

Social work is a profession devoted to helping people function to the best of their ability in their environment. This means providing services or therapy directly to people. It can also mean working for change to improve social conditions. Social workers help clients deal with their feelings about a situation and help them decide what to do about a situation. Individual distress is seen by social workers in a social context with a clear view of all factors – biological, psychological, familial, economic, political and social – that influence it. Social workers serve individuals, families and communities. They are managers, supervisors, administrators, teachers, therapists and researchers. The social work profession has its own body of knowledge, code of ethics, practice standards, credentials, state licensing, and a nationwide system of accredited education programs. For more information on careers in social work and developments in the field, see the National Association of Social Workers ([www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)) and [www.HelpStartsHere.org](http://www.HelpStartsHere.org).

## Degree Programs

Social workers must have a degree in social work from a college or university program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Graduate degrees include the Master of Social Work (MSW) and the Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) or Ph.D. The MSW is the professional degree for social work practitioners and psychosocial therapists, while the doctorate is useful for those who wish to prepare for careers in teaching, research, management, or policy analysis. Advanced degrees are typically offered by *schools* of social work, but can also be obtained in social work *departments*.

There are about 150 CSWE-accredited programs in the U.S. Accredited MSW programs in California are at UC Berkeley, UCLA, CSU Bakersfield, CSU Chico, CSU East Bay, CSU Fresno, CSU Long Beach, CSU Los Angeles, CSU Sacramento, CSU San Bernardino, CSU Stanislaus, San Diego State University, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, USC, and Loma Linda University.

A national list of social work programs is on CSWE's Web site at [www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org). The UCSD Career Services Center also has *Peterson's Graduate Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law & Social Work* as well as *The Social Work Graduate School Applicant's Handbook*.

## Curriculum and Emphasis

MSW programs are typically two full-time years in length (part-time programs are also available at some schools), and include course work in human growth and development, social policies and programs, methods of practice, and social research. All programs also require field work in established social agencies. Following foundation coursework in the first year, students usually choose between direct work with individuals, families, and groups, or organizing, managing, planning and policy analysis work with social agencies. Students are also required to specialize in an area, such as mental health, employee assistance, aging, health care, corrections, and child welfare.

Schools of social work can vary considerably in regard to methodological emphases, policy and program specializations, and opportunities for fieldwork or joint degrees (public health, law, business, etc.). Some schools seek to prepare professionals for private practice in psychotherapy, others for work in public and non-profit social service agencies, and others for engaging in social planning and social change.

## Preparation and Admission

There is no undergraduate major or minor required for graduate study in social work. However, solid grounding in the social and behavioral sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, ethnic studies, urban studies, public service, etc.) would provide excellent preparation. Some programs require successful completion of a course in statistics and human or general biology. Admission requirements include official transcripts of all post-secondary course work, scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test ([www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)), an application from the university and the department, a personal statement, letters of reference, demonstrated skills in oral and written communication, and possibly an interview. Applications are typically submitted in the fall or winter for entry the following fall, but deadlines vary. Most programs require a minimum GPA of 2.75 – 3.0, although the expected GPA could reach 3.4 or

higher, depending on the program. Stronger than average GRE scores may also be expected. Many programs place heavy emphasis on community or social service, often requiring at least a year of exposure to social work or related human service activities.

Opportunities to gain community or social service experience and to develop interpersonal skills may be found online through [www.VolunteerMatch.org](http://www.VolunteerMatch.org) or [www.VolunteerSanDiego.org](http://www.VolunteerSanDiego.org), through the Volunteer Connection located on campus in the Price Center, the Academic Internship Program, Express to Success, Independent Study (199) within your major, or self-initiated contacts with community or religious groups, non-profit or government agencies. The Career Services Center Career Library has directories of community service organizations to get involved with including a San Diego County directory called *Directions* available online through the United Way at [www.uwsd.org/agencies](http://www.uwsd.org/agencies).

### **Licensure**

Graduates of social work programs can become licensed mental health practitioners. In California, to become licensed, graduates must accrue at least 3,200 hours of experience (post-Master's) in psychosocial diagnosis, assessment, and treatment including psychotherapy and counseling and client-centered advocacy, consultation, evaluation and research. They must pass both a written and oral examination to become a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). California licensure procedures and details are available at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/index.shtml>.

### **UCSD Resources**

The Career Services Center "Mental Health" webpage at <http://career.ucsd.edu/L3/sa/PMentalHealth.shtml> offers searchable links to schools and career information. There – and in the Center – you can find materials on writing your application essay, test preparation, obtaining letters of reference, making the most of volunteer experience, and financial aid for graduate study, as well as help with interview preparation. You can also submit a typed, double-spaced draft of your application essay for a critique. Advisors are available on an appointment basis to discuss individual concerns or answer questions about applying to social work programs. Call (858) 534-4939 or stop in to make an appointment.

*Careers in Focus: Social Work, Opportunities in Social Work Careers, and Careers in Social and Rehabilitative Services* are three informative books available in the Career Services Center Career Library. To speak with a social work professional to learn more about social work as a career, contact local agencies and/or organizations which employ social workers or contact schools of social work to have them connect you to current students and practicing alumni of their programs.

### **MSW Stipend Program**

Many students will pay for graduate school in social work through financial aid in the form of student loans. However, the California Department of Social Services has contracted with the California Social Work Education Center and the California graduate schools of social welfare to provide federal Social Security Act Title IV-E funds to select child welfare MSW students. Through this program, students interested in public child welfare careers can receive \$18,500 per year for each of two years of Master's study. After completion of the MSW, stipend recipients must then render one-year full-time employment in a California county or public child welfare agency for each year of stipend award. Apply for these programs through the individual participating schools or departments of social work.