

UTRGV MSW
STUDENT HANDBOOK
2025-2026

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Introduction to the School of Social Work

The faculty and staff welcome you to the Master of Science in Social Work Program. The program is offered via two options, which are Traditional Face-to-Face format and Traditional Online (TOP) format. The TOP is available to any student in the world. You have embarked on an academic path that will prepare you for social work practice at an advanced level. During your course of study, you will acquire values, knowledge, and skills that are essential for independent professional practice. We urge you to use the program resources that are available to you, including your Faculty Advisor, the MSW Program Director, the social work faculty, and the Graduate Association of Student Social Workers. This handbook, along with the University's Graduate Catalog, and university resources should assist you in successfully progressing through your course of study [Graduate College Policies](#)

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Overview of the Social Work Program:

Mission Statements

School of Social Work Mission

To prepare social work professionals who will have a positive impact on individuals, families, and communities through excellence and leadership in education, research, and community engagement, with a commitment to social and economic justice, health equity, and sustainability, locally and globally.

MSW Mission

The MSW program prepares graduates for advanced professional social work practice at individual, family, group, and community levels addressing the specific and evolving needs of the region along the southern, United States border and its dispersed communities. The program emphasizes service to the region focusing on working effectively with varied populations experiencing different challenges. Through a trauma-informed lens, students are equipped with the knowledge, ethical foundation, and applied skills necessary to provide high quality services. They are guided by principles of professional responsibility, scientific inquiry, and a commitment to improving well-being and access to resources for individuals, families, groups, and global communities.

Goals & Objectives:

The Council on Social Work Education delineates critical components in its 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) in Social Work Education (Appendix A). Based on these practice expectations, UTRGV social work graduates are taught the following knowledge and skills.

The MSW program:

1. Prepares students for specialized practice with Latine individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations.
2. Prepares graduates to practice with diverse, vulnerable, and at-risk populations to promote human well-being and social and economic justice especially in the Texas-Mexico border.
3. Applies critical thinking skills in social work practice and practice according to the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles.
4. Critically analyzes, evaluates, and applies research findings and best practices to professional practice, programs, and service delivery.
5. Prepares graduates for leadership in developing and implementing policies and services for at-risk populations with an emphasis on the Texas-Mexico border region.
6. Promotes interprofessional education within the program and the university.
7. Encourages students to lead collaborative partnerships with community.

Program History:

The Master of Social Work (MSW) Program was granted Candidacy Status by Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in 1999 and received initial accreditation from the CSWE in 2003. Graduates of the MSW Program are eligible to take the LMSW examination. The master's degree was initiated to meet the growing demand for increased social work practice at the supervisory and independent levels in the Rio Grande Valley. Since the closest master's program available was in San Antonio, the necessary commute discouraged baccalaureate level social workers from pursuing graduate degrees at the rate needed to fulfill the social service needs of the Rio Grande Valley region. The MSW Accelerated Online Program option was initiated in 2017. This program option was offered in a 7-week module format, and all courses were online asynchronous. In 2023, the Traditional Online Program (TOP) was initiated, and the AOP was slowly phased out as students graduated. The TOP format also offers all courses online; however, they are synchronous. Both programs allowed students from all over the world to engage in a unique MSW program whose focus is working with Latine populations. Community agencies and social service providers have been a strong mechanism in providing the support needed for a successful master's degree program. With the added practicum sites across the nation and in different countries across the world, students can experience the practicum component of the program in their own communities. Our practicum program relies heavily on this community support. The School of Social Work is administratively under Academic Affairs, and the faculty is housed at three different locations: the Innovation Building in Edinburg, the Cueto building in Brownsville, and the UT Education and Research Center building in Laredo.

Communication:

The School of Social Work supports the bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy of our students. We acknowledge that students and staff may speak English as well as a second language, such as Spanish. As part of culturally sustaining pedagogies, we support translanguaging, or allowing students to use their full linguistic repertoire, including Spanish or other languages, to express themselves or engage with content. This could involve using bilingual dictionaries, allowing code-switching, and encouraging students to share vocabulary and concepts in their home language. Assignments and other class activities should continue to be submitted in English unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Admission Criteria

MSW Program admission requirements for both program options include:

1. Clear admission to the UTRGV graduate school, based on a 3.0 cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA)
2. Admission into the 30-hour (Specialized) program requires a 3.0 cumulative GPA and a 3.2 GPA in core undergraduate social work courses.
3. A course in statistics (3 credit hours) before admission into the MSW Degree Program.
4. Copies of all academic transcripts
5. Copy of resume including specific duties and dates employed.
6. A Personal Statement: see School of Social Work webpage for [instructions](#) related to the content of the narrative.
7. A recommendation questionnaire is sent to three people whose names are provided by the applicant. Appropriate references include current or former professor, current or former employer/supervisor and practicum instructor (if applying for the Specialized Program)
8. Signature attesting that student will adhere to the National Association [Code of Ethics](#) (NASW). Upon admission, each student will receive a packet of forms including the Code. All forms will require a signature and should be returned to the MSW Director.

Application Review

The evaluation process for admission to the program begins after the deadline for receipt of all materials. At least two reviewers of the MSW committee review completed applications. Reviewers assign points based on accomplishments in four categories: GPA, three letters of reference, professional experience, and a personal statement in narrative form.

Offers of Admission to the Graduate College:

The Graduate College officially makes admission offers, and these are valid only for the semester requested on the application. Through the online application web site, applicants can view their application. Students who are accepted but do not attend the semester requested on the application must apply for readmission to enroll for a later semester. An additional fee will be charged if the student applies more than one year from the semester originally requested. Students can submit a request for deferred admission for up to one semester. Information can be found by going to the Graduate College page [here](#).

Conditional Admission

Conditional Admission may be offered to applicants with a lower GPA in exceptional cases. These students may not enroll for more than twelve (12) credits. A student on conditional status must earn a grade of B or better in each of the first two courses. Students who earn any grade less than a B will not be allowed to

continue in the MSW program. Additionally, students will not be eligible for financial aid until the requirements of the conditional status have been fulfilled.

Suspension/Probation Policy

Whether or not in repeated courses, a student is automatically dismissed from the MSW program for the reasons listed below. A student who is dismissed is ineligible for an MSW degree from our School of Social Work and will not be permitted to re-enroll in the MSW Program. Graduate College Academic Probation and Suspension policies are found at [UTRGV Probation and Suspension Policy](#) and summarized here.

1. For a degree-seeking student in a master's program to remain in good academic standing, the student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 (3.0=B on a 4.0 scale) and meet their department's academic progress criteria toward degree completion. The minimum GPA of 3.0 is based on all course work taken regardless of whether the courses are part of the student's degree plan.
2. A student whose overall GPA falls below a 3.0 in each semester is automatically placed on academic probation the following semester. Within the following nine semester credit hours, the overall GPA must return to 3.0 or the student will be suspended for a minimum of one semester.
3. A student who receives an F in any course is automatically dismissed from the graduate program.

Specific to the School of Social Work:

1. If a student who is on academic probation does not raise their GPA to 3.0 within the next twelve (12) semester credit hours, they will be dismissed from the MSW program. This includes pass/fail courses, and any course attempted at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, whether inside or outside of the School of Social Work.
1. Students who are admitted conditionally must earn a grade of B or better in each of the first two courses to remain in the MSW program. Failure to do so will result in termination from the MSW program.

In addition, the School of Social Work has internally approved the following policy:

Three "C" Rule: a student who receives a grade of C or lower in three (3) graduate courses attempted at this university, whether in repeated courses, will be permanently suspended from the program. Additionally, a student who receives an F in any course is automatically dismissed from the graduate program.

MSW Curriculum:

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally.

Social work educators serve the profession through their teaching, scholarship, and service. Social work education at the baccalaureate, master's and doctoral levels shapes the profession's future through the education of competent professionals, the generation of knowledge, the promotion of evidence-informed practice through scientific inquiry, and the exercise of leadership within the professional community. Social work education is advanced by the scholarship of teaching and learning, and scientific inquiry into its multifaceted dimensions, processes, and outcomes.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) uses the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) to accredit baccalaureate and master's level social work programs. EPAS supports academic excellence by establishing thresholds for professional competence. It permits programs to use traditional and emerging models and methods of curriculum design by balancing requirements that promote comparable outcomes across programs with a level of flexibility that encourages programs to differentiate.

The EPAS 2022 Social Work Competencies are listed below. Programs may add competencies that are consistent with their mission and goals and respond to their context. Each competency describes the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that comprise the competency at the generalist level of practice, followed by a set of behaviors that integrate these components. These behaviors represent observable components of the competencies, while the preceding statements represent the underlying content and processes that inform the behaviors.

Competency 1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior

Competency 2: Advance human rights and social, racial, and environmental justice

Competency 3: Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice

Competency 4: Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice

Competency 5: Engage in policy practice

Competency 6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

Competency 7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

Competency 8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

Competency 9: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

The MSW program offers two options to earn the degree, which are the traditional face-to-face and the traditional online program (TOP). In either option, the curriculum is identical. Students in the traditional face-to-face attend classes at their respective campus (Edinburg, Brownsville, or Laredo), and traditional online students attend online synchronous courses as scheduled in the syllabus.

Generalist Year - 30 hours

The Generalist year consists of eight (8) courses and a 400-hour internship. The courses are listed below:

SOCW 6300 Human Behavior & the Social Environment I

SOCW 6301 Human Behavior & the Social Environment II

SOCW 6302 Social Welfare Policies and Programs

SOCW 6321 Practice w/Individuals & Families

SOCW 6322 Practice w/Groups & Communities

SOCW 6381 Applied Social Work Research

SOCW 6370 Generalist Practicum I (200 hours)

SOCW 6371 Generalist Practicum II (200 hours)

Advanced Year – 30 hours

The Advanced Year consists of eight (8) courses, and a 500-hour internship that can be completed in two (2) semesters. The courses are listed below:

SOCW 6316 Global Social Work Practice
 SOCW 6337 Multi-Dimensional Clinical Assessment
 SOCW 6340 Advanced Community & Organizational Practice
 SOCW 6342 Advanced Policy Analysis and Development
 SOCW 6355 Trauma Informed Advanced Practice
 SOCW 6380 Practice and Program Evaluation
 SOCW 6378 Advanced Generalist Practicum I (250 hours)
 SOCW 6379 Advanced Generalist Practicum II (250 hours)

Students will select one of the following tracks as a part of their advanced year:

Track:	Courses Required:
<i>Practice with Children and Families (Title IV-E)</i>	SOCW 6363 – Trauma Specific Practice w/Children & Families SOCW 6368 – Forensic Social Work
<i>Mental Health</i>	SOCW 6363 – Trauma Specific Practice w/Children & Families SOCW 6364 – Interdisciplinary Social Work Practice
<i>Gerontology</i>	SOCW 6364 – Interdisciplinary Social Work Practice SOCW 6396 – Social Work with Older Adults
<i>Leadership & Social Change (Macro Practice)</i>	SOCW 6369 – Global Leadership for Social & Organizational Change SOCW 6366 – Grant Writing and Program Development
<i>School Social Work</i>	SOCW 6363 – Trauma Specific Practice w/Children & Families SOCW 6367 – School Social Work Practice
<i>Medical Social Work</i>	SOCW 6332 – Social Work Practice with Latinos SOCW 6364 – Interdisciplinary Social Work Practice
<i>Global Social Work</i>	SOCW 6363 – Trauma Specific Practice w/Children & Families SOCW 6369 – Global Leadership for Social & Organizational Change
<i>Primary Care Behavioral Health (PCBH) – Certificate (ONLY AVAILABLE TO FACE-TO FACE STUDENTS)</i>	SOCW 6386 – Foundations of Integrated Behavioral Health SOCW 6387 – Clinical Skills for the Behavioral Health Consultant

Academic Advising

MSW students are assigned a School of Social Work faculty member as an academic advisor at the time of admission into the program. Normally, the student will have the same advisor during his/her entire academic tenure. If changes must be made, students will be advised accordingly. Faculty advisors are selected from faculty who are assigned primary teaching responsibility in the MSW Program.

Students are responsible for making an appointment with their respective advisors each semester to ensure they are following the plan of study. Additionally, students should consult with the advisor before making any changes, including withdrawal from courses, changes from full-time to part-time or vice versa, and a change in program delivery. If students deviate from their plan of study, it may result in a delay in graduation. It is strongly recommended that students schedule an appointment in advance of the opening date of registration.

If a student wishes to change the academic advisor assigned to them, the student must contact the MSW Director to make the request. It should be noted there is no guarantee of having a specific faculty member assigned to any student.

Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

The advisor will:

1. Engage the student in a process of orienting and assisting the student in evaluating their aptitude and motivation for a career in social work.
2. Engage the student in a process that allows for early and periodic evaluation of their performance in the total educational program.
3. Refer students with academic or personal problems to appropriate resources within the university and in the community, e.g., tutorial, medical, psychological, financial, housing, childcare, employment, or career counseling.

Student Responsibilities

The social work faculty is committed to the provision of quality academic advising; however, the student has the major responsibility for the satisfactory completion of the degree program. The specific responsibilities of the student include:

1. Planning a course schedule each semester to ensure that there is reasonable progress toward completion of the degree.
2. Maintaining updated contact information in the student "ASSIST" system, such as UTRGV e-mail and telephone numbers.
3. Satisfactorily completing all courses for which they register.
4. Reviewing the Graduate Catalog to be aware of the academic policies and procedures related to admission, tuition, financial assistance, registration, library services, graduation, student services, and the learning assistance and guidance center.
5. Maintaining contact with their assigned faculty advisor during each semester for academic planning.

6. Participating in registration advising.
7. Maintaining a current mailing address with the office of admissions and records and responding promptly to all communications from the School of Social Work. The UTRGV email is the official communication of the University.
8. If a student must take a semester off, the student is responsible for submitting a Leave of Absence form to the Program Director.

Request for Exceptions

A student who wishes to take a three (3)-credit hour graduate elective outside of the School of Social Work must obtain approval from their assigned academic advisor and from the respective MSW Program Director. A written request should be initiated by the student. The same process should be followed for other requests.

MSW Program Option Transfer

Students requesting a transfer from the one program option to another (e.g. from Traditional Face-to-Face to Traditional Online or vice versa) must meet the following criteria:

1. Student **MUST** have followed the Plan of Study.
2. Student cannot be in the final semester immediately prior to practicum.

Additionally, the following applies:

Advanced standing students (30 hours) may transition **ONLY** when there are extenuating circumstances. Regular students (60 hour) may transition **ONLY** in the semester immediately following completion of all foundation courses.

Grading Policy:

Scale for grading – A standard grading scale is used.

A	90 - 100
B	80 - 89
C	70 - 79
F	69 and below (Grades of D are not applicable in graduate courses)

Late assignment policy – Students should become familiar with each instructor’s policy regarding the acceptance of late assignments. Information can be found in the course syllabus.

Incomplete policy – Students are eligible for a grade of “incomplete” **ONLY** if: (1) the student has a passing grade in the course; (2) the student is in good standing and has attended and completed most of the assignments up to date; and (3) the student has discussed this with the instructor. Any student who receives a grade of “incomplete” is responsible for submitting all missing work **BEFORE** the end of the following semester. Failure to submit work will result in a grade of “F”.

Attendance Policy:

Please see [UTRGV Drop/Withdrawal Policy](#) for questions regarding these.

Class cancellation policy: Any communication regarding class being cancelled or moved online will be sent by the instructor through the student's UTRGV email. Students are required to check their UTRGV email daily for communication from instructors.

Absences/Sick Policy:

When **facing extenuating circumstances** affecting attendance, students need to notify the Accessibility Office to obtain proper accommodation. The instructor also needs to be notified.

The course week information and assignments are to be submitted in the corresponding file on Blackboard. Students need to be aware of the late assignment submissions policies of the course.

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes. [UTRGV's attendance policy](#) excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics, accommodation by Student Accessibility Services (SAS), observance of religious holy days, or military service. For more information on absences, please see [UTRGV Absence Policy](#).

Accommodation related to long-term complications from medical conditions should go through SAS. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

Tardies: Students are allowed up to 2 tardies unexcused per semester. Students who arrive to class 15 minutes after the start time are considered tardy.

Step away/class disruption: Students who have frequent disruptions in their class participation (as defined as more than 2 disruptions for longer than 5 minutes) per class may be subject to a reduction of participation or attendance points. This includes answering phone calls, text messages, tending to caregiving, etc.

Class participation:

Participation: Students are expected to participate fully in class. Participation includes attending class on time, having camera and microphone on for the duration of the class (for online, synchronous classes), responding to peers and the instruction in class discussion, not engaging with another activity including work, other classes, trainings, caregiving, driving, etc.

Students taking class online are expected to have a working camera, working microphone, working chat feature, and a reliable internet connection. Students are expected to turn their camera on at the start of class, when responding to classmates or to the instructor, and at the end of class. Students will be monitored for online engagement using analytics available in the online classroom technology. Students found to be not attentive for more than 20% of the class may be subject to a reduction of participation points. This includes students who turn the camera off during class time. Students are also expected to participate with all polls, quizzes, and other online engagement activities throughout the class. Students are expected to give full attention to the course even when it is virtual.

Disruptive or distracting behavior—such as talking out of turn, using electronic devices inappropriately, or showing disrespect toward others—interferes with the learning process and will not be tolerated. All students are expected to contribute to a positive, respectful classroom environment that supports focus, engagement, and mutual learning.

Students with accommodations should ensure these are registered with the Student Accessibility Services Office and that the instructor has received a copy.

Technology:

Recording class and requesting transcripts: Students are not allowed to record class in any way, either online or in person, without prior consent from the instructor. Students may not post any content from classes online or in other communication venues. Students who would like to record class or need to record class related to their established accommodation, should discuss this with their instructor no later than 3 days before class. Students may request the transcript from online classes prior to their class. Students should feel free to turn on any accessibility feature they require in Zoom or request the instructor to do so.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Chatbots, and other learning software: Students are responsible for their use of AI and other tech platforms for any use in any course related activities or assignments. Students that elect to utilize any AI or other related software are responsible for fact checking their content against established and reliable sources. Students who do not fact check their assignments may be subject to a reduction of points in the assignment. Misinformation, disinformation, or incorrect facts given to the student using AI or other technology will not be an allowable excuse for restoration of points.

Students are responsible for being aware of and adhering to any agency regulations about the use of AI throughout their practicum. Violations of these policies could result in termination of the practicum placement. Misuse of AI during practicum may also be considered academic dishonesty and be reported to Vaqueros Report IT.

Students are strongly encouraged to understand the need to fact check artificial intelligence. AI may be used to support learning—such as brainstorming, research guidance, or practice—but not to complete assignments, tests, assessments, case notes, client interventions, or biopsychosocial assessments unless authorized. Misuse of AI will be considered academic dishonesty and may result in disciplinary action. Students are encouraged to use AI ethically, transparently, and in ways that support their own understanding and growth. For some additional information, see: [ChatGPT – AI Technology | UTRGV](#)

Use of headphones, e readers, or other assistive devices- Students that use any assistive device, through an ADA accommodation or not, are expected to notify their course instructor 3 days prior to the class. Headphones should only be utilized with prior consent from the instructor unless being utilized in online courses.

Email/Cell phone/texting and general internet: All social work students are required to check their university email. Failure to check university email will not constitute an excuse for missed information or assignments. Students are required to keep their cell phone, computer, or other smart devices silent during class.

Americans With Disability Act and other Accommodation Requests

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Accommodations: Students with a diagnosed disability are encouraged to reach out to the University ADA office to obtain needed accommodations under the ADA section 504.

[UTRGV ADA Office](#)

Breastfeeding accommodations: Students who require an accommodation for breastfeeding or to express breastmilk should inform their instructor per University policy. [UTRGV Breastfeeding Policy](#)

Prayer or other religious observances: Students who would like to request an accommodation for prayer or for class absences for religious observances that are not covered by the University holiday schedule should first discuss their request with their course instructor. Students may also elect to complete this form if needed: [UTRGV Accommodation Form for Religious Observances](#) .

Other types of accommodation: If a student would like to request an accommodation for a condition or life event that is not covered by the policies above, they should reach out to their course instructor to discuss their request. If they require additional assistance with requesting their accommodation they should contact the director of their program.

Work or Life Experience

In accordance with the Council on Social Work Education Standards (AS 4.1.5), the School of Social Work does not grant school course credit for work of life experience.

Practicum Education

Students who will be entering practicum will be contacted by the MSW Practicum Director during the semester immediately preceding. A 3.0 GPA is required to enter any of the practicum courses; a GPA lower than 3.0 will require a delay. Students are required to review and sign off on their program Practicum Manual.

Ethics

In addition to the privileges that are associated with admission into the MSW Program, students assume personal and professional responsibilities. Implicit in the process of being admitted into the program is the expectation that the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (Appendix B) will guide the student's behavior. The Code of Ethics addresses six areas outlined below:

- 1) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients
- 2) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues
- 3) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings
- 4) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals
- 5) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession
- 6) The Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society

Students at the graduate level are expected to conduct themselves as professional social workers; they are expected to use the NASW Code of Ethics to guide their interaction with faculty, program support staff, peers, and clients. Additionally, students must adhere to university rules and regulations – see

[University Handbook of Operating Procedures:](#)

STU 02-100 STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE
STU 02-200 STUDENT GRIEVANCES AND COMPLAINTS

Additional information can be found on the [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) webpage.

Academic Integrity:

Students are required to follow the University policy regarding academic integrity and dishonesty. If a student is found to have plagiarized any of their work, including self-plagiarism, they will receive a zero for the assignment. Students who are found to have frequently plagiarized work could be subject to academic probation or suspension. This also includes any plagiarism that may come from the use of artificial intelligence. (please see technology section for further information on AI policy)

See the following link for further detail:

Link: [UTRGV Academic Integrity](#)

Dismissal Policies and Procedures

Academic Dismissal

Policies and procedures from the university and its academic programs are explained in the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley Graduate Catalog, specifically the section on [Academic Probation and Suspension](#). For additional information, please refer to page six (6) of this handbook.

Non-Academic Dismissal

Student Conduct, Professional Expectations, and Program Policies

The UTRGV School of Social Work is committed to preparing students for ethical, competent, and professional practice. Students enrolled in the Master of Social Work (MSW) Program are expected to uphold the values outlined in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Academic success alone is not sufficient for continuation in the program. Students must also demonstrate professional behavior, emotional maturity, and ethical conduct in both classroom and practicum settings. The following policies outline expectations and procedures related to student conduct, impairment, and other behavioral concerns. Students should refer to the Practicum Manual for incidents that occur in a practicum setting.

Student impairment and behavioral expectations

Student impairment: Students may not attend class, or their practicum impaired. If a student comes to class or practicum with signs of impairment, emergency services may be called for the student to receive an evaluation. Follow up with the student will occur after the incident.

Symptoms of acute impairment can be (but are not limited to):

- Facial drooping or noticeable acute physical changes
- Slurring Speech
- Nodding off or falling asleep
- Other signs of physical distress
- Exhibiting signs of psychosis that cannot be managed by the student
- Frequent interpersonal conflicts with classmates, instructors or practicum staff
- Threats of violence towards self or others
- Frequent refusal to complete tasks required to pass the course

Egregious or dangerous behavior: Any student that is exhibiting dangerous or egregious behavior, including yelling, screaming, demeaning, threatening, or exhibiting other types of violence will be immediately dismissed from the class and suspended by the program. Investigation will occur pursuant to university policies. Safety planning and other types of mandatory interventions may be required of the student to return.

Possession of a Firearm: The School of Social Work strongly discourages any possession of a firearm in classes or any on campus activities. In addition, the SSW strongly discourages any images of firearms (either manufactured or actual) in online courses. This is the UTRGV Firearm Policy: UTRGV Campus Carry Policy [UTRGV Campus Carry Policy](#)

Children in class: All parents and guardians are encouraged to fill out this parenting resource form [Parenting and Guardian Support](#) If students need to have their children present in class, either online or in person, the student should reach out to the instructor prior to class for guidance.

Statement on sharing information from professional, personal or internship experience: Students and faculty may utilize their own life experiences as examples in class. Information shared in class, particularly information not specific to the students' own lived experience, should be shared with caution. De-identification of clients must be always adhered to. There is no expectation of confidentiality within the classroom although students are encouraged to not share information outside of the classroom unless required.

SSW Statement on background checks and screenings

Substance Use Screenings and other health screenings: The School of Social Work does not require substance use or other background screenings for entrance into the academic program. Prior to the start of the practicum placement phase of a student's program plan, some agencies may require a student to complete a substance use screening or other type of health screening (TB testing, vaccinations, etc.) before beginning their internship. The University will not facilitate these screenings, nor will they release this information on behalf of the student.

Students that test positive for substance use, legal or illegal, or other screenings may be precluded from completing their internship at their chosen site. Students that have concerns regarding these types of screenings are encouraged to discuss this with the Practicum Office staff prior to applying to the internship location.

Criminal Background Checks (CBC): The School of Social Work does not conduct criminal background checks prior to entry into the program. However, students may encounter a request or requirement for

CBC for some practicum placements. The Office of Practicum Education makes every possible effort to secure a practicum placement site for students. Students enrolling in the practicum course are required to comply with individual practicum agency requirements regarding criminal background checks (CBC) prior to the beginning of the practicum placement and are responsible for any associated costs in completing the requirements if not covered by the practicum agency or the UTRGV School of Social Work Office of Practicum Education.

If the CBC reveals a felony conviction or serious misdemeanor an agency may be unwilling to extend a practicum placement to the student and can negatively impact on the student's ability to continue in the practicum placement process or completion of their social work degree.

Students with circumstances in their backgrounds that may emerge during the criminal background check will need to discuss the potential implications of these circumstances with the Office of Practicum Education during their individual interview for a placement opportunity.

Students need to be aware that the circumstances revealed in their CBC may preclude them from the practicum in the following ways:

- The ability to secure and complete the required Practicum Placement Experience, as most practicum placement agencies request criminal background investigations, fingerprint checks, child and/or adult protective services check and/or random drug screens.
- The ability to be considered eligible for licensure as a social worker by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners which requires that licensure applicants must provide a sworn statement regarding the existence of a criminal history which states that certain misdemeanor or felony convictions could preclude the possibility of acquiring one's license to practice social work.
- The ability to secure employment within the social work practice field, as most employers within the social work field require that applicants either possess or be eligible for, a social work license, as well as require criminal background investigations, fingerprint checks, child and/or adult protective services check and/or random drug screens, as a condition for employment.

Steps for Addressing Unprofessional Behavior

Step 1: Informal Faculty Intervention

- Observation: A faculty member or practicum instructor identifies concerning behavior related to professionalism, ethics, or academic performance.
- Initial Discussion: The faculty member meets with the student to discuss the concern directly.
- Resolution Plan: Together, they develop a plan to address and resolve the issue.
- Documentation: The faculty member keeps personal notes of the conversation and resolution plan.
- Outcome: If the concern is resolved, no formal record is placed in the student's file.

Step 2: Formal Review Initiation

- Escalation: If the concern is not resolved informally, or if the faculty member or student requests further action, a formal review is initiated.
- Referral: The faculty member refers the matter to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities and submits a report via Vaquero Report It.

Step 3: Administrative Review

- Review Process: The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities evaluates the concern using evidence and testimony.
- Meeting: The MSW Program Director (or designee) meets with the student to review the issue.

Step 4: Determination and Outcomes

Based on the review, one or more of the following actions may be taken:

A. Continuation Without Conditions

- The concern is resolved and no further action is required.

B. Continuation with Informal Conditions

- Oral or written warning or reprimand.
- Misconduct noted in administrative records.
- Sanctions applied per university policy and/ or School of Social Work recommendations (e.g., behavioral agreement).

C. Continuation with Formal Conditions

a. Collaboration with the MSW Program Director and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs to set specific conditions.

b. Possible actions include:

- § Development of a performance improvement plan.
- § Probation with monitoring.
- § Referral to counseling or academic support services.
- § Reduced course load or delayed practicum placement.
- § Temporary withdrawal with option to reapply.
- § Suspension from the program (e.g., one-year suspension).

Note: Failure to meet formal conditions may result in dismissal from the MSW Program.

D. Dismissal From the Program

- a. The MSW Program Director notifies the appropriate university office.
- b. Dismissal is processed according to university policies and procedures.

Termination from MSW Program

A student can be terminated from the program for not maintaining the required GPA after being given a semester to raise their overall GPA to a minimum of 3.0 and/or for earning an F in any course. MSW students may also be terminated from the program due to confirmed criminal activity, verified dishonesty in their work, assignments, practicum, grades and/or unprofessional behavior.

Students' Rights on Confidentiality

All procedures relating to the performance review shall be carried out in a manner that will protect the student's right to privacy consistent with federal and state privacy laws. Members of the committee and all other persons who appear at the review meeting are expected to observe the confidential nature of the information made available to them, as well as any discussion held during the meeting. Actions and recommendations of the committee are to be confidential and shared only with those persons involved with the student in educational capacity or University personnel on a need-to-know basis.

The School of Social Work faculty, staff, and practicum instructors have a right and an obligation to exchange information about students. Such an exchange is necessary because student performance may impact the operation of any part of the program, integrity of the program in meeting its goals and objectives, student's potential for success, and the safety and well-being of UTRGV Faculty and practicum agency personnel, other students, and agency clients. The School of Social Work also abides by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the student's educational records and grants specific rights to parents and eligible students.

Student Complaints & Appeals

The procedures for appealing grades and addressing misunderstandings related to academic standards and expectations in individual courses are found in Section 5.2.1 of the H.O.P. Students are encouraged to discuss these matters with the instructor of the individual class before resorting to the formal appeals process. Student complaint procedures for resolving complaints against faculty or staff related to matters other than discrimination or grade appeals are found in Section 5.8.1 of the H.O.P. Students are encouraged to resolve complaints informally, including discussing the complaint with the Director of the department.

Note: The provisions of this handbook are not contractual in nature. They are simply a description of the program that attempts to summarize the practices, policies and procedures currently used in the MSW Program. Some of these practices, policies and procedures are prescribed by the CSWE, our accrediting body, and others are not. This handbook is a working document subject to change and designed to better serve our student population.

Whistleblower policy:

Whistle Blower: The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Social Work is dedicated to supporting students and other stakeholders in transparency and full reporting of possible violations of local, state, and federal law. Furthermore, the program is committed to the NASW Code of Ethics and requires all students, faculty, staff, and program stakeholders to act in accordance with the profession's ethical standards.

If a student believes, in good faith, that the school, program, or their internship agency is acting in a way that violates the professions ethical standards, or violates any laws, they are encouraged to report that to the MSW Practicum Director or Dean of the School of Social Work.

If a report is made, the school commits to the following procedures:

1. All reports will be investigated. In conducting its investigations, the UTRGV School of Social Work will strive to keep the identity of the complaining individual as confidential as possible, while conducting an adequate review and investigation.
2. The student will be free from retaliation or other consequences from making a Whistle Blower Report
3. The student will be fully notified of the outcome of the investigation possible within university policy
4. If a complaint is made against the student's practicum placement, the student may request to be removed from the placement and secure a new placement, per the policies listed in this handbook.

Appendix A: CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

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Appendix B: Code of Ethics: NASW Code of Ethics: [NASW Code of Ethics-English](#)

[NASW Code of Ethics-Spanish](#)

Appendix C: [Leave of Absence Request for Graduate Students](#)

