastery of a social work method: Advanced Practice; Social Policy & Policy Analysis; or Social Policy & Administration. Advanced Practice students take three of these core courses, whereas Social Policy & Policy Analysis and Social Policy & Administration students take two.

4) 7 courses in research methods and statistics (21 credits)

All students (unless granted a course waiver) are required to take the introductory Research Methods in Social Work course. In subsequent semesters, students may choose to take advanced courses covering various historical, qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Often the advanced courses are taken in other departments of the University.

Statistics courses are generally taken in other departments of the University. Advanced courses include measurement, applied regression analysis, structural equation modeling, and advanced analytic topics suitable for diverse research designs and data types.

Seven 3-credit courses in all must be taken between research methods and statistics. Students must take three courses in research methods, three courses in statistics, and a seventh course which may be taken in either discipline.

5) 3 courses in social or behavioral sciences (9 credits)

These courses may be taken in economics, public health, sociology, psychology, political science, anthropology, social history, and other specialized areas. The choice of area should be particularly germane to each student's dissertation themes and career objectives. Students are required to declare their chosen social/behavioral science by the beginning of their second year.

6) A 360-hour research practicum (not taken for course credit)

The purpose of the research practicum is to link classroom learning to the dissertation process by providing students with an applied research internship in conjunction with a current faculty research project. The practicum, typically taken during the student's second through fourth semesters, involves 8-12 hours of work per week for 30-45 weeks. The practicum is designed with concrete objectives in mind and may lead to the development of a publishable paper.

7) 1 field of practice tutorial (3 credits)

Each doctoral student is required to demonstrate expertise in a field of practice related to their substantive interests and career goals. To this end, students typically complete a field of practice tutorial with a social work faculty member during their third semester. They may choose from an available tutorial that is being offered or they may audit a Master's level field of practice course to fulfill the tutorial. Previous field of practice tutorials have included topics ranging from family and child policy, social work in the workplace, mental health services, comparative social policy and HIV/AIDS.

8) The field of practice examination/paper

After completing the field of practice tutorial, students opt to either take a three-hour written exam in their selected field of practice or to complete a paper, usually in their fourth semester. They prepare for the exam or paper by synthesizing knowledge accumulated in their elective courses, guided readings, tutorials, and practice experience. They must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the research and scholarly literature in their field and assess the implications of that research for social work practice and policy.

9) Comprehensive examinations

When a student has completed all required course work as well as the field of practice exam, they may sit for the comprehensive examinations. The comprehensive exam, which aims to help students synthesize and integrate their coursework, is taken in two stages: a written exam and an oral follow-up exam conducted by a faculty panel.

10) The Dissertation

The successful defense of the dissertation is the final eligibility criterion for the Ph.D. degree. Dissertation planning begins early in the course of studies, but becomes more focused after the three social work method courses and field of practice tutorial have been completed. Students take a Dissertation Seminar course with their peers during the third year and receive faculty advisement through the required 6-credit Dissertation Research Instruction course. In this course faculty guide the degree candidate through the processes of selecting a study topic, developing an approved proposal, implementing the research, and writing the dissertation. Students defend their dissertation proposal and the completed dissertation in front of a five-member interdisciplinary committee. They are evaluated on the basis of their potential for independent scholarship and, optimally, on the contribution of their work to the social work discipline.

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences permits students a maximum of 7 years to complete all requirements for the Ph.D. However, with timely and proficient progress through the doctoral program's curriculum, most students can finish their degree in 3-5 years.

More information on the program can be found on our website:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/phdprogram>