

# PH.D. IN SOCIAL WORK

## Academic Guidelines Program Objectives and Structure

### Overview

The program of doctoral study consists of two major components: Coursework and dissertation. These integrated components are designed to teach students the knowledge and skills necessary for future leadership positions in policymaking, service development, education, practice, and research.

The program requires a minimum of two years to earn the 48 credits necessary for the degree. Students may take courses on a part-time or full-time basis. During the first two to four years of study, students complete 48 credits.

A primary objective of the Ph.D. program is to educate social work scholars and researchers. In support of this objective, the curriculum consists of two required courses in social statistics, four required research methods courses that cover quantitative and qualitative research methods, and a course on the philosophy of science.

In addition to the required courses, students may choose to enroll in additional research methods and statistics courses either in the Graduate School of Social Service or in other divisions of the University. All students are required to take at least one semester of an advanced research practicum in conjunction with their third or fourth required research methods course. During the practicum they will assist a faculty member in an ongoing research activity.

A major responsibility of all social work doctoral programs is to prepare graduates who will assume academic positions in social work education. In recognition of this responsibility, the Ph.D. program offers a course on social work education. In addition, all students are expected to take a one-semester teaching practicum in which they will assist a faculty member in the design, development, and delivery of a graduate-level social work course. Students who have the interest and expertise will have the opportunity to teach in the Graduate School of Social Service's M.S.W. and B.A.S.W. programs.

Rounding out the coursework are elective courses and independent study, which give students the opportunity to individualize their education further and develop greater knowledge in particular areas. Students are expected to take some of their electives in other academic divisions of the University to broaden their perspectives on particular topics. To ensure integrity in the coursework, academic advisers assist students when they choose electives.

Upon completion of 48 credits and passing the doctoral comprehensive examinations, each student begins to work on developing a dissertation proposal. At this point the student assembles a dissertation committee that will review and approve the dissertation proposal.

After a successful proposal review each student continues to work with the committee, which oversees execution and completion of the dissertation research. The dissertation committee is chaired by a faculty member and includes two other members, one of whom is selected from outside the Graduate School of Social Service. Although the dissertation committee is formed officially after students pass all comprehensive examinations, students are encouraged to discuss dissertation ideas with faculty members while they are taking courses. This process should help

students to identify possible committee members before they must begin to prepare dissertation proposals.

While in the dissertation phase, students are required to register each academic semester for the maintenance matriculation with mentoring course.

### Electives

Students take 6 credit hours of electives offered in GSS's doctoral program or other doctoral programs at Fordham University. At times, after approval from the doctoral faculty adviser and the director of the doctoral program, a doctoral student may be permitted to take a master's level course.

In order to qualify for doctoral level credit, a course must:

- Further the student's knowledge in the area of study or research reflected in their educational program.
- Present material not covered in the student's previous education or other available doctoral level courses.
- Involve an assignment agreed to by the instructor and the student that exceeds work required of master's level students.
- Provide evidence of familiarity with prevailing theory and conceptualization of practice at a greater breadth, depth, and higher level of abstraction.

To meet the above criteria, the student must contract with the course instructor that these expectations will be met and must present to his or her faculty advisor, a written justification for taking the course.

If in the advisor's judgment the student's proposal fits into the student's learning plan, the advisor recommends approval to the director of the doctoral program. The program director must authorize any independent study.

Six credits in elective courses are a required minimum. Students might wish (or may be asked) to take more electives to gain added knowledge in their areas of concentration and to have better preparation for the Comprehensive Examination.

Electives may be taken in other graduate departments of Fordham University with the advice and consent of the student's adviser, the director of the doctoral program, and the chairperson of the other Fordham University graduate department.

## Academic Progress Expectations and Timeline

### Completion of Coursework

Students are expected to complete course work in two years. Matriculated students are expected to be enrolled in three or four courses per semester.

### Completion of Comprehensive Examinations Paper

Students must complete this requirement within thirteen months of completing coursework. Students will be given two opportunities to complete this requirement.

### Completion of a Dissertation Proposal

Students are expected to successfully defend a dissertation proposal within one year of passing comprehensive examinations.

## Completion of Dissertation Research

Students are expected to successfully defend a dissertation within two years of successfully defending a dissertation proposal.

## Practicums

Students enroll in practicums to enhance teaching and teaching skills.

These courses have the same numbers as the internships. Zero-credit, one-semester practicums in research (SWGS 7800 Research Practicum) and teaching (SWGS 7801 Teaching Practicum) are required for all students in their advanced year of studies. The Research Practicum is a seminar-long supervised research experience. As a part of this practicum, it is expected that students will have had experience in more than one of the areas associated with conducting original research. The student must have taken the required courses in research methods to register for the research practicum. The Teaching Practicum is a seminar-long supervised research experience. As a part of this practicum, it is expected that students will have had experience in more than one of the areas associated with teaching a social work course. The student must be in or have taken the social education course.

## Statistics Course Waivers

Students may waive Statistics 1 and/or Statistics 2 by passing waiver examinations.

Statistics I and II are required courses in the doctoral program. To avoid redundancy in students' education, qualified students are allowed to waive these courses. The waiver application must be submitted to the director of the doctoral program. The instructor(s) for the course(s) for which the waiver(s) is(are) requested will review the application(s) and decide whether the waiver(s) is(are) approved.

Please note that waivers do not apply to students who receive transfer credit, which is given at the time of admission. Waivers are for students who are not eligible for transfer credit, but believe they may have fulfilled the statistics requirement by having taken graduate-level courses. Students who fail Statistics I or Statistics II may not request a waiver in lieu of re-taking either course.

A student must take a data analysis course(s) **outside of the Graduate School of Social Service** to replace the credit hours for each of the Statistics I and II courses for which a waiver is approved. A data analysis course may be an advanced statistics course (e.g., Advanced Regression Analysis, Path Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling) or a course on qualitative data analysis (e.g., Content Analysis, Narrative Analysis, Linguistic Analysis).

Research design courses, either in quantitative or qualitative methods, may not be used to meet this requirement. The number of credits of advanced data analysis courses must be equal to the number of credits for which a waiver is received (i.e., 3 credits if only Statistics I is waived and 6 credits if both Statistics I and II are waived). Prior approval of the advanced data analysis course(s) taken in the event of a waiver of Statistics I and/or II must be obtained from the director of the doctoral program.

## Waiver Criteria

To waive Statistics I or Statistics II, students must have received a grade of B or better in an equivalent statistics course. This course must have been completed within the past five years. Applications for all waivers must be verified by a check of the transcript by the director of the

doctoral program. Students are notified of a decision as soon as possible so they can enroll in another course if they qualify for the waiver.

## Application Procedure

1. Applications are submitted to the director of the doctoral program for review. A separate application must be completed for Statistics I and for Statistics II.
2. After verifying that the student has received a grade of B in a statistics course that was taken within the past five years, the director of the doctoral program will send the application to the statistics course instructor.
3. The statistics course instructor will notify the student and director of the doctoral program of the decision.

## Comprehensive Examinations

### Purpose

The student will demonstrate mastery of a substantive area of social work or social welfare and the ability to design an empirical study. Demonstration of that knowledge will require the student to integrate and synthesize empirical and theoretical knowledge; critically analyze the existing research, including substantive gaps and methodological weaknesses in the research; and discuss the implications of the study the design on practice and policy.

Successful completion of the comprehensive paper and all course work allows students to proceed to the dissertation.

### Comprehensive Exam Paper

The student will develop a comprehensive exam paper. The student will work independently on the paper without consultation from any other person. The University's academic honor code applies to this comprehensive exam paper. The guidelines on plagiarism, including citing sources, paraphrasing, and the use of direct quotations found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) should be followed. The paper will integrate policy, practice, theory, and research evidence concerning a substantive area of social work or social welfare. The paper will:

- a) identify a substantive area of social work or social welfare
- b) integrate discussion of the theories, policies, and social work practices associated with the identified substantive area of social work or social welfare
- c) critically analyze the existing research, including substantive gaps and methodological weaknesses in the research
- d) identify research question(s) critical for the advancement of knowledge in the identified substantive area of social work or social welfare;
- e) develop a research proposal for an empirical study that addresses the research questions;
- e) contain an appendix containing a systematic literature review focused on the identified research questions.

The comprehensive paper will be a maximum of 25 pages, not including the references and appendix.

### Comprehensive Paper Proposal

Students will submit a proposal for the comprehensive exam paper. The paper proposal must be approved before beginning work on the paper.

There are three deadlines for submission of comprehensive exam paper proposals: September 1, December 1, and May 1.

Students will receive feedback on the proposal within three weeks after submission. The paper is due four months after receiving approval for the proposal.

The proposal will include the following:

1. Problem statement, description of the substantive area of social work or social welfare that will be the focus of the paper, and its relevance to social work
2. List of references cited in the proposal in APA format

The length should be a maximum of three pages, excluding the reference list.

## Comprehensive Paper Structure

The page ranges here are suggestions within the maximum of 25 pages, not including the references and appendix.

1. **Definition and scope** of the topic (including main subtopics (1 to 2 pages))
2. **Synthesis** of existing policy, practice, and empirical and theoretical literature (organized according to the subtopics) (14 to 17 pages)
3. **Strengths and limitations** of the literature on this topic:
  - a. Methodological issues
  - b. Research questions addressed
4. **Future research** (1 to 2 pages)
  - a. Topics to be addressed
  - b. Methodological issues to consider
5. **Research Proposal** (3 to 4 pages)
  - a. Research questions and study aims (1 to 2 pages)
  - b. Methodology (using correct terminology throughout) (3 to 4 pages)
    - i. Study design (including name of design, unit of analysis)
    - ii. Sample (including target population, study population, sampling plan, eligibility criteria)
    - iii. Measures (including independent variables, dependent variables, potential confounding variables, and other key variables)
    - iv. Data collection strategy
    - v. Data analysis plan
    - vi. Strengths and weaknesses of the methods with respect to the study aims
6. Practice and policy implications (1 page)
7. Appendix
  - a. References
  - b. Systematic literature review using the table and guidelines in Appendix B

## Oral Defense

An oral defense will be conducted within three weeks of the submission of the comprehensive exam paper.

## Comprehensive Exam Paper Committee

The Comprehensive Exam Paper Committee will consist of two faculty members. The committee will be responsible for approval of the proposal, the final paper, and the oral defense.

## Timeline

- *Comprehensive exam paper proposal approval*: The comprehensive exam proposal must be approved within one semester after completing course work.
- *Proposal revision*: If the Comprehensive Exam Paper Committee requests revisions, these must be submitted within three weeks. A maximum of one revision is allowed.
- *Comprehensive paper submission*: The comprehensive exam paper must be submitted within four months after approval of the proposal.
- *Comprehensive paper revision*: If revisions of the paper are requested, these must be submitted within three weeks. A maximum of one revision is allowed.
- *Oral comprehensive exam paper defense*: The oral defense will be conducted with three weeks of submitting the paper or revised paper if applicable.
- *Comprehensive exam paper decision*: Students will receive a decision about the comprehensive exam within two weeks after the oral defense is conducted.
- **Note**: The proposal and completed paper should be submitted to the director of the doctoral program by 5 p.m. of the due date.

## Comprehensive Exam Paper Grading Rubric

Students must earn an average score of 3 to pass the comprehensive exam. A score of 4.5 or higher is a "high pass." If students do not earn an average score of at least 3 on both the written paper and oral defense, they may submit a revision within one month.

The quality of the review/proposal is evaluated using the scale below, with 1 indicating the poorest and 5 indicating the highest possible rating. Descriptive anchors are provided to facilitate rating.

## Instructions for Systematic Literature Review

Conduct a literature review on the specific topic and subtopics described in the paper. Specify the search terms you used, the bibliographic databases included in searching for the articles, and the eligibility criteria that you used for selecting the articles.

Include 10 studies. Choose the studies most relevant to your topic. If there are more than 10 studies, choose those that are most rigorous and recent.

NOTE: In the comprehensive exam paper, the systematic literature review does NOT include conducting a meta-analysis. Existing meta-analyses can be incorporated into the systematic literature review. The following should also be provided:

- Search terms used
- Bibliographic databases searched: Inclusion criteria for studies

## Dissertations

### Overview

The final requirement for achieving the doctoral degree in social work is the completion and satisfactory defense of a research study which reflects the student's mastery of the research process, and which makes a contribution to knowledge. There are many models that a dissertation may follow. Copies of dissertations of GSS graduates can be accessed via the Fordham library database (Dissertations & Theses @Fordham). Dissertations are usually a highly detailed and technical investigation

of some particular problem, concept, or method, carried out on either a quantitative and/or qualitative basis.

Whether quantitative or qualitative, the study should reflect:

1. A defined source of data which allows one to generalize or develop a broader understanding beyond the particular cases being studied
2. Use of a clearly defined research procedure
3. Exploration of the interrelationship of key variables in a controlled or systematic manner. In all instances, the dissertation must represent an independent contribution to knowledge in the field of social work or social welfare. While the research may be part of a larger project undertaken by a team of investigators, the document offered for the degree must represent work for which the student has taken major responsibility in design, methods, research implementation, and interpretation.

Dissertation proposals for data analysis of an existing data set (for which study design, selection and operationalization of measures, and data collection have been completed) must meet exceptionally high standards for originality of the study aims, contribution to the field, and sophistication of data analysis.

In addition to constituting a contribution to knowledge, a dissertation is expected to demonstrate a student's mastery of content in their area of specialization.

The student is expected to adhere to standards of scholarship and to demonstrate competence in appropriate problem, question, or hypothesis formations, development of design, data collection and analysis, drawing of sound conclusions and/or inferences, and preparation of an accurate and clear report. It is most important that students maintain professional standards for scholarship and research as delineated in the NASW Code of Ethics. Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense and materials quoted from other writers should be clearly attributed to the correct author. More information about acceptable social work academic practice in this area can be found in the American Psychological Association (2020) and Szuchman and Thomlison (2012).

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.)*. Washington, DC ISBN 13: 978-1433832178 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>

Szuchman, L.T. and Thomlison, B. (2012) *Writing with Style: APA Style for Social Work (4th Edition)* Brooks Cole: San Francisco, CA ISBN-13: 978-0840031983

## Dissertation Proposal

As the student proceeds through the course of study, consideration should be given to identifying areas or topics of interest that might be studied in depth in the dissertation research process. The student's faculty advisor, as well as individual course instructors, is available for discussion regarding this initial consideration of a research topic.

The proposal to be prepared for faculty committee review and approval should be a detailed description of the topic of study, in the context of existing knowledge, the methodology planned, and timetable. The faculty committee may require alteration in the proposal that has been developed in the seminar course. Students should consult Appendix F for an outline for the dissertation proposal. While the particular format of the proposal should be determined by the student and their committee, all items in the outline should appear in the proposal.

The student is required to choose a mentor/chair and other committee members with earned doctorates when the student first begins to work on the proposal. When the mentor and the student believe that the proposal is ready for the Dissertation Proposal Review, the review will be scheduled and the doctoral office notified of the time and participants.

The doctoral candidate shall prepare a proposal following the outline in the next section.

## Dissertation Proposal Review

Students and proposal committees should review the University's IRB procedures during proposal development. The student and dissertation chairperson will have to complete the CITI Protection of Human Subject online training before submission of study's protocol to the IRB for review. To obtain the application forms and access IRB resources, the students will need to log in to Mentor IRB—this online system manages IRB protocols.

The University's IRB website provides detailed information on how to access the Mentor IRB system.

A copy of the proposal must be distributed to the Dissertation Review Committee at least two weeks prior to the scheduled proposal defense. This Committee consists of the candidate's Dissertation Committee (mentor, another Fordham faculty member, outside member), an additional Fordham faculty member who has not been involved with the proposal preparation (this person is selected from the School's faculty by the doctoral program director), and the director of the doctoral program (ex officio).

The Dissertation Proposal Review will be scheduled for two hours. The format of the proposal review will be determined by the Committee and the candidate. In general, the candidate will present the planned research. The candidate is encouraged to use visual aids (e.g., overhead projector or PowerPoint) and/or handouts. The formal presentation will be followed by a question and answer period between the members of the Dissertation Review Committee and the candidate. The candidate will then leave the meeting and the Dissertation Review Committee will have 20 minutes to come to a decision.

The decision (Accept, Accept with Minor Revisions, Accept with Major Revisions, or Reject) will represent the majority opinion of the Dissertation Review Committee. The chair of the Dissertation Review Committee will document the decision and distribute it to the other Committee members within one week of the defense. The Committee members may submit revisions to the chair within one week after receiving the written decision.

The chair will then provide the candidate with the written decision of the Committee. The chair may provide oral feedback to the candidate following the defense.

Other faculty members and students may attend the formal presentation and question-and-answer parts of the proposal defense as nonparticipating observers.

## Dissertation Chair and Committee

The Dissertation Committee will continue to work with the student after the proposal is approved and accepted. In some cases, the student may want to have a non-faculty member on the committee because of this person's expertise in the topic or area of the research. If the person does not have an earned doctorate and is not a member of a university faculty, then such a person can be added as a fourth member of the committee.

The Dissertation Committee's function is to assist the student in carrying out the research design and in the writing of the dissertation. As materials are developed, they should concurrently be submitted to the chair and to the other two members of the committee for review. The student may be required to make modifications in the design of the study as the committee advises. The chair may call meetings of the committee when indicated. The chair with the approval of other committee members also schedules the oral defense.

The mentor should inform the doctoral director at the end of each semester about the progress of each student in completing their dissertation.

## Dissertation Defense

When the chairperson, in consultation with other committee members, decides that the dissertation is ready for defense, they will arrange a time for the defense to take place. At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of oral defense, final typewritten copies of the dissertation must be submitted to the Dissertation Committee chair and other committee members.

The chairperson of the Dissertation Committee serves as the chair of the defense meeting, guiding and focusing the discussion so that the student's scholarship and research abilities can be accurately and fairly evaluated.

When the student's defense has been completed, he or she will be asked to wait while the committee members confer and reach a conclusion as to whether or not the defense has been satisfactory.

The student will then be invited to rejoin the committee, be informed by the chairperson as to the committee's decision, and if indicated, be given a verbal explanation of the reasons for an unsatisfactory rating, areas needing re-doing or modifications, or other problems.

When the defense has been satisfactory, the approval form should be signed by all committee members, and given to the director of the doctoral program.

In cases where the defense has been unsatisfactory, the director of the doctoral program should be notified immediately. When a student's defense is rated unsatisfactory, or when major modifications are required, the chairperson should prepare a written statement outlining the reasons for the rating, areas requiring modifications, or other problems and make this available to the student as soon as possible.

Students may require consultation on methodological or substantive issues that are not available from the faculty at the Graduate School of Social Service. Students are responsible for obtaining any outside consultation necessary to complete the dissertation.

## Final Preparation of Dissertation

After successful defense, when any necessary corrections have been made, the chairperson must give final approval that dissertation standards have been met. Following this final review, the student must prepare the dissertation to be deposited electronically. Instructions for this procedure are available from the director of the doctoral program. Dissertations must conform to the APA style manual. Each final copy should have a title page, an abstract of not more than 350 words and a statement of acceptance signed by all committee members. When the dissertation is deposited, students must complete a Survey of Earned Doctorates Questionnaire and prepare a separate abstract to be deposited with Social Work Abstracts.

## Deadline for Dissertation Completion

Students have a maximum of eight to 10 years (for full-time and part-time students respectively) of active involvement as matriculated students in which to complete all work for the degree, including the writing and successful defense of a dissertation.

If a student is actively engaged in completing the dissertation and needs a brief extension of the deadline, that student may apply in writing to the director, who will review the request with the Doctoral Curriculum and Policy Committee, where a final decision will be made.

## Outline for Dissertation Proposal

- **Table of Contents**
- **Abstract**
  - 250-word or less description of the proposal's goals and specific aims
- **Literature Review**
- **Study Hypothesis**
- **Problem Statement/Rationale**
  - Should state in a clear, precise way what is the problem to be studied, why it is important, and how the proposed project will contribute to social work knowledge. The hypothesis or major questions to be answered by the dissertation should also be included.
- **Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Model**
  - This very important section should provide a detailed review of the theoretical frame of reference being used in carrying out this study. Included must be a detailed review of the literature and research related to the topic. It should represent a synthesis of the state of the art in the topic area. References should be appropriately footnoted.
- **Proposed Methodology**
  - This section should include five subsections:
    - Data analysis plan
    - Sampling plan
    - Study design
    - Data collection plan
    - Measures

The student must describe the proposed research methods to be used in the study, including why they are believed to be appropriate approach. Also, the sources of data, the sampling procedure, and the limitations on generalizability of the study need to be defined. If a qualitative approach such as a case study is used, appropriate methodology should be specified as outlined in standard qualitative texts. The student should define the proposed sample size as well as the number of subjects who will be available. Any agreements that have been obtained that will assure access to the study sample should be specified.

In terms of the instruments, the variables in the study and how data on them will be collected, must be indicated. If using measures developed by others, the student should indicate how they were previously used, and any studies of validity and reliability, which have been done. If the student is going to construct his or her own measures, reasons why they are preferred should be stated; also, how it is proposed to pretest the measures, check for reliability, and for validity. Whenever possible, the student should provide as an appendix, a draft of the instrument, indicating why the data collection method chosen seems

most appropriate to the task. When using a qualitative approach, the nature of interview guides should be specified ways in which authenticity and genuineness of the data is preserved.

The steps planned to be taken to assure the protection of human subjects in the study should be stated. The doctoral program's administrative assistant should be consulted for all appropriate guidelines.

- **Plan for Analysis**

- In this section, the plan for analysis of the data to be collected should be detailed. If statistical tests are to be used, the student should indicate tentative thoughts on what the approach will be as well as what tentative bivariate and multivariate analysis will be undertaken
- Dummy tables for this may be used if desired. The student should be sure to show how the proposed analysis will answer the study questions (hypotheses) which have been posed. If content analysis of narrative data is used, the approach taken should be specified.

- **Timeline**

- A Gantt Chart detailing the major steps in the work and the approximate times of completion should be developed.

- **Supporting Documents**

- If proposing to work within an agency, a letter from the appropriate agency person, indicating the agency's willingness to give access to study subject and/or case records, should be included.

Examples of previous dissertations are available in the library. *Social Work Research and Abstracts* has a yearly review of all dissertations completed in the field of social work. Review of other appropriate abstracts and journals relating to the specific area may also be included.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**

Students will also be required to receive IRB approval before proceeding with dissertation research. Study protocols for IRB review are submitted electronically. Electronic submission is done on the University's IRB website. All study protocols must receive IRB approval. IRB policies and procedures for determination of the type of review a particular study will require are found on the University's IRB website.

## **Research Award**

A research award is presented annually to a Ph.D. graduate that has prepared the year's most outstanding dissertation. The awardee's name appears in the commencement program and includes an honorarium.

### **Eligibility**

Any student graduating between August of the previous year and May of the current academic year is eligible to receive the award.

### **Procedure**

The chair of a student's dissertation committee must nominate a student for the award and must submit to the doctoral program director an electronic copy of the student's dissertation. Nominations for the award must be received by the doctoral program director by April 1.

Two faculty members named by the program director will review the submitted dissertations. They will inform the program director of their decision by April 15. The winner of the award will be announced at the School's commencement exercises.

## **Criteria**

The faculty members will use the following criteria when making their decision:

1. **Originality and Contribution:** The reviewers will consider the importance of dissertation's subject matter, the contribution the study makes to our knowledge base, and the significance of the findings for social work practice and/or social policy.
2. **Study Design:** Factors including the design's rigor, appropriateness, and implementation will be considered.
3. **Quality of Scholarship:** How well is the study anchored in the extant literature? How well are the study's conceptual and theoretical foundations developed?
4. **Descriptive Clarity:** How well is the study rationale described? Are procedures, research questions, study rationale, etc. clearly described? Could the study be replicated readily?
5. **Depth and Breadth of Analysis:** Is the student's thinking clearly explicated? Does the student consider a range of possible explanations? How well does the student develop the implications of the study and its findings, including its strengths and limitations?
6. **Written Quality of the Dissertation:** Is the dissertation organized well? Does it follow acceptable formatting and style guidelines?