SOCIAL WORK, MSW

MSW Program

The goal of the master of social work program of the University of Alabama School of Social Work is to educate social workers for advanced practice with an emphasis on public and non-profit social services and on community advocacy. The goal encompasses education for advanced practice in specific types of direct practice and in program assessment and administration, advocacy, and policy and reform roles. The program emphasizes preparation for practice specifically intended to benefit disadvantaged or oppressed people at the state and regional levels, and the program provides opportunities for students to prepare for practice based on this commitment at the national and international levels.

Building on the professional social work foundation, and within a focused area of study, the program prepares graduates:

• for advanced social work practice in an area of concentration
• who will provide leadership in planning, administering, delivering, and evaluating social services
• who will advocate for social causes and justice, and work on reform efforts
• who will demonstrate a commitment to practice and service to benefit poor, oppressed, and other socially disadvantaged people, and to work toward the elimination of poverty, oppression, and discrimination
• who value human diversity and display sensitivity to the uniqueness, commonalities, and richness of cultures and their constituents
• who are committed to the values and ethics of social work
• who engage in a continuous process of professional development through systematic inquiry, analysis, reflection, and participation in organized professional educational opportunities
• who will contribute to the development of the profession of social work within the state, region, and nation and/or international communities

Curriculum

The MSW program is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The curriculum follows the curriculum policy requirements of the Council on Social Work Education and provides a balanced, integrated approach that includes a professional foundation and a choice of concentrations. The professional foundation curriculum taken the first year consists of coursework in the following:

• Social work practice. This area of the curriculum is designed to provide practice knowledge and competencies in working with individuals, groups, families, communities, and organizations.
• Human behavior and the social environment. This area of the curriculum helps the student to understand the whole person and the process of growth, change, adaptation, social functioning, and disfunctioning in the environmental context, including family, groups, formal organizations, and communities. Courses in this area cover prenatal stages through the process of aging.
• Social welfare policy and services. This area of the curriculum is designed to help the student identify, appraise, analyze, and understand social change in its dynamic perspectives; the role and responsibility of social work as a profession in influencing social policy; and the delivery of service to individuals and society.
• Research methods. This area of the curriculum is designed to help the student understand social work and related research and the use of research for the improvement of services to individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.
• Field education. This area of the curriculum provides opportunities for students to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, and values in a social work practice context.

MSW Curriculum Themes

The MSW program emphasizes the following five themes underpinning the foundation and the concentration year objectives:

• Life Course Perspective: Social workers understand that the growth and development of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities are influenced by a range of psychological, social, historical, political and economic factors. The interaction of these factors with life events and life transitions contribute to the subsequent outcomes. This theme also serves as the conceptual framework for the entire MSW curriculum.
• Valuing Diversity: Social workers value and work respectfully with people who are different from themselves.
• Critical and Reflective Thinking: Critical and reflective thinking that challenges assumptions, and that is based on evidence to arrive at creative solutions, is the basis for competent social work practice.
• Evidence-Based Practice: Social workers favor interventions with demonstrated effectiveness. They are prepared to carefully evaluate practice and program outcomes.
• Services to the Poor and Underserved: Alabama’s poor and underserved receive social services primarily from public and non-profit social service agencies. Social workers must be prepared to practice in these contexts and to challenge social injustice.

MSW Program Foundation Objectives

Foundation Year MSW students will demonstrate the ability to:

• Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.
• Understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles, and practice accordingly.
• Practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills related to clients’ age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race religion, sex, and sexual orientation.
• Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and apply strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social and economic justice.
• Understand and interpret the history of the social work profession and its contemporary structures and issues.
• Apply the knowledge and skills of generalist social work perspective to practice with systems of all sizes.
• Use theoretical frameworks supported by empirical evidence to understand individual development and behavior across the life span and the interactions among individuals and between individual and families, groups, organizations, and communities.
• Analyze, formulate, and influence social policies.
• Evaluate research studies, apply research findings to practice, and evaluate their own practice interventions.
• Use communications skills differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities.
• Use supervision and consultation appropriate to social work practice.
• Function within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems and seek necessary organizational change.

Concentration Objectives
• In professional social work intervention with children, youth, and their families, or adults
• and their families, students will demonstrate:
• The ability to effectively apply selected models and methods of advanced social work practice, consistent with social work values and ethics, with an emphasis in public and non-profit social services.
• The ability to use reflectively the theoretical approaches and knowledge bases underlying their practice with particular attention to the life course perspective.
• The ability to evaluate their own practice.
• The ability to analyze the impact of social welfare policies on clients and practice situations.
• The ability to practice in ways that are culturally and gender appropriate with low income persons and with those who have experienced social and economic injustice.

Degree Requirements
The master of social work (MSW) degree will be awarded to the student who has met the following requirements:

• Successful completion of 60 hours of approved courses including field education or 42 hours for students admitted with advanced standing
• Evidence of the capacity to perform in all aspects of the student’s educational program at a satisfactory and responsible level, as judged by the faculty, and promise of further professional development (see the Master’s Degree Program Student Handbook for further details)
• Students are expected to demonstrate writing proficiency at a graduate level. Writing skills may be evaluated through specialized assignments in foundation or advanced-standing courses, or through a proficiency examination. The student may be required to attend tutorial sessions until proficiency is demonstrated.

Time Limit Requirement
Work toward the MSW degree must be completed within four calendar years from the time the first class is taken.

Additional information concerning transfer of credit, time limit and all other Graduate School degree requirements is in the Degree Requirements section of this catalog.

Program Requirements
First-year Foundation Core Requirements
The professional foundation year of core courses prepares students to use a range of social work knowledge, methods, and skills to facilitate change within a continuum of client systems, from individual to societal. Field education in the foundation year is generic in focus, exposing students to a wide range of clients and programs.

First-Year Required Courses
Note: The timing of first-year foundation courses in may vary slightly depending on the program, but the foundation courses must be completed before second year (concentration year) courses are undertaken.

First Year

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<th>Course</th>
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<tr>
<td>SW 500</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SW 511</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>SW 510</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SW 570</td>
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<td>SW 540</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SW 534</td>
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<td>SW 541</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SW 590</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW 542</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Two Year Programs
The School offers a traditional weekday program in Tuscaloosa, a Saturday program in Tuscaloosa that provides students the opportunity to complete first-year classroom coursework on Saturdays, and a primarily online program. The Saturday program offers first-year (foundation-year) courses each year in Tuscaloosa. The primarily online program offers most courses in an online format, with face-to-face practice skills labs required for some classes. The practice labs are offered on weekends in regionally convenient locations in Alabama. The second-year (concentration year) courses are not available on Saturdays. All students are required to complete a 500-clock-hour field education experience in the spring. For all programs, at least 16 hours per week of field education experience must be completed during customary work days and hours (M-F, 8:00am to 6:00pm).

Advanced-Standing Program
Students admitted with advanced standing must complete 12 hours of coursework preceding the second year (concentration year) of the MSW program.

Required Courses—Advanced-Standing Program
(Spring or Summer Prior to Second Year of MSW Program)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW 576</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW 577</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW 578</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW 579</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
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Hong Kong Courses
The School of Social Work, under contract with Hong Kong Shue Yan University, allows students to complete the first year of the master’s degree program in Hong Kong. All standards and policies of the School of Social Work and the Graduate School, including admissions requirements, apply to students taking these courses.

Challenge Examinations
The master of social work program permits admitted MSW students to demonstrate a mastery of specific course content areas by passing a challenge examination. Challenges are permitted in the areas of policy, research, and human behavior. Thus, students in the advanced program may request to challenge SW 576 Intermediate Research, SW 577 Human Development and Social Systems, and/or SW 578 Social Welfare Policy and Delivery Systems. Students in either the Saturday program or the weekday program may request to challenge SW 500 Social Welfare Policy, SW 510 Human Behav Social Envir I, and/or SW 570 Research-Informed Practice. A student who successfully challenges a course will be permitted to take a substitute course in lieu of the required foundation course. The degree-hour requirements remain the same.
Field Education Placement Procedures

The major objective in the placement process is to match the student with the field education setting that offers the best potential for promoting the student's professional development. The School is responsive to personal factors related to location of placements and specific agencies, but it cannot assure an assignment tailored to personal situations. In accepting admission to the School and registering in the MSW program, the student has agreed to accept field education placements assigned by the School of Social Work.

Students who are employees of organizations that meet the School's criteria for field education agencies and that agree to the School's requirements may apply to the Field Education Coordinator to arrange a placement with that agency as one of the required field education experiences.

Field education placements are available in the Tuscaloosa area and throughout the state. Students are responsible for arranging transportation and paying any expenses related to field education. Students may not enroll in field education unless they have completed the required courses for the year in which they are enrolled, or unless they are concurrently enrolled in those courses. A student who has a grade of "I" on his or her record will not be allowed to enroll in field education.

A student who is unable to meet minimum standards in field education may be dropped from field education at any time. A student dropped from field education is also discontinued from other courses requiring concurrent enrollment in field education.

Washington, D.C., Placements

The MSW program provides the opportunity for students to complete the second-year field education requirement and other specific program requirements in Washington, D.C. These placements offer special opportunities to obtain field education experience not ordinarily available in Alabama.

Electives

All students must complete 9 hours of electives. Electives may be taken at any time after admission into the program (i.e., interim term, summer, fall, or spring semesters), if prerequisites are met. Electives may include, if openings exist, required courses from the other concentration. If an emphasis in Program and Agency Administration is desired, two of the three electives must include SW 506 Planning and Program Development and SW 536 Social Service Program and Agency Administration. Electives may also be taken outside of the School of Social Work with advisor approval. Students are encouraged to consult their advisors to plan their academic programs.

Second-Year Concentrations

The curriculum stresses specialized knowledge; the ability to understand complex theories, methods, and models of social work practice; and the ability to apply knowledge and skills differentially in the process of selecting alternatives in all levels of practice. The purpose of the second, or concentration, year of the social work curriculum is the preparation of social workers for advanced practice in one of two concentrations: Social Work with Children Adolescents, and their Families or Social Work with Adults and their Families. An emphasis on Program Planning and Administration (PAA) is available with either of the concentrations. The concentration year is built on a liberal arts perspective and professional foundation content, with particular emphasis on populations at risk.

Each concentration includes two required courses, the opportunity for three electives (which can be courses from other concentrations), and a field education placement related to the concentration. Two other courses are required during the second or concentration year: SW 525 Evaluation Research and SW 501 Social Welfare Advanced Policy Analysis. Students have the opportunity, in collaboration with their academic advisors and depending on course availability, to tailor their concentrations to reflect their own preferences. An emphasis in Program and Agency Administration in either concentration requires that students complete:

- a. SW 506 Planning and Program Development,
- b. SW 536 Social Service Program and Agency Administration, and
- c. a field education placement that provides and opportunity to implement the knowledge gained in these two courses.

The School reserves the right to alter the concentration requirements as necessary.

Advanced-Standing Program Students are required to take the following concentration year courses:

### Required Courses for ALL Concentrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW 525</td>
<td>Evaluation Research</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW 501</td>
<td>Social Welfare Advanced Policy Analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
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<td>15</td>
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### Required Courses for Social Work with Children, Adolescents, and their Families

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW 564</td>
<td>SW Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW 565</td>
<td>Social Work Practice in Child Welfare and Family Services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW 595</td>
<td>Field Education II</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
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### Required Courses for Social Work with Adults and their Families

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SW 532</td>
<td>Social Work Practice with Adults in Mental Health</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW 533</td>
<td>Models and Methods of Gerontological Social Work Practice</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW 595</td>
<td>Field Education II</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>11-15</td>
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Master’s Degrees

The primary purpose of master’s degree programs is to provide students with subject matter at an advanced level in their fields of study. Master’s degrees are designed to assist students either to continue their graduate studies or to meet the goals of their professions. In most cases, master’s programs also help students become familiar with methods of independent investigation.

### Program Requirements

Two plans are offered for the master’s degree:

**Plan I.** Candidates for the master’s degree under Plan I must earn a minimum of 24 semester hours of credit in coursework plus a minimum of 6 additional hours of thesis research hours, for a total of 30 hours.
Plan II. Candidates for the master’s degree under Plan II must earn a minimum of 30 semester hours of coursework credit and pass the comprehensive examination or complete a culminating or “capstone experience” as described under the Comprehensive Examinations section below.

Both plans require a minimum of 18 semester hours in the major subject. With the approval of the major department, the remainder of the coursework may be completed in either the major or a related field.

In some divisions and in many departments of the University, candidates are required to do their work under Plan I. Candidates working under Plan II may be required to participate successfully in seminar or problem courses that will give them an acquaintance with the methods of research and an appreciation of the place and function of original investigation in the field.

Residency Requirements
A student's program at the master's level must provide sufficient association with the resident faculty to permit individual evaluation of the student’s capabilities and achievements.

Graduate Credit
A student must be admitted to the Graduate School and must register as a graduate student in order to receive graduate credit. Approval for graduate registration must be obtained from program advisors prior to registration.

Graduate Credit for Noncredit Experiences
All course credit used toward a UA graduate degree must be taught at the graduate level. No graduate credit may be earned by correspondence study or for experiential learning not conducted under the direct supervision of graduate faculty of The University of Alabama. The UA does not offer graduate credit for noncredit workshops, seminars, continuing education experiences, professional development, internships, work/life experience, and so forth.

Transfer of Credit
Courses of full graduate-level credit earned in a regionally accredited institution where a student was enrolled in the graduate school may be submitted for review for inclusion in a master’s degree program. Evaluation of credit for transfer will not be made until after the student has enrolled in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama. Acceptance of credit requires the approval of the student’s advisory committee and the dean of the Graduate School. Credit will not be accepted for transfer from any institution at which the student failed to achieve a “B” average on all graduate work attempted. Only courses in which a student earned a “B” grade or better may be transferred.

In some cases, foreign educational credentials may not meet the Graduate School’s criteria for transfer of credit. It may be necessary for students in this situation to secure an evaluation of their credentials from World Education Services Inc. (WES), an external foreign credential evaluation service. Additional information on their services can be found at their website.

A student initiates at the Graduate School’s website a Request for Transfer of Graduate Credit earned at another institution. It is also the student’s responsibility to assure that the Graduate School receives an official transcript of the credit requested for transfer, well in advance of the final semester.

With the approval of the student’s department and the dean of the Graduate School, the greater of 12 hours or 25 percent of the required coursework for a master’s degree may be transferred from another institution. All credit toward the master’s degree, including transfer credit, must have been earned during the six years (18 fall, spring, and summer semesters) immediately preceding the date on which the master’s degree is to be awarded. Revalidation (recertification) of graduate credits that will be more than 18 semesters old at the time of UA master’s program completion is not an option.

Please note that some departments allow fewer than 12 hours of graduate transfer credit. Be sure to check with your department’s graduate coordinator regarding your department’s transfer policy.

400-Level Courses
A maximum of 6 semester hours of 400-level course credit may be accepted for a master’s degree program, but only if a form for Approval of 400-Level Course Work for Master’s Credit is approved by the Graduate School prior to the semester in which the 400-level coursework will be taken.

Time Limit
All requirements for the master’s degree must be completed during the six years (18 fall, spring, and summer semesters) immediately preceding the date on which the degree is to be awarded. There is no provision for an extension of the time limit beyond 6 years for master's students.

Admission to Candidacy
During the 2013-2014 academic year, the Graduate Council eliminated the master’s candidacy requirement. Departments may monitor master’s candidacy if they wish, but the Graduate School does not monitor it and will not accept master’s candidacy forms. Doctoral candidacy is not affected and remains an important doctoral program requirement.

Thesis
A thesis evidencing research capacity, independent thought, and the ability to interpret materials is required of all master’s degree candidates who pursue Plan I. The subject chosen must be in the major field and must be approved by the graduate committee of the major department or school and by the head of the student’s major department or division.

The final oral thesis defense is the culminating experience in the master’s program. As such, all members of the thesis committee are expected to attend and participate in real time. Virtual attendance via interactive video or teleconference is permitted for off-campus external committee members, but Tuscaloosa campus faculty should attend in person unless extraordinary circumstances dictate the need for virtual attendance.

Article Style vs. Journal Format

Article Style.
At the doctoral level, “article-style dissertations” are unified works that include several distinct but related studies of research or creative activity, each of which is of publishable quality. The University does not permit an “article-style thesis” to be presented for a master’s degree.

Journal Format.
A “journal-format thesis” is acceptable. Such a thesis follows the format of a particular journal in which the student and advisor want the thesis to be published. To prepare a journal-format thesis, the student uses the journal’s “information for authors” or similarly titled guidelines in conjunction with the Graduate School’s Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations.

A thesis committee must consist of at least three members appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. A form for Appointment or Change of Master’s Thesis Committee is used to request that the graduate dean appoint a thesis committee. The request normally is made as soon as
the successful defense of the thesis proposal has been completed. All members of a thesis committee must be members of the Graduate Faculty. The Committee Chair must be a full or associate member of the Graduate Faculty. One member must be from outside the student's major department. If the outside member is not a full or associate member of the UA Graduate Faculty (e.g., a highly qualified person from another university, a business or industry), the graduate dean needs to appoint that member by approving Temporary Graduate Faculty status for the specific purpose of serving on the student’s thesis committee. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances meriting approval by the graduate dean before the final oral defense of the thesis, all members of the thesis committee must attend the defense.

The candidate must give members of the examining committee a minimum of two weeks to read the thesis before the date of the final oral examination. A final oral examination is required of all students completing a thesis. All members of the thesis committee must be members of the UA graduate faculty and must attend the final oral examination unless there are extraordinary circumstances warranting the graduate dean's approval of the absence prior to the defense meeting.

As of August 15, 2009, all theses are submitted electronically rather than on paper. See the graduate school’s homepage for a link to information on Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) for details.

Theses must comply with the regulations set out in A Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations, available on the Graduate School’s website. Approval of the thesis by the graduate dean is necessary before graduation.

The thesis should be completed, if possible, while the student is in residence at the University. To request permission to complete a thesis in absentia, the student must, before leaving the University, submit a satisfactory outline of the thesis, as well as evidence that adequate facilities are available where the work will be done, to the head of the student's major department.

**Protection of Human Subjects for Research**

Scientific research involving human subjects has produced substantial benefits for society, but it also can pose troubling ethical questions. The mission of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Protection of Human Subjects is to ensure that research involving human subjects is conducted ethically. University and federal policies require that review and approval to use human subjects in research precede the research. In the case of thesis research that involves the use of human subjects, the principal investigator is responsible for contacting the college Human Research Review Committee to obtain approval for the planned research.

**Comprehensive Examinations**

In addition to the regular course examinations, a final comprehensive examination representing a "culminating" or "capstone" experience for a degree is required of all candidates for the master’s degree (except for those candidates pursuing the master of accountancy, the master of business administration, the master of library and information studies, the master of social work, and the master of tax accounting). The comprehensive examination is a culminating experience in which the student is expected to integrate prior learning. Each department, with approval of the Graduate Council, determines the most appropriate format. The various exams may consist of one or more of the following:

- a written and/or oral examination based on the content of the degree program;
- a thesis and final oral defense;
- a course requiring interpretation and integration of information from previous courses;
- a research paper, a "policy and practice" paper, or equivalent experience;
- a public performance or exhibition along with a contextualizing paper; and/or
- a practicum or internship.

If the comprehensive exam requirement is met with option 1 and/or 2 above, then the examining committee for comprehensive examinations must consist of at least three members of the graduate faculty from that department and appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. The examination must be given at least six weeks before the date of graduation (two weeks before for Plan II) and reported promptly to the dean of the Graduate School on appropriate forms. A final report, on the Master's/EdS Examination Form is on the Graduate School website. The form should be submitted when all examinations are completed. A student may take the final oral or written examination only twice. Failing the examination twice results in dismissal from the degree program and the Graduate School.

**Application for Graduation**

Each candidate for a master’s degree must apply for graduation through myBama no later than the registration period for the semester or the first session of the summer term in which requirements for the degree are to be completed.

**Second Master's Degree**

Six (6) semester hours of eligible credit from one master’s degree at The University of Alabama may be applied to the requirements for a second master’s degree, but only if the department of the second master’s agrees to the courses in the plan of study. Any hours from the previous master’s degree must have been earned during the six years (18 fall, spring, and summer semesters) immediately preceding the date on which the second degree is to be awarded. ***Please note that if a student double counts six hours between two master’s degrees, no hours may double count toward any additional master’s degrees.***