15.4 DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM

PhD Program Chair: Professor Wesley T. Church II, Office: 117A Little Hall

Admission Requirements

Graduate School Admission Requirements. The Graduate School determines eligibility for regular or conditional admission, primarily on the basis of standardized test scores and previous academic record. Successful applicants must meet the minimum admission requirements of the Graduate School, which follow.

- a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (overall) or a GPA of at least 3.0 for the last 60 hours of the previous degree program, or 3.0 for a completed graduate degree program.
- an acceptable score on an appropriate entrance examination as set by the department or school.

An applicant may be considered for conditional admission if he or she has a GPA of 2.5 overall and an acceptable score on the appropriate admission examination, or a GPA of 3.0 and less than the minimum score on the admission examination.

Additional information is in the Admission Criteria section of this catalog.

PhD Program Admission Requirements. Once the application is complete, it is sent to the PhD program office in the School of Social Work for evaluation. Listed below are the requirements for unconditional admission to the social work PhD program.

- a minimum composite score of 1000 on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) general test verbal and quantitative sections. In addition, the faculty will consider the score on the analytical writing section of the GRE together with the essay submitted to the School of Social Work as part of the application to the PhD program. Applicants from non-English-speaking countries must submit evidence of English language proficiency by means of a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of at least 550, or 79 on the internet-based TOEFL, or a score of at least 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).
- letters from three references, one of whom must be an experienced social worker with firsthand knowledge of the applicant's capability and one of whom must be a former university instructor who has personal knowledge of the applicant's intellectual and scholarly abilities. If the applicant has earned the MSW degree, at least one letter must be from a former instructor in the applicant's MSW program.
- a statement of purpose indicating the reasons the applicant wishes to pursue a doctoral degree in social work and indicating the applicant's research interests.
- evidence of scholarly ability, supported by evidence the applicant supplies (e.g., a paper published in a journal or presented at a conference or workshop, a design of a service program or a research proposal, and/or a course syllabus written by the applicant).

An Admissions Committee composed of members of the PhD Program Committee reviews application materials and a recommendation is made to the Graduate School, which formally notifies the applicant of the admission decision. Applicants seeking admission to the program who do not meet the above requirements are considered on an individual basis. If an applicant desires such consideration, he or she should file all application materials as directed above. In addition to the materials required of all students, he or she should file, along with the School of Social Work application form, a petition for exemption from one or more requirements. The petition should state the requirement from which exemption is sought and should provide information supporting the petition. After the file is complete and referred to the PhD program by the Graduate School, the applicant may be invited to schedule an
interview with the program chair or other member of the admissions committee, in order to assess individually the applicant's qualifications for doctoral studies in social work. A summary of this interview and the petition for an exception will be made available to the Admissions Committee for consideration prior to its decision regarding an admissions recommendation.

If seeking exemption from the requirements, the applicant should be aware that he or she may be required to register for courses other than the standard curriculum, including courses at the MSW level. The amount and type of such work may be decided by the Admissions Committee before admission and/or by the applicant's academic advisor after admission.

**Additional Program Admission Requirements.** In addition to the above program admission requirements, it is recommended that the applicant also possess the following:

- a master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) at the time of graduation.
- a minimum of two years of full-time employment (or its equivalent) in social work after earning the master's degree.

Many schools of social work require the MSW degree and at least two years of post-MSW practice experience for admission to the doctoral program in social work. In this program, they are highly recommended but not required. There are advantages to having the MSW and practice experience prior to matriculation in a PhD program. Students may be able to transfer up to 12 hours of MSW coursework into the PhD program, subject to Graduate School policies on transfer of credit. In addition, students with the MSW and practice experience will have more context in which to interpret the content of social work core courses. Finally, the BSW or MSW and practice experience will permit the applicant, under current CSWE accreditation standards, to engage in the full range of teaching and advising assignments at accredited schools of social work. Thus, the applicant will have a competitive advantage in the job market over someone who does not have the BSW or MSW and post-MSW practice experience.

Applicants admitted without the MSW must earn an MSW prior to receiving their Ph.D. It is the responsibility of such students to work with their academic advisor through this process.

**CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT IN THE MSW AND PhD DEGREES PROGRAMS.**

The University of Alabama School of Social Work offers an MSW/PhD concurrent program for individuals who hold, or are candidates for, bachelor's degrees who have strong interest in research careers in social work. These individuals may be admitted simultaneously to the MSW and PhD programs and work on both degrees concurrently. Those admitted to the concurrent program will complete all current requirements for the PhD degree. Specific required PhD coursework will be applied to specific MSW degree requirements, reducing the number of semester hours required for the MSW and PhD degrees by 18 hours. The MSW degree will be awarded when all requirements for the MSW completed, and the student will continue to work on the PhD requirements.

Successful applicants must meet the minimum admission requirements of the Graduate School and The School of Social Work MSW and PhD Programs.

Inquiries concerning the program or application may be made to the following address: The University of Alabama School of Social Work, Doctoral Program, Box 870314, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0314.

**PhD Degree Requirements**

A doctoral **Plan of Study** must be submitted to the Graduate School by the time the student completes 30 hours of UA credits and/or transfer credits for the doctorate. In the Social Work PhD Program, 53 hours of regular course work are required, not counting the statistics requirement. Typically, students who have completed the MSW will take 41 hours of course work and be given credit for up to 12 hours for the MSW degree. This total of 53 hours does not include the work to satisfy the statistical proficiency requirement or the student’s
dissertation hours. Specific requirements of the doctor of philosophy in social work degree program are as follows:

- Thirty-one semester hours of core social work courses, including a one-credit seminar, five courses in substantive areas and six courses in research methodology (credit for prior graduate work may be granted, based on the student's own particular program of study and research; consult the program chairperson for details).
- Twelve semester hours in a minor field taken from one or more areas outside the School.
- A statistical research competency demonstrated by successful completion of a research sequence of courses chosen from the educational research course sequence BER 540, BER 545, and BER 546; the political science course sequence PSC 522 and PSC 621; the College of Community Health Sciences course sequence CHS 525 and CHS 526. Alternatives may be approved.
- A dissertation showing the student's ability to conduct independent research that adds to the knowledge of the profession (includes a minimum of 24 hours of dissertation credit).
- Completion of all courses with a grade point average of 3.0 ("B") or better.

These requirements are minimum standards. Additional work may be required, depending on the student's preparation and career interests. Doctoral study must be completed within seven years.

Residency Requirements. The minimum period in which the PhD degree can be earned is three academic years of full-time graduate study (or the equivalent in a set of shorter segments). Both the fall and spring semesters of either the second or third academic year of study must be spent in continuous residence as a full-time student (as an alternative, the full-time residence may be completed by full-time enrollment during a summer session, including both summer terms, preceded or followed by a regular semester). Full-time residence study is defined as an academic load of 9 semester hours or more during a period when the student's principal activity is academic work.

Admission to Candidacy. A department-approved Admission to Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree form is submitted to the Graduate School as soon as possible after passing the comprehensive (preliminary) examination.

Additional information on Plan of Study, Residency, Admission to Candidacy, and all other degree requirements is in the Degree Requirements section of this catalog.

PhD Program. The purpose of this program is to prepare persons who hold the master's degree in social work, or a related discipline or profession, for scholarly roles by advancing their knowledge and increasing their skills in theory-building, research methods, and the critical evaluation of social work policies and practice.

The doctoral program builds on a base of professional knowledge and practice in social work. It provides all students with advanced knowledge of research, social policy, and practice. In addition to a grounding in research methods, the program offers students the opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of a selected area of concentration and, through the dissertation, contribute to knowledge development in that area. To supplement this concentration area, students select a minor area in a single academic discipline or develop a comprehensive interdisciplinary minor. As soon as they enter the program, students are assigned to a PhD faculty advisor for program planning and guidance.

The program is notable among social work doctoral programs for the range and depth of its research foundation courses and electives. Exceptional opportunities are available for students interested in research in mental health, aging, and child welfare. There are opportunities for overseas experience as well as for collaboration with the Center for Mental Health and Aging, the Institute for Rural Health Research, the Institute for Social Science Research, the Program for Rural Services and Research, and the Youth Services Institute, with other colleges and
departments of the University; and with various units of The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

**Time Limit.** All doctoral degree requirements must be completed in the 7 years (21 consecutive fall, spring and summer semesters) after admission.

**Obtaining Information.** Inquiries about the program and requests for application materials should be made to: The University of Alabama School of Social Work, PhD Program Office, Box 870314, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0314; telephone (205) 348-9785; fax (205) 348-9419.

**Financial Aid.** Some financial aid is available from the School of Social Work, including graduate assistantships and the Ben Avis Orcutt and Leslie J. Shellhase endowed scholarships, which are administered by the PhD program. For information on financial aid from other sources, visit the Financial Aid website.

Financial aid commonly takes the form of graduate teaching or research assistantships, special grants or fellowships, student loans, work-study, and/or part-time employment in a local social agency.