

SOCIAL WORK, PH.D.

PhD Program

The University of Alabama's Social Work PhD program prepares social work scholars who develop and disseminate knowledge. As with other members of the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE), our PhD program focuses on preparing scholars, researchers, and educators who will function as stewards of the discipline.

Specific goals of the PhD Program:

- To provide a rich, supportive environment that enables a diverse group of students to pursue and attain their academic and professional goals.
- To prepare social work scholars committed to social justice, advocacy, the social work profession, and those the profession serves.
- To equip students to produce quality research and engaged scholarship that effects meaningful change.
- To prepare students to translate research for use by relevant stakeholders.
- To prepare our graduates to be successful educators of future social workers.

The PhD Program builds on a base of professional knowledge and practice in social work. In addition to a rigorous grounding in research, the program offers students the opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of a selected area of focus and, through the dissertation, to contribute to knowledge development in that area.

Students are provided with in-depth study of research methodologies and methods supporting skill development necessary for the design of scientific investigations, data collection, management, and analysis, along with writing for publication. The PhD Program includes a strong research methods curriculum. In addition, students take substantive courses in theory and other topics and elective courses. As soon as they enter the program students begin working with the Program Director for program planning and guidance. PhD students select advisors to guide their professional development and dissertation research typically by the end of the first year of the program with the first year devoted to getting to know faculty.

Obtaining Information

Inquiries about the program should be to: The University of Alabama School of Social Work, PhD Program Office, Box 870314, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0314; telephone 205-348-0798; mtsiler@ua.edu.

Admissions

The School of Social Work determines eligibility for regular or "admission with permission to continue" admission partially on the basis of previous academic records, but also based on each applicant's unique Statement of Purpose and information from their references. Successful applicants must meet the minimum admission requirements of the Graduate School prior to consideration by the School of Social Work PhD Program.

School of Social Work PhD Program Admissions Requirements and Additional Information About Supporting Documentation:

- A master's degree in social work (MSW) or simultaneous separate applications to the UA MSW and PhD Programs to enter the Concurrent Program to work on the two degrees simultaneously.
- Letters from three references, one of whom must be a university professor or social work scholar who has personal knowledge of the applicant's intellectual and scholarly abilities. If the applicant has earned the MSW degree, at least one letter should be from a former instructor in the applicant's MSW program.
- A Statement of Purpose indicating the reasons the applicant wishes to pursue a PhD in social work and indicating the applicant's research interests. There is no standard length, generally, the statement ranges from 900 to 2,250 words in length.
- Evidence of scholarly writing ability, supported by evidence the applicant supplies (e.g., a sole-authored 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).
- In addition to the above program requirements, it is recommended that the applicant also possess a minimum of two years of employment experience in social work after earning the MSW degree.

Applicants seeking admission to the program who do not meet the above requirements may be considered on an individual basis for "admission with permission to continue". If an applicant desires such consideration, they should file all application materials as directed above. In addition to the materials required of all students, applicants seeking exception from admission requirements must notify the PhD Program Director by filing a specifically labeled "Petition for Exception" identifying from which of one or more requirements the exception is sought. In addition to identifying the specific requirement(s) from which exception is sought, applicants should provide information supporting the petition. After the application file is complete and referred to the social work PhD program by the Graduate School, the applicant may be invited to schedule an interview with the program director or other member of the admissions committee, in order to assess individually the applicant's qualifications for PhD 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. Please contact the School of Social Work PhD Program Director directly for questions about this possibility.

If seeking exception from the requirements, the applicant should be aware that they 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.

Concurrent Enrollment in the MSW and PhD Degrees Programs

The University of Alabama School of Social Work offers an MSW/PhD concurrent program for **truly exceptional** individuals who hold, or are candidates for, bachelor's degrees who have very strong academic credentials and aptitude for scholarly careers in social work. Such

individuals may be admitted simultaneously to the MSW and PhD programs and work on both degrees concurrently, following a strict, rigorous curriculum. 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 12 hours typically. The MSW degree will be awarded when all requirements for the MSW are completed, and the student will continue to work on the PhD requirements.

Successful applicants **must exceed the minimum admission requirements** of the Graduate School and the School of Social Work MSW and PhD programs.

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

Curricular Requirements

First Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
SW 601	1	SW 625	3
SW 620	3	SW 623	3
SW 640	3	SW 641	3
Statistics Course from among program approved sequences	3	Statistics Course from among program approved sequences	3
Elective	3		
13		12	

Second Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
SW 600	3	SW 624	3
SW 605	3	SW 627	3
SW 626	3	SW 628	3
Elective	3	Elective	3
12		12	

Third Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
SW 699	9	SW 699	9
Remaining coursework			
9		9	

Total Hours: 67

Transfer Credit

Graduate School information on Transfer Credit.

Doctoral Plan of Study Requirement

The Social Work PhD Program requires 50 hours of coursework. Specific requirements are as follows:

- Thirty-four semester hours of core social work courses, including a one-credit professional seminar.
- Nine semester hours in an electives supportive of a planned research area taken in or outside of the School of Social Work.
- A statistical research competency demonstrated by successful completion of an approved statistics two-course sequence.
- A dissertation showing the student's ability to conduct independent research that adds to the knowledge of the profession (includes a minimum of 18 hours of SW 699 Dissertation Research 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.

Comprehensive Exams

Upon completion of required coursework, students will take comprehensive exams. Exams will be offered two times during the academic year, near the end of the fall and spring semesters. To take exams, students must submit a "Comprehensive Exams Registration Form" to the PhD program office by the designated mid-semester date.

All students taking the exams at any given time will receive the same question options. Questions will require application of essential social work concepts and knowledge. Exam takers will receive three question options in each of three content areas: research, policy, and practice/theory.

The exams will take place over three days, with question options from one content area distributed to all exam takers at the same designated time each day. Exam takers will have four hours and 5 minutes to write and return a response electronically.

Exam takers may not consult with others (in other words, no digital or live communication with any other individuals, except the program chair or his or her designee) about the questions or the responses. Exam takers may rely on any other digital or written materials they desire to answer the questions (using appropriate APA citation style).

Questions will be written by members of the PhD committee or others invited by the program director. At each exam offering, the program director will solicit questions from committee members or others they designate and prepare the exam. Three faculty members will submit questions for each of the three areas.

The same three faculty members who submit questions for any content area or areas will grade the responses from the same area or areas or each response they grade, graders will submit a grade of "pass," "fail," "pass with distinction," or "Permission to Retake." Exam takers' identities will not be disclosed to graders nor will graders' identities be disclosed to exam takers. A student must receive a grade of at least "pass" from a majority of graders to pass each content area. If a student fails in any content area or areas, he or she will have one re-take opportunity following a grade of "fail".

Standards. In responding to examination questions, PhD students are expected to demonstrate a strong grasp of issues salient to the questions. Normally, this will involve demonstration of knowledge of theory, research findings, and relevant research methods. Answers should show that the student knows the literature well and should reflect the student's ability to critically summarize the important issues and conclusions in the literature. Further, the student should show evidence of the ability to integrate knowledge and to apply concepts.

Answers should be well written. Writing quality can obscure intended meaning. The clarity, specificity, relevance, integration, and application of knowledge demonstrated in the student's response are more important than the length of the response. The student must demonstrate the ability to apply relevant material to challenging questions with clearly-reasoned, well-informed responses that bear specifically on the point of the question. All sub-sections of each question should be specifically addressed. The student should exhibit mastery in each area: policy analysis/research, theory-informed research on practice, and research methods. **Mastery** means, among other things, that the student has command over essential information and can use

it to resolve issues and solve professional problems. Because the Comprehensive Examination is an important part of the educational experience, a high standard of performance is expected. It is understood that Comprehensive Examination question answers are, in a sense, first drafts, but nonetheless, strong written communication skills should be demonstrated.

Re-Examination. If a student fails one or more sections of the examination, those sections may be re-taken once in accordance with Graduate School policy. Faculty members selected by the PhD Program Director will write a new set of questions for each section to be re-examined. Any re-takes should take place at the next exam offering (at the end of the next fall or spring semester). **Results of the second examination will be final.** A second failure of any section of the Comprehensive Examination will result in dismissal from the PhD Program and the Graduate School will be notified of this decision.

Students who fail one or more parts of the Comprehensive Examination twice may submit a written petition to the PhD Program Director if they believe an exception should be made because of extenuating circumstances. PhD Program Committee members and the PhD Program Director will review the request and decide whether an exception is in order, in consultation with the Associate Dean for Academic Programs.

Admission to Candidacy Requirements

Following the successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination, the student will be admitted to Doctoral Candidacy.

Continuous Enrollment Policy

Graduate School information on Continuous Enrollment.

Dissertation Requirements

NOTE: It is **imperative** that all students take time to read and review the Graduate School Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) web page beginning at the dissertation proposal writing stage. This gives a step-by-step guide to the whole ETD submission process and answers nearly all of the questions that students have in regard to formatting and their ETD submission.

In particular, students *must* follow Graduate School guidelines regarding preparation of the dissertation. See *A Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, published by the Graduate School.

Doing so at the beginning of the proposal stage will facilitate later success.

When dissertations are rejected, it is usually because there are errors in document formatting and the preparation and inclusion of the preliminary pages. Candidates need to make time to review the required formatting and the sample preliminary pages on the Graduate School ETD website.

Dissertation Committee

After the student passes the Comprehensive Examination, they must focus on the dissertation proposal. The student should successfully defend the dissertation proposal within one calendar year of passing the comprehensive examination. The first step is to select a Dissertation Chair and the other members of the Dissertation Committee. The student consults with the Dissertation Chair regarding the composition of the committee. The Dissertation Committee must be composed of at least five members of the Graduate Faculty of the University. The Chair of the Dissertation Committee must be a Full Member of the School of Social Work's Graduate Faculty. At least two additional committee members must be members of the School of Social Work Graduate Faculty. At least one, and no more than two, members of the Dissertation Committee

must be from another division of The University of Alabama and one can come from another institution. Students should be sure that prospective committee members will be available for the anticipated duration of the dissertation research. The Dissertation Committee should include members who can guide the student's dissertation research, including experts in the student's substantive area of research specialization and experts in the research methods that the student will use, including a statistician if the dissertation research will involve the analysis of quantitative data or a qualitative data analysis expert if the research will involve qualitative or mixed methods.

Faculty members from other universities and other expert individuals may, at times, be appointed to dissertation committees. There should be clear and compelling rationale for such appointments and the faculty member must receive an *Affiliate Appointment* to the Graduate Faculty.

The curriculum vitae of each such proposed Dissertation Committee member must be submitted to the PhD Program Director who will advise the Dean of the School of Social Work to recommend appointment to the Graduate Faculty to the Dean of the Graduate School.

The composition of the proposed Dissertation Committee must be approved by the PhD Program Director, the Dean of the School of Social Work, and the Dean of the Graduate School. To compose or change the composition of the Dissertation Committee, the student does this through the Graduate Student Portal.

The dissertation is the major scholarly endeavor of the PhD experience. A broad range of subjects and methods can be used in the dissertation. All dissertations, however, should focus on issues of concern to social work so that the findings will have meaning and implications for social work. The dissertation is expected to contribute knowledge and to demonstrate the student's technical research skills and her or his mastery of the subject matter in the chosen area of specialization. The following list offers examples (but by no means constitutes an exhaustive list) of the range of dissertation options that would usually be considered appropriate. Exploration of the database *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global* using the search term "social work" offers insights to potential inquiry paths.

- **Social Policy or Program Evaluations.** Evaluations of on-going programs and existing policies using administrative records, field studies, interviews, survey data, or some combination of these and other types of data.
- **Case Studies.** Intensive analyses of persons, social groups, organizational components, or communities, with an emphasis on depth rather than breadth.
- **Theory Generation.** Use of qualitative methods, e.g., grounded theory, to generate theory.
- **In-depth Exploration.** Use of qualitative methods to explore conduct in-depth investigations of phenomena, concepts, ideas, and/or experiences.
- **Hypothesis-Formulation Studies.** Exploratory research of a quantitative or qualitative nature on problems or issues with little or no previous study. The goal is to formulate theories and hypotheses for future research. The state of development of relevant theory will determine the appropriate designs to be used.
- **Hypothesis-Testing Studies.** Research on problems that have received sufficient empirical and theoretical attention for clear hypotheses to be stated in advance. The main goal of the research would usually be to test these hypotheses with systematic quantitative data, as a step in the refinement of knowledge.

- **Methodological Studies.** Development, standardization, and validation of research tools such as scales for measuring phenomena of importance in social work. The constructs investigated in such studies should be grounded in theory.
- **Survey Research.** Use of purposive or random sampling techniques to investigate and/or to estimate the prevalence or intensity of various phenomena of interest to social work. These studies can include epidemiological studies, attitude surveys, and demographic analyses. All would attempt to make inferences about populations based on data collected from samples.

Dissertation Proposal

While the subject matter of proposals may vary greatly, there are certain elements common to all dissertation proposals. The proposal, whether for a monograph dissertation or a three-article dissertation, must have:

1. A clear statement of the research problem or area of investigation.
2. A comprehensive synthesis and summary of the relevant literature and prior research.
3. Unambiguous and comprehensive research procedures including, where applicable, a description of the data to be collected, how the data will be obtained, and a detailed description of how the data will be analyzed. This should include a draft of proposed instruments, interview or question protocols, document audit procedures, and scales. If appropriate, evidence of data availability from archived sources or agency records should be provided.
4. A description of units of observation (subjects, records), how they will be selected and accessed. If data will come from human participants, measures taken to ensure availability and provide for protection of rights and welfare along with informed consent should be described.
5. In the case of multiple-article dissertations, methods should be clearly and thoroughly described for all studies or all parts of the study planned for each article in the dissertation.
6. In the case of multiple-article dissertations, the proposal must include an introduction which introduces the common theme or framework, describes the articles, explains how they are related, and explains their expected significance. There must be connecting language to bridge each planned article description to the next. There must be a summary section that addresses the expected importance of the articles and discusses the potential implications of the overall product. This section should provide a clear description of how the parts of the project fit together.
7. Explication of potential risks or harm to human participants, where applicable, and steps that will be taken to minimize such risks. This will be important when preparing forms for submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All members of the UA community (students, faculty, staff) hold an obligation to adhere to Office of Research Compliance policies and procedures.
8. A timetable, including critical milestones and potential sources of delays.
9. A budget (if needed). This will be particularly important if a subsidy to defray dissertation costs will be requested from the UA Graduate School.
10. Potential results and the potential usefulness of the results for social work.
11. An outline and tentative table of contents for the dissertation.

12. The proposal should be concise and to the point. It should clearly demonstrate that the student has mastered subject matter, methodology, and the logistics of carrying out a major research investigation.

Institutional Review Board

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) of the US Department of Health and Human Services requires that any research that involves the collection of data from human participants must have approval from the UA Institutional Review Board (IRB). Guidelines, forms, and other information can be obtained by calling the Office for Sponsored Programs at (205)348-5152 or visiting the website.

Where students receive approval from the IRB a copy of the certification must be included in the dissertation as the final appendix.

Proposal Defense

When the student and the Dissertation Committee Chair believe the proposal is ready for defense, a Proposal Defense, or formal oral examination, will be scheduled. This meeting should be scheduled through the PhD Program Assistant well in advance, but at a minimum three weeks, of the time set in order for the Program Assistant to reserve space for the Proposal Defense. Copies of the defense-ready dissertation proposal must be provided to all committee members at least two weeks in advance of the oral defense. The student is responsible for presenting her or his dissertation proposal to the Dissertation Committee.

As a “working meeting” between the student and their committee members, the Dissertation Proposal Defense meeting can be conducted in various ways depending on the needs of the student and the preference of the Dissertation Committee Chair. The agenda may include a formal presentation by the student of their proposed project and then a discussion of the proposal by the committee with the student, but the formal presentation is not a requirement (e.g., committee members may be familiar enough with the project that no “reminding” may be necessary via a presentation).

A student, after discussion and agreement by their Dissertation Committee Chair, may invite guests for that portion of the meeting when the student presents details of their proposed project. If guests are invited, they will leave the meeting for the portion of the meeting where the student and the committee discuss the proposal and committee members offer feedback about the project to the student.

As a result of the defense process, the committee may find that the proposal is:

- *Acceptable* (without modification);
- *Acceptable* (with modification); or
- *Not Acceptable*

If the committee finds that the proposal is *Acceptable* (without modifications), the student may proceed with the dissertation research. If the committee finds that modifications are necessary, the student will be given a list of recommended changes for improvement of the proposal. The Dissertation Chair is responsible for seeing that these changes are made to the satisfaction of the committee. If the committee finds that the proposal is *Not Acceptable*, the Dissertation Chair will provide the student with a list of reasons for its unacceptability and a record of the Dissertation Committee’s vote. This document will be kept in the student file. If the proposal was *Not Acceptable*, the student must schedule another proposal defense.

A successful defense of the proposal is defined as an *Acceptable* vote (with or without modification) by a majority of the Dissertation Committee

members. After the defense, a copy of the approved dissertation proposal must be submitted to the Director of the PhD Program. The student should successfully defend the dissertation proposal within one calendar year of passing the comprehensive examinations.

General Outline of a Traditional Monograph Dissertation

The student should work closely with the Dissertation Committee, under the supervision and guidance of the Dissertation Chair. As with dissertation proposals, organization and content of dissertations may vary, especially across methods. Listed below are some suggested headings for chapters.

- **Chapter I. Research Problem.** A description of the question, issue, or phenomenon being investigated, including the research questions being addressed. Definitions of major concepts should be given. The significance of the project to social work should be discussed.
- **Chapter II. Theoretical Considerations.** The relevant literature should be described in detail. A conceptual framework synthesizing several theories or conceptual schemes may be developed. Hypotheses to be tested (if appropriate) should be discussed within the context of the existing literature.
- **Chapter III. Research Methods.** This chapter should contain a complete description of the research methods used in the study. It should be clear that these approaches were a direct result of the questions asked and/or hypotheses tested. The chapter should contain a description of the following:
 - the research design or general plan of approach;
 - sampling strategy, access to units of observation, and any sources of bias;
 - procedures;
 - instruments, scales, record audit procedures, protocols, or questionnaires, including information about properties such as reliability, validity, and inter-coder agreement (as relevant for respective research approaches);
 - data collection procedures;
 - data analysis procedures, and
 - Statement of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
- **Chapter IV. Results.** This section should present a complete description of the findings of the study. It should include a description of the sample, and, if appropriate, a description of how the sample was different from expectations. Findings should be specifically linked to the questions that were asked or the hypothesis that were tested in the research.
- **Chapter V. Interpretation and Summary.** This section should interpret the findings of the study with particular emphasis on the contribution made by the research. It should discuss implications for the profession and for other disciplines, if appropriate. It should also discuss limitations of the research and appropriate next steps in the overall research plan represented by the dissertation.
- **Appendices.** IRB documents, etc.

Three-Article Dissertation Option

For students who choose this option, the dissertation will include three manuscripts or articles. As with traditional dissertations, the work in a three-article dissertation must be based on research completed while the student is enrolled at The University of Alabama. For each article, the student must be the sole author.

The dissertation must reflect the student's original work. Each of the three papers will be of publishable quality, focusing on a single theme or framework. In one of the articles or across all three, the product must

include a comprehensive review of the literature, and the dissertation must illustrate an in-depth understanding of the unifying theme or framework. At least two of the articles must be empirical.

The product must include an introduction which introduces the common theme or framework, describes the articles, explains how they are related, and explains their significance. There must be connecting language to bridge each article to the next. There must be a summary section that addresses the importance of the articles, integrates the major findings, and discusses the implications of the overall product.

All parts of the dissertation must conform to the provisions set forth in the *UA Student Guide to Preparing Theses and Dissertations*, except when the circumstances of a specific project require deviation. Articles submitted to journals should follow the style requirements of the particular publications, but for the three-article dissertation, the articles must follow UA Graduate School guidelines with respect to formatting and presentation.

A maximum of one sole-authored article published or accepted for publication prior to the proposal defense may be included in a three-article dissertation. This article must represent work undertaken while the student was enrolled at UA and must be approved by the student's dissertation committee at the time of the proposal defense.

If a previously published article is approved by the committee, the student will be responsible for securing necessary permissions from the copyright holder, as the article will be reprinted as part of the dissertation.

As with traditional dissertations, students choosing this option will work with a dissertation committee of five members. In addition to the considerations included in a traditional review of a dissertation, the committee will be responsible for assessing whether the articles are of publishable quality, evaluating the quality of the integration into a unified theme, and evaluating the quality of the implications. Note also that the dissertation defense will be comprehensive; in addition to the component parts, it will focus on the entire dissertation.

Community-Friendly Dissemination of Dissertation Findings

In addition to the customary dissertation document, students who entered the SSW PhD Program in the Fall of 2020 and later, are required to also create a community-friendly document summarizing dissertation findings and implications. The community-friendly document itself, along with the plan for dissemination, should be included as an appendix to the dissertation.

The "document" could take a variety of forms including, but not limited to: an infographic, website, Facebook page, flyer, short report, slide presentation, video, and/or poster.

It could be distributed to a range of audiences including, but not limited to: research participants, community members, and/or social work students. It could be distributed through a variety of means including, but not limited to: electronic mail, postal mail, in-person meetings or presentations, and/or social media. When applicable, students should consult with research participants and/or community members about the format and distribution method.

The purpose of this requirement is to encourage students to adopt practices consistent with community-engaged research and social work values and ethics. Values reflected in the requirement include: (1) social work research should have relevance to community members, research participants, and others outside academia; (2) research participants and community members should be informed of research findings having relevance to their lives; and (3) research findings should be shared with participants.

Dissertation Defense

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the requirements and expectations laid out by the Graduate School and described in the *Graduate Catalog* related to dissertations, their defense, and other PhD degree requirements (<https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/academic-policies/degree-requirements/#doctoraldegreeext>), including initiation of the Public Notice of Defense Form (visit The Graduate Student Portal).

The student has the primary responsibility for determining their readiness to defend the dissertation. However, the dissertation defense should not be scheduled until the Dissertation Chair and members of the Dissertation Committee have indicated that the dissertation is ready to be defended. When the student, the Dissertation Chair, and the other members of the Dissertation Committee believe the time is right, the student and Dissertation Chair will arrange for the defense of the dissertation. This meeting should be scheduled through the Doctoral Programs Assistant well in advance, but at a minimum three weeks, of the time set in order for the Program Assistant to reserve space for the Defense. At least three weeks in advance of the defense, the Dissertation Chair should inform the PhD Program Director and the PhD Program Assistant, so the date and time of the defense can be publicized internally. Dissertation defenses will take place in Little or Farrah Hall unless compelling circumstances warrant that the defense takes place outside of Little or Farrah Hall (see section on virtual defenses below). Dissertation defenses are public, and thereby publicized, in accordance with University policy.

Copies of the dissertation, in complete and legible form, must be provided to all committee members *at least two weeks in advance* of the time selected for the oral defense. This version should, in substance and format, be presented as the final report of the dissertation research.

The Dissertation Committee will conduct an oral examination based on the copy of the dissertation the student has provided to them. When the defense is completed, the chairperson will poll the committee members for their recommendation. The decision will be either:

- *Acceptable* (if the committee determines that little or no revision of the manuscript is required).
- *Not Acceptable* (if the committee determines that major revisions are required before the dissertation can be considered acceptable).

In the case of a *Not Acceptable* recommendation, the Dissertation Chair will compile a complete list of detailed instructions/requested revisions from the various committee members, including whether or not another defense should be scheduled. The student should incorporate the recommendations into the dissertation as quickly as possible and, if needed, schedule another defense.

Virtual Defenses

In accordance with Graduate School Policy all members of a student's graduate committee are expected to attend and participate, usually in person, in any oral examination as part of the student's degree program. Traditionally, oral examinations are conducted with the student meeting their committee while gathered in one physical location on campus. However, the need occasionally arises for virtual participation in the oral examination. Under extenuating circumstances, a virtual defense may be possible based on the discretion of the Dissertation Chair in consultation with the PhD Program Director. In these cases, graduate programs must ensure adherence to the Graduate School policy regarding technical and attendance requirements if any graduate-level oral examination involving the student's partial or entire thesis/dissertation committee includes

virtual participation: <https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/academic-policies/degree-requirements/#doctoraldegreeext>

Following Successful Defense of the Dissertation

The PhD Dissertation Chair should alert the PhD Program Director of the successful defense so the Program Director can initiate the Committee Acceptance Form and publicize the successful defense. The notification to the PhD Director needs to include the following information:

- The student's name and email address,
- Date of the defense,
- Manuscript title,
- The name and email address for each regular committee member,
- The name and email address of the committee chair.

After the Dissertation Chair has notified the PhD Director, all committee members can sign the Committee Acceptance Form initiated by the PhD Program Director via the DocuSign process. The PhD Program Director will provide a final signature on the Committee Acceptance Form once the ETD confirmation notification is received by the PhD Program Director from the student.

If the student is unable to complete the dissertation prior to the deadline for regular commencement, the student may defend later in the semester, between semesters, or whenever the Dissertation Committee can be convened. After the successful defense and approval of the dissertation by the Dean of the Graduate School, a Certificate of Degree will be issued to potential employers, as needed. The official degree will be conferred at the next commencement. Other appropriate letters documenting completion of the degree will be written to assist the student in matters related to employment or credentialing.

Submission of the ETD

The final dissertation as approved by the dissertation committee and in the format required for ETDs must be submitted online to the Graduate School through the ProQuest/UMI submission portal. In addition, the student must complete the information about his or her degree and dissertation in the online submission. There is an easy step-by-step process to follow, simply go to the Graduate School ETD web pages to prepare for the process. It is very helpful to familiarize yourself with this process prior to the time when you need to engage with this process.

Graduate School Review

The final version of the dissertation must follow the requirements of the Graduate School for the preparation and submission of dissertations as stated in *A Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, published by the Graduate School and available on-line. **This section of the PhD Handbook contains cautions based on past experiences but does not contain complete information about the process.** The Graduate School provides complete information and students must consult and follow those policies and procedures.

In preparing to submit the dissertation to the Graduate School, the student should pay particular attention to the requirements listed under *Format*. The instructions contained in this section must be followed *exactly*. **Failure to do this can result in a considerable delay, perhaps even to the next semester.**

The results of the defense, and the dissertation, must be in the hands of the Dean of the Graduate School in accordance with Graduate School deadlines. The Graduate School determines the exact calendar deadlines for each semester; these are available online at the Graduate School website for Current Students. The student needs to pay attention to this information well in advance of at the beginning of the semester in which

they intend to graduate. **The student should be aware that she/he will be required to register for more dissertation credits if all paperwork is not completed by a certain date.**

The manuscript prepared by each student should be fully proofread and corrected *BEFORE* submission online to the Graduate School. It is the primary responsibility of the student for reviewing and proofing the document before submission. Some students engage external editors to help with this process.

As part of the submission the committee and the student must sign and certify that the electronic copy of the manuscript is a true copy of the final approved version. The PhD Program Director initiates the Committee Acceptance Form for the Electronic Thesis or Dissertation; **the thesis or dissertation cannot be accepted unless this form has been completed via the Graduate School's process.**

Each doctoral candidate must also submit to the Graduate School at the same time as the ETD is submitted a completed Publication Agreement Form. This is the publishing agreement between the student and UA and mirrors the Electronic Publishing Agreement the student completes online as part of the submission to ProQuest/UMI, UA's publishing partners. **Any embargo period selected MUST be the same on both of these publishing agreements; any inconsistencies will result in a rejection of the submission.**

Also, each doctoral candidate is required to complete an online NORC Survey of Earned Doctorates. Again, **unless and until this has been completed, the submission will be deemed incomplete and may be subject to rejection.**

The Graduate School then conducts a final editorial review of each master's thesis or doctoral dissertation to ensure that the general requirements of this manual and the student's style guide have been met. However, the primary responsibility for reviewing a thesis or dissertation has always belonged to the student and the thesis or dissertation committee.

The Graduate School's review focuses on **grammar** and **format** rather than the scholarly content, which is the responsibility of the student and committee.

The Graduate School reviews the following key areas:

- **Organization of the pages** – preliminaries are all present and in the correct order;
- **Format** - print font, margins, and page numbering are all correct;
- **Grammar and spelling** – the Graduate School will review the manuscript for spelling errors and to ensure that the sentences and use of English are grammatically correct;
- **References** – bibliographies will be reviewed to ensure that all references and quotations are included and correctly formatted;
- **Abstract** – this will be read to ensure that it satisfies the Graduate School requirements for length and content;
- **Table of Contents, List of Figures, List of Tables** – these will be reviewed to ensure that wording is consistent between table/list and main body of the manuscript; and
- **Publishing Agreement and Survey of Earned Doctorates** – the Graduate School will ensure that all necessary forms have been completed and signed.

If, in reviewing a manuscript, the Graduate School determines that major corrections must be made, the dissertation will be rejected for a more thorough editing and proofing by the student and the Committee

Chair. Thereafter, a changed pdf must be re-submitted using the online electronic submission process.

If the Graduate School requires minor corrections to the dissertation, the student will need to complete these within the deadline set by the Graduate School (typically 10 days) and create a changed pdf file for re-submission.

The student will be notified under either of the above instances via email, please make sure that the email address input to the UMI Administrator is current and valid as **ALL** ETD correspondence will be made using this address.

Once the dissertation has been approved by the Graduate School, the student will also receive confirmation via email.

Publication Requirements

You can make your work available either as soon as it is published under either of the above publishing options or place an embargo (delay) for one of the following periods of time: 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, or 5 years. The decision to place an embargo on your work must be made in conjunction with your committee advisor and funding agency.

Candidates must satisfy publication requirements by having their dissertations published online with ProQuest/UMI and through the University of Alabama Libraries. There is no charge for the Traditional Publishing option with ProQuest, and this is the recommended choice. Students will satisfy the requirement for wide dissemination of their material by publishing the ETD "Open Access" with UA Libraries, for which there is also no charge. Where an embargo period is selected, the student must ensure that the same period is selected with both ProQuest and UA Libraries.

Time Limits for Degree Completion Requirements

Although the UA Graduate School has established a nine-year time-to-degree deadline for PhD students, entering Social Work PhD students have a seven-year internal deadline to complete the degree. Students who reach Year 7 will be held accountable for reaching due dates and deadlines distributed each year. If a student fails to meet a due date or deadline in Year 7, yet wants to pursue degree completion, the student must apply for an extension to the social work degree completion deadline.

To apply for an extension, a student should prepare a statement explaining why an extension is justified and why the student is confident he or she will be able to meet new deadlines if an extension is granted.

The statement must first be approved in writing (e.g., via e-mail) by the student's advisor. Prior to approval, the advisor has the option of convening the full dissertation committee for consultation.

If the extension request is approved by the student's advisor, the statement and advisor's approval should be forwarded to the PhD program director. If the PhD program director approves the extension request, they will work with the School of Social Work registrar to propose new due dates and deadlines. The PhD program director will submit a memo explaining their reasons for supporting an extension, the proposed new due dates and deadlines, the advisor's approval, and the student statement to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and the Dean for their approval.

If a request is approved by all parties, the student must agree in writing to meet the newly established due dates and deadlines. After approval and student agreement, if a student fails to meet any due dates or deadlines,

the student's registration can be dropped and he or she can be dismissed from the School of Social Work.

No School of Social Work extensions will extend beyond the UA Graduate School's graduation deadline.

Student Progress Requirement

Every spring semester, each student in the PhD Program completes the *Doctoral Student Planning and Annual Review Form* with advisor assistance.

The form is to be submitted to the PhD Program Director, along with current *curriculum vitae*. Together with reports from the student's advisor, instructors of courses the student has taken, and supervisors of the student's graduate research and teaching assistantships, this information provides the basis for an Annual Review of each PhD student's progress in the program conducted by the PhD Program Committee. Attendance by the student at the end of year annual review is mandatory. Attendance by the advisor is highly recommended.

Additional Academic Requirements

Professional Preparedness Review Policy

Members of the School of Social Work community have an obligation to the social work profession to make reasonable efforts to ensure that graduates of its professional programs are emotionally and ethically prepared for the demands of ethical practice. This duty is consistent with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (2.09, 2.10 and 2.11) and with the objectives of our academic programs that require students to "understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles and practice accordingly."

Therefore, the appropriate program director will consult with any student in his/her respective program who (a) exhibits "impairment that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties" that is deemed by that program director likely to interfere with social work practice effectiveness, or (b) who engages in other behavior proscribed by the National Association of Social Workers. The program chair will (if appropriate) make reasonable efforts to assist the student in resolving behavioral concerns regarding the student's ability to practice effectively and responsibly in the social work profession.

The results of this student/program director consultation may include:

- a) a determination that the alleged behavior does not constitute an ethical violation or impairment serious enough to interfere with practice effectiveness;
- b) the development of a plan for remediation of the behavior while the student continues in the social work program;
- c) the student's temporary withdrawal from the social work program; or
- d) the student's indefinite withdrawal from the social work program.

Academic Misconduct Information

Graduate School information on Academic Misconduct.

Withdrawal and Leave of Absence Information

Graduate School information on Withdrawals and Leave of Absence.

Academic Grievances Information

Graduate School information on Academic Grievances.

Grades and Academic Standing

Students in the UA School of Social Work PhD program must meet the UA Graduate School requirements for good academic standing of a 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Failure to meet this standard will result in dismissal from the PhD program.

Note that a grade of "I" (incomplete) should be removed within four weeks during the next term of enrollment. If a student's overall grade point average drops below a "B" as a result of the incomplete, the result could be either an academic warning or dismissal.

Graduate School information on Grades and Academic Standing.

Graduate School Deadlines Information

Information on Graduate School Deadlines.

Application for Graduation Information

Information on the Application for Graduation.

Financial Assistance

The PhD program is demanding and, therefore, generally requires taking a break from full-time employment. As a result, there are multiple opportunities to receive financial assistance. Most PhD students receive Graduate Assistantships in the form of Graduate Research Assistantship and Graduate Teaching Assistantship positions, which provide full tuition scholarships, health insurance, and monthly stipends. Others receive fellowships from the Graduate Council or external sources. There are also opportunities for employment as an instructor in the School of Social Work's BSW Programs and as Graduate Research Assistants on externally funded research grants (no separate application for these funding opportunities is necessary as part of the program application process). In recent years, full-time students have received at least three years of financial support (unless other options were available to the student). The PhD Program aims to continue providing support for students for a minimum of three years, given the student's substantial continued progress in the program and the program's adequate financial resources. For more information about financial assistance for graduate students in the School of Social Work, contact the PhD Program Director.

Graduate Assistantships

A limited number of Graduate Assistantships are available for PhD students. Three duties of Assistantships are offered and assigned based on the needs of the School and faculty with acknowledgment of the preferences of the student. Graduate assistants are expected to provide service to a supervisor, usually a faculty member. The School of Social Work typically offers .50 FTE graduate assistantships, although .25 FTE graduate assistantships are possible. A student with a .25 FTE graduate assistantship is expected to provide 10 hours of service per week and receives a 50 percent tuition scholarship, partial payment of health insurance, and a monthly stipend; a student with a .50 FTE graduate assistantship is expected to provide 20 hours of service per week and receives a 100 percent tuition scholarship, full payment of health insurance, and a monthly stipend. Any student who has an assistantship may not be employed more than at a .50 status. Graduate School policy does not allow for overloads. Please see the Graduate School policy about the minimum required enrollment for tuition-bearing assistantships or fellowships.

A Graduate Administrative Assistant is assigned to an administrator to assist with some aspects of the School's administration. A Graduate Research Assistant is assigned to a faculty member to assist with research. Duties may include literature searches and reviews, data

analysis, drafting of sections of proposals or articles, or any other aspect of research. A Graduate Teaching Assistant is assigned to a faculty member to provide assistance in teaching either a BSW- or MSW-level course. Duties may include developing course activities, grading assignments, giving lectures, leading discussions, or any other aspects of the teaching process. At times, a student may have a .25 teaching assistantship with one professor and a .25 research assistantship with another professor. It is important for the supervisor and the student to be clear about expectations and responsibilities. Students with a GTA may also be assigned to teach independently after completion of the teaching preparation required in the PhD program.

Continuation of Graduate Assistantships at any time is contingent upon continued enrollment in the School of Social Work PhD program, the availability of funding, satisfactory progress toward your degree objectives, remaining in good academic standing (3.0 or better overall GPA), and satisfactorily completing the duties associated with the assistantship.

Students in the School of Social Work PhD Program may hold graduate assistantships administered by other divisions of the University.

Fellowships and Scholarships Administered by the School

Several endowed scholarships are awarded to BSW, MSW, or PhD students at the discretion of the Associate Dean of Educational Programs and Student Services and/or the scholarship committee. Please see the School of Social Work Financial Aid webpage for more information. Typically, scholarships awarded to PhD students are awarded based on student performance in the PhD program. Several scholarships have been established specifically for PhD students.

The Ben Avis Orcutt Fellowship is awarded to a PhD student who has displayed outstanding dedication and commitment to the social work profession. The recipient of the scholarship has the MSW and two years of competent social work practice. To promote doctoral education at the University of Alabama School of Social Work, Dr. Ben Avis Orcutt and others established the Ben Avis Orcutt Endowed Doctoral Fellowship Fund in 1984. Dr. Orcutt served as Professor of Social Work and Director of the Doctoral Program at the University from 1976 until she retired in 1983.

The Ben Avis Orcutt Summer Fellowship Program allows for summer support of doctoral students who would otherwise face hardship in continuing their academic work between the spring and fall semesters when other assistantships and academic employment might be more available. The PhD Program solicits application for these funds during the academic year preceding the summer for which the support would be intended. This Fellowship Program was funded from 2021 through 2025.

The Leslie J. Shellhase Endowed Scholarship for Doctoral Students in Social Work is awarded to an outstanding PhD student. It is specifically intended to provide support for a student who is beginning work on the dissertation. The late Dr. Leslie Shellhase established the scholarship in 1994 to promote the education of deserving students pursuing a PhD degree in social work at The University of Alabama. Priority consideration for this scholarship is given to students who have been advanced to candidacy for degree. Dr. Shellhase was instrumental in the founding of the doctoral program and served on the Doctoral Program Committee from the time of its inception until he retired.

The Social Work Board of Friends Summer Research and Education Scholarships. Historically, each summer scholarships are awarded to PhD students by the SW Board of Friends. These scholarships require

an application. A research scholarship is intended to support a summer writing project. An education scholarship is intended to support summer course work.

Each spring the PhD Program Director notifies students of the application guidelines and due dates.

Fellowships Administered by the Graduate School and External Organizations

A number of fellowships and other awards are administered by the Graduate School and by external organizations. For more information, see the Graduate School's Financial Assistance webpage.

Office of Student Financial Aid

To apply for financial assistance through other sources, students may contact the Office of Student Financial Aid, 106 Student Services Center, (205)348-6756. Assistance can take the form of scholarships, grants, or loans.

Conference Attendance and Research Funding

School of Social Work (SSW) PhD students can receive funding to partially cover costs for travel to academic conferences and to support research endeavors. Pending the availability of funding, students can apply to receive:

- Up to \$1,000 (combining SSW and Graduate School funds) when presenting at a conference for one conference in the academic year;
- Up to \$700 per academic year from the SSW when presenting at a conference for up to two additional conferences in the academic year (dependent on availability of funding);
- Up to \$500 (from SSW only) for conference registration and partial costs for travel to an academic conference when not presenting for one conference in the academic year. Please note that funding requests to support presentations will take priority over those for attendance only.

Research Funding: SSW PhD Students can receive funding to defray costs of research up to \$600 (combining Graduate School and School of Social Work match funds). For Research Awards, priority goes to pre-dissertation or dissertation research. Funds may be used for travel related to data collection and exploratory research or for the processing of data or equipment.

See the PhD Program Toolkit linked on the PhD Program Website for application procedures.