University at Buffalo
School of Social Work

PhD Program
Handbook

- **2020-2021 Academic Year**

The *Vision* of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work:

The diverse community of UB's School of Social Work is unified by our *vision* of a better society achieved through generation and transmission of knowledge, promotion of social justice, and service to humanity.

The *Mission* of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work:

In our teaching, research, and service we strive to:

- educate future generations of social workers who will be the leaders of the profession locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally;

- facilitate critical inquiry into and analysis of the causes and consequences of social problems and injustice;

- produce innovative, theoretically-based and empirically-sound means of alleviating and rectifying such problems and injustices through policy and practice;

- provide professional leadership in resolving critical social, economic, and political challenges;

- be responsive and responsible members of our university, regional, national, and global communities; and

- honor the inherent dignity, rights, and strengths of all individuals, families, and communities.

INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAM & HANDBOOK

The UB School of Social Work's (UBSSW) PhD Program in Social Welfare is guided by our objective of graduating social work scholars who:
- deepen our understanding of social problems and their solutions;
- create and implement innovative methods for studying complex issues;
- conduct rigorous and original analyses;
- converse and collaborate across disciplines, professions, and communities;
- uphold social work ethics and a commitment to social justice; and
- engage in creative and effective strategies to disseminate and impart knowledge in social work and related disciplines.

We view intellectual exchange and collaboration across disciplines and professions as essential to advancing theory, research, policy, and practice. Our doctoral program reflects our objectives and orientation through its interdisciplinary and customizable design. The program structure strikes a balance between a solid, common foundation and the freedom to chart a specialized course of study.

The PhD Program is comprised of three degree tracks, which differ only with regard to admissions criteria and whether any masters-level coursework is required.
1. **PhD Track:** for students who enter the program having already earned a MSW
2. **MSW/PhD Traditional Track:** for students who enter the program without a BSW or MSW
3. **MSW/PhD Advanced Standing Track:** for students who enter the program with a BSW but no MSW

This handbook describes the structure and requirements of the PhD Program and presents the policies and procedures that guide students' progress through the PhD Program. When applicable, links to other university units, external sites, and their policies and documents are provided. All SSW-specific forms are available to UBSSW faculty, staff, and PhD students on the Program's UB Learns site.

The PhD Program conforms to all Graduate School policies regarding registration, grading, and degree requirements (e.g., those dictating leaves of absence, course resignation, course attendance). These are available on the Graduate School website and therefore are not repeated in this handbook. Students should consult the Office of the Registrar for class schedules and academic calendars (including dates for registration, drop/add periods, and class resignations).

The handbook is divided into the following sections:

    SECTION I: ETHICAL, PROFESSIONAL, AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

    SECTION II: STUDENT, FACULTY, & ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES

    SECTION III: CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

    SECTION IV: EXTRACURRICULAR COMPONENTS

SECTION I: ETHICAL, PROFESSIONAL, AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

ETHICAL & PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The PhD Program abides by prevailing principles of academic integrity, research responsibility, and social work ethics. Students are expected to adhere strictly to the standards and policies identified below and may be dismissed by the Program Director for any violation thereof.

Academic Integrity
The PhD Program follows the UB Graduate School's academic integrity policy and procedures. These apply to all work conducted while a student in the program including coursework, comprehensive exams, dissertation, and any affiliated research projects. To emphasize the program's unconditional commitment to academic integrity, students must sign the *Academic Integrity Agreement* prior to the comprehensive exam.

Research Responsibility
All research conducted under university auspices is monitored by the UB Human Research Protection Program for adherence to principles of ethical and responsible research. Prior to engaging in research with human subjects, students must complete a free online training in Responsible Conduct of Research hosted by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). The Graduate School requires all PhD students to complete the CITI training upon reaching candidacy, even if not conducting human subjects research.

NASW Code of Ethics
In addition to the university standards applicable to all undergraduate and graduate students, the SSW also adheres to the NASW Code of Ethics and theTechnical Standards for Admission, Promotion, and Graduation. PhD students must abide by these standards in all program domains and capacities. Alleged violations may be referred to the SSW's Committee on Students, which will conduct a thorough review of evidence, convene a hearing as indicated, and recommend consequent action to the Dean. The procedure for this review follows the steps outlined in the MSW Student Handbook.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE & PROGRESS

As the most advanced academic degree possible, work required to earn a PhD is held to the highest standards of intellectual breadth, depth, and rigor. Expectations of excellence apply not only to the quality of students' work but also to the pace of their progress through the program. As per procedures outlined below, students may be dismissed from the program for substandard performance or failure to progress.

Academic Performance
Students must demonstrate adequate proficiency in course material in order to fulfill program requirements. A student's performance in a course is considered substandard and warrants consequences as follows:

- **C+, C, or C- in a course**: The student must repeat the course or another that fulfills the requirement. The student must consult with the advisor/chair prior to the start of the next semester to discuss her/his performance and remedial strategies. Others may attend at the discretion of the advisor/chair. The advisor/chair will send the Program Director a summary of the meeting and any corrective actions within five academic days.

- **D, F, or U in a course**: The student must repeat the course or another that fulfills the requirement. The Program Director will convene an academic review prior to the start of the next semester, to be attended by the student, advisor/chair, and others at the discretion of the advisor/chair or Program Director. At the review, specific remedial steps and a corresponding timeline will be established. The Program Director will send review attendees a summary of these terms within five academic days.

- **Below 3.0 overall GPA:** The student is placed on academic probation. The PhD Program Director will convene an academic review prior to the start of the next semester, to be attended by the student, advisor/chair, and others at the discretion of the advisor/chair or Program Director. At the review, terms of probation will be specified (e.g., corrective actions and corresponding timeline, circumstances under which probation will be lifted, consequences if terms of probation are not met). The Program Director will send a summary of the probationary conditions to all attendees within five academic days.

The PhD Program Director may take additional action if a student does not: respond to requests for an academic review; appear at a scheduled academic review; or uphold terms devised at the review. Such action includes but is not limited to one or more of the following: placement on academic probation; withdrawal of funding support; restriction from course registration; or program dismissal.

Academic Progress
It is expected and accepted that time required to earn a PhD can vary by several factors. Nevertheless, students must demonstrate steady progress toward their degree. This is monitored through the *Student Annual Report*, completed by students on an annual basis in consultation with their advisors/chairs. The report has three purposes: 1) to track students' academic and research activities; 2) to facilitate future planning and goal-setting; and 3) to ensure that students receive feedback about their performance and progress. The report must be submitted to the PhD Program Assistant by May 31 of each academic year.
- **First-year students** must also complete the report with their advisors after the first semester of coursework (as per Graduate School policy). The report is due to the Program Assistant by January 31.

Students who are judged by the advisor/chair or Program Director to be making inadequate progress toward their degree will be notified by the Program Director that they are in jeopardy of program dismissal. This communication will specify remedial steps and a corresponding schedule to which a student must adhere in order to avoid dismissal. In addition to consultation with the advisor/chair, the Program Director also may convene an academic review with the student and advisor/chair to identify obstacles to progress and to devise a plan for improved pace and productivity.

PROGRAM DISMISSAL

The PhD Program Director may dismiss from the program any student who does not uphold ethical, professional, or academic standards. This includes but is not limited to: ethical or professional misconduct; failure to meet minimum academic standards; and failure to progress. A student may also be dismissed if they do not maintain continuous registration or do not meet Graduate School time limits (i.e., degree conferral within seven years). In all cases, students will be notified when in jeopardy of program dismissal. The student will have an opportunity, if reasonable and feasible, to redress the concern or to present claims on her/his behalf. Students have the right to petition for retroactive registration and time extensions; however, the PhD Program Director will allow these only under extenuating circumstances.

As per Graduate School guidelines pertaining to dismissal, students who are dismissed on academic grounds (i.e., substandard performance, failure to progress, failure to maintain continuous registration, or exceeding Graduate School time limits for degree completion) will have a service indicator placed on their record that will prevent them from future registration. A student may contest her/his dismissal and seek reinstatement to the program by submitting a formal request to the Dean (see the relevant Graduate School policy under "Reinstatement"). If a student wishes to reapply to the same program or another at the university, they must also submit a formal request for reinstatement.

STUDENT RECOURSE

PhD students may have concerns about the conduct of student peers, faculty, or staff. In such cases, students are entitled and encouraged to seek guidance or take action through a variety of channels. Students may express their concerns to the PhD Program Director, Assistant Dean for Student & Academic Affairs, or any other trusted faculty/staff member. Beyond the UBSSW, students may contact the following university-wide resources for consultation, clarification of policies and procedures, or further referral.

- UB Students' Advocate Office
  Student advocates are able to help with an array of academic and non-academic issues, including but not limited to questions related to your student account, registration and records, campus services, and policies related to the conduct of all university community members (faculty, staff, and students).
- UB Office of Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

If a PhD student believes that they have been subject to unfair, inequitable, or discriminatory treatment by a faculty member, they may file a grievance.
- When a **UBSSW faculty member** is involved, the grievance is heard by the UBSSW's Committee on Students and follows the process set forth in the MSW Student Handbook.
- When a **non-UBSSW faculty member** (i.e., an instructor from another academic unit) is involved, the grievance process follows the Graduate School's Academic Grievance Policies & Procedures.

SECTION II: STUDENT, FACULTY, & ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES

Students, faculty, and staff may occupy diverse roles in the PhD Program. Below are definitions of these roles and any associated responsibilities or applicable procedures (e.g., for forming a committee).

STUDENT STATUSES & GROUPS

PhD students may be categorized based on candidacy status: **pre-candidates** are those who have not yet passed comprehensive exams; **candidates** have passed exams and are in the dissertation stage.

Navigation
Navigation is the PhD student group at the SSW. The group's objectives, activities, and governance are determined solely by participating students. A representative is invited to attend Faculty Council meetings.
- 2020-2021 Leadership: Hannah Ginn and Beth Tripi

SSW Graduate Student Association (GSA)
The SSW GSA is the school chapter of the university-wide GSA. The SSW GSA represents the interests of all SSW students and organizes initiatives and activities as it sees fit. SSW GSA officers are elected by students each year. A representative is invited to attend Faculty Council meetings.
- 2020-2021 Officers: President - Michelle Melton; Vice-President - Jessica Mencia; Treasurer - Leah Ingraham; Secretary - Jillian Connick

FACULTY ROLES

Advisor
SSW faculty who are recognized Graduate School Faculty are eligible to advise PhD students. The PhD Program Director assigns advisors to students upon their acceptance to the PhD Program. These matches are made based on the student's and faculty member's expressed interest in working together. The advisor is expected to counsel a student regarding: course selection; program requirements and standards; scholarly interests and objectives; professional norms and socialization. Until a committee chair is selected, the advisor is responsible for completing the *Student Annual Report* with the student.

Supervising Committee
Students' comprehensive exams and dissertation are supervised by a committee of at least three Graduate School Faculty members: a SSW chair; one SSW member; and one member from another university unit.
- The **committee chair** functions much like an advisor but with the added responsibilities of guiding the student's comprehensive examination and dissertation work. Once formally appointed, the committee chair assumes responsibility for completing progress reviews with a student. The chair may be the same faculty member who served as the student's initial advisor but this is not automatic or required.
- The other **two committee members** may also confer with the student individually and during group meetings, but the degree of their involvement may vary. Preferences with regard to frequency and scope of consultation should be discussed and mutually agreed upon by the student, chair, and committee members. At minimum, committee members: review work generated by the student for the comprehensive examination (all stages thereof), dissertation proposal, and dissertation; provide constructive feedback; attend and vote at oral defenses; and review required revisions.

- Students may elect to have **auxiliary committee members** (e.g., faculty from other universities, UB researchers who are not Graduate School Faculty). These individuals may not chair committees but retain the same rights and responsibilities as other committee members. Students should consult thoroughly with all involved parties prior to formally adding an auxiliary committee member.
- A student may approach eligible faculty to inquire about their willingness to serve on her/his committee at any time after entry into the program. Students are strongly encouraged to find a committee chair (and committee members, if possible) before the final semester of coursework. Students may not proceed with the comprehensive examination until a full committee has been established.
- As students identify members of their supervising committee, they should submit a *Request to Establish a Committee* for each. These do not need to be filed at the same time.
- Students are encouraged to maintain the same committee throughout the program. However, circumstances may necessitate changes in committee composition. In such a case, students should identify new committee members as soon as possible and file a *Request for Committee Change*. If students have already filed the *Application to Candidacy*, they must submit an [amendment](#).
- As per [Graduate School guidelines](#), a faculty member leaving UB for another institution may remain on a committee if the student will defend the dissertation within one year. If longer, the departing member must be replaced. A retiring faculty member may stay on a committee if the faculty member, student, and PhD Program Director are amenable.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES & PERSONNEL

This is not a comprehensive list of SSW faculty and staff involved in the PhD Program. It includes only those who play a direct role in determining and/or implementing PhD Program policies.

PhD Program Director
Supervises all aspects of the PhD program, including admissions, curriculum, academic standards, policy compliance, and student support and professional development.
- 2020-2021: Annette Semanchin Jones

Academic Processes Coordinator
Assists with PhD program operation, particularly student files, registration, & communication.
- 2020-2021: Ashley Allen

Doctoral Programs Committee
Comprised of faculty and doctoral students, this body oversees policies, procedures, and planning for both the PhD and DSW programs.
- 2020-2021: Annette Semanchin Jones and Louanne Bakk (co-chairs); Paul Stasiewicz; Betsy Bowen; Diane Elze (Ex officio), Hannah Ginn (PhD Student Representative), and Michelle Fortuango (DSW Student Representative)

Assistant Dean for Student & Academic Affairs
Provides student support services, oversees graduate assistantship tuition funding, and ensures compliance with applicable PhD Program, SSW, Graduate School, and University policies.
- 2020-2021: Dana Horne

SECTION III: CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

All three degree tracks of the PhD Program include three curricular components: 1) coursework; 2) comprehensive examinations; and 3) dissertation. The following section describes the requirements, policies, and procedures for each of these components.

PhD students must maintain full-time status. During coursework, students who also hold an assistantship must register for at least nine credits (and no more than 19). Those without an assistantship must register for at least 12 credits (and no more than 19). As per the Graduate School's registration policies, failure to meet these credit thresholds may affect students' loans, immigration status, and scholarship eligibility. After coursework, students register for single Directed Reading or Dissertation credits as described below.

MSW COURSEWORK

Only students in the MSW/PhD Traditional and Advanced Standing tracks are required to take MSW courses. MSW curriculum and course descriptions are available on the SSW website.

MSW/PhD Traditional Track
- All foundation year courses and field placement
- All required advanced year courses and field placement

MSW/PhD Advanced Standing Track
- Advanced standing seminars
- All required advanced year courses and field placement
- Three electives

Field placements are a core component of the MSW curriculum. The UBSSW Field Education unit arranges and supervises all placements to ensure that they meet CSWE standards. Foundation year placements provide a generalist experience, allowing students to develop basic social work skills in a broad range of social work activities. Advanced year placements focus on honing students' skills and expertise in a chosen area or mode of practice. All MSW students have the option of indicating research as an area of interest for a field placement. MSW/PhD students typically elect to complete one research-oriented field placement, however this is neither required nor guaranteed. This can be during either the foundation or advanced year.

PhD COURSEWORK

Proseminars (12 credits)
These SSW-based courses ground students in social work perspectives and priorities while encouraging interdisciplinary synthesis. They also provide opportunities for interaction with other social work students and exposure to social work-specific norms, standards, and trends (e.g., publishing, job market, funding).
- Students must complete three proseminars (*Social Work Processes*, *Theories of Social Functioning*, and *Research Directions in Social Work*) in the first two years of coursework. Each of these proseminars are worth three credits and are offered in a rotating sequence (one per semester) determined by the PhD Program Director.

- Students are required to register for three semesters of the one-credit *Social Work Scholarship* proseminar: both semesters of the first year; one semester (spring or fall according to student choice) in the second year.

SW 663: Social Work Scholarship
This proseminar is designed to foster students' intellectual and professional development into innovative and productive social work scholars. Through delivered content, assignments, and interactions, students will have opportunities to: 1) amass critical knowledge needed to become expert in a specific substantive area; 2) hone professional skills and strategies; and 3) integrate interdisciplinary experiences and content with social work knowledge, methods, and ethics. Students will reflect on their emerging scholarship – in terms of their substantive areas and professional profiles – in relation to the wide range of systems (e.g., individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations), systems of care, and fields of practice (e.g., clinical intervention, community intervention, administration, policy) in which social work is engaged.

SW 664: Social Work Processes
This proseminar critically examines how social systems undergo change and the role of social work in those processes. Students will examine: 1) how various systems change over time and in response to various stimuli; 2) how a system's structures and components, surrounding contexts, and intersection with other systems affect change processes and outcomes; 3) how to conceptualize, initiate, respond to, and assess system change. Students will examine processes of and potential for change in relation to the wide range of systems (e.g., individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations), systems of care, and fields of practice (e.g., clinical intervention, community intervention, administration, policy) in which social work is engaged.

SW 665: Theories of Social Functioning
This proseminar is a critical, multidisciplinary survey of classic and emerging theories of the complex functions and interrelations of social systems. Students will examine theories for their fundamental assumptions, sociohistorical origins, philosophical underpinnings, empirical bases, and ramifications for various systems and in various contexts. This process of critical and comparative analysis will emphasize the role of theory in guiding social work practice and help students recognize the steps and skills required of theory-building. Theories studied in the course will reflect the wide range of systems (e.g., individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations), systems of care, and fields of practice (e.g., clinical intervention, community intervention, administration, policy) in which social work is engaged.

SW 667: Research Directions in Social Work
This proseminar will prepare students to apply advanced research methods and analytic approaches to the study of social issues. The course will provide students with foundation necessary to design and carry out an independent research project (e.g., a dissertation). It is taken in concert with advanced research methods and statistics courses in other disciplines and is not expected to replicate the content of those courses. The methods and approaches studied will be relevant to the wide range of systems (e.g., individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations), systems of care, and fields of practice (e.g., clinical intervention, community intervention, administration, policy) in which social work is engaged.

Advanced Analysis (9 credits) & Research Methods (3 credits)
These courses can be taken in any academic unit at UB and must include doctoral-level content. Their purpose is to equip students with skills and knowledge to design and carry out empirically sound research.
- These courses can be taken in any combination or sequence, but students should note that some analysis courses are offered as part of a year-long, two-course sequence and plan accordingly.
- A student should consult with her/his advisor to select courses that build appropriately on the student's existing skills and can be applied to the student's field of study.
- Students are advised to contact course instructors and/or academic units to ensure that courses of interest are open to students from other disciplines and include sufficiently advanced content.
- Of the advanced analysis courses, at least two must cover quantitative techniques. The third may involve qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches.

Electives (PhD: 15 credits; MSW/PhD: 6 credits)
Electives may be chosen on many grounds, such as: direct relevance to the student's substantive area; the expansion of a student's analysis skills; the opportunity to work with a faculty member with related expertise; or the potential for a student to forge innovative connections across theories, methods, or fields of study. In any case, students should have a clear rationale for which electives they select.
- Students should consult advisors about the selection of electives.
- Students should contact course instructors and/or academic units to ensure that courses of interest are open to students from other disciplines and include doctoral-level content.
- Electives are intended to be courses taken outside the SSW in order to foster interdisciplinary exposure and exchange. Exceptions may be allowed for MSW courses or independent studies that are uniquely well-suited to the student's field of study and scholarly development. The following conditions apply:

    To take a MSW course for PhD elective credit:
    1. The instructor must agree to adjust assignments and expectations to qualify as doctoral-level work.
    2. Course content may not duplicate a previous course (including from the student's MSW program).
    3. The student must submit a *SSW Elective Permission* form, including clear justification, for review and approval by her/his advisor and the PhD Program Director.

    To take an Independent Study for PhD elective credit:
    1. Course content may not duplicate an existing and available course at the university.
    2. No more than six independent study credits may be applied to the degree; no more than three of these may be taken within the SSW.
    3. A student must arrange the independent study with the desired faculty supervisor (must have a doctorate) including specification of time commitments, supervisory meetings, and products. One credit is roughly equivalent to four hours per week. At the doctoral level, three credit independent studies should result in a publishable product.
    4. Based on terms negotiated with the faculty supervisor, the student completes the *Independent Study Contract* for review and approval by her/his advisor and the PhD Program Director.
    5. If approved, the PhD Program Assistant will register the student for the independent study.

Research Internship (4 credits)
The Research Internship provides students with an opportunity to apply the skills, competencies, techniques, and tools of social work research.

- To complete the Research Internship, a student must have: 1) access to a study at any stage of development or previously collected data; and 2) faculty supervision to ensure the quality of the learning experience and of the student's work.
- Learning activities may include, but are not limited to: literature reviews; project design and implementation; grant writing; IRB protocols; data collection; data entry; data analysis; writing results; conference paper or poster; and manuscript preparation and submission.
- Students are advised to complete the research internship during their final year of PhD coursework.
- The Research Internship is typically divided over two semesters, but alternatives may be approved at the discretion of the supervising faculty member, faculty advisor, and Program Director.

There are three paths by which a student can pursue the Research Internship:
- A student can find a UBSSW faculty member with data to analyze or an active study that the student can assist with and who is willing to supervise the student and serve as the instructor of record.
- A student with independent access to data or a study (e.g., data from an agency) may ask a faculty member with relevant topical or analytic expertise to supervise and serve as the instructor of record.
- A student without access to data or an active study should contact the PhD Program Director for matching with an appropriate project and faculty supervisor.

   In all cases, to register for a Research Internship:
   1. A student and the supervising faculty member will complete the *Research Internship Contract*, including the following information: a brief description of the project; the tasks to be completed by the student and any relevant deadlines; and a plan for supervision (e.g., frequency of meetings, type of feedback to be provided by the faculty member).
   2. Once completed by the student and supervising faculty member, the *Research Internship Contract* will be submitted to the student's faculty advisor (if not directly supervising the project) and the PhD Program Director, who will each review the contract and request revisions as needed to ensure a feasible and rich learning experience.
   3. After approval by the student's faculty advisor (if not the supervisor) and PhD Program Director, the PhD Program Assistant will add the contract to the student's file.

Directed Readings & Dissertation Registration
After completing required coursework and the research internship, students must register for at least one credit per semester until the PhD is conferred. To maintain full-time status, students must also submit the *Certification of Full-time Status* to the PhD Program Assistant.
- Until the comprehensive examination is passed, students register for at least one Directed Reading credit per semester.
- Once a candidate, students register for one Dissertation credit per semester until the final defense.
- For Directed Readings and Dissertation credits, the committee chair serves as the instructor of record.
- To meet the 47-credit minimum required for PhD degree conferral, students must register for at least four credits under Directed Readings and/or Dissertation.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The comprehensive examination tests a student's knowledge and capacity for critical analysis of a particular research topic. Exams cover four domains related to the identified research topic: **1) substantive area**; **2) theories of human behavior**; **3) interventions** (micro, mezzo, or macro, including policy); and **4)**

research methods and analyses. Exams typically are conducted the year after coursework (a minimum of 43 credits must be complete). Passing the comprehensive exam indicates a student's readiness to begin the dissertation. Only after passing the comprehensive exam does a student qualify as a doctoral candidate. Comprehensive exams proceed in the three stages described below. Please note that the written essays and oral defense are two parts of a single process. Once the written essay stage has been initiated, the exam should not be paused or halted. Examination timeframes and processes may be revised only under exceptional, unalterable, and/or unforeseen circumstances. Such adjustments are at the discretion of the committee chair and must have the approval of the PhD Program Director. Students and faculty should consult the *Comprehensive Examination Policy & Procedure,* and *Comprehensive Examination Guidelines* for details about each stage of the process and guidelines for assessing student's work. **Faculty chairing a comprehensive examination committee for the first time will meet with PhD Program Director for an in-depth review of the process, evaluative standards, and the role of chair.**

1. **Literature Tables**
    As soon as the student identifies a field of study, they may begin compiling literature tables. This work consists of reviewing relevant literature and constructing four annotated bibliographies, one for each of the domains noted above. At minimum, tables must include each of the following for each source: complete citation information; content summary; and notation of the particular relevance or contribution of the work to the student's critical understanding and analysis of the topic. Tables should also be prefaced by a brief introductory paragraph defining the conceptual parameters of the literature to be reviewed. Beyond this, the format, scope, and content of the tables should be tailored to the field of study, the student's needs and skills, and the committee's preferences. Committee members may also divide responsibilities for overseeing the development and assessment of the literature tables as they see fit. Expectations regarding the literature tables should be discussed explicitly and agreed to by the student and supervising committee members as early as possible so that this step is completed efficiently and so that the tables serve as a strong, rich foundation for subsequent stages of the examination process. The *Comprehensive Examination Guidelines* should be used as a resource.

2. **Written Essays**
    A student may not begin essays until they sign the *Academic Integrity Agreement* form stating that work generated for the exam will be original and adhere to the [Graduate School's academic integrity policy.](#) **Students who violate this agreement are not entitled to repeat the examination and may be dismissed from the program at the discretion of the PhD Program Director.**

    Essays are written in response to one question (formed by committee members) for each of the four domains (i.e., substantive area, theories, interventions, research methods/analyses). Questions are expected to be sufficiently complex to require the student to demonstrate mastery of the subject area and the ability to synthesize knowledge, theory, practice, and research in relevant and creative ways. Committee members may collaborate in writing questions or divide responsibilities for each domain.

    The student writes essay responses to each question over four weeks (one question per week). The sequencing and timing of question distribution will be determined by the student's supervising committee. The PhD Program Assistant will coordinate question distribution and response receipt. Essays must conform to APA style and citation. Expectations regarding exam length should be discussed by the student and supervising committee in advance of question distribution, using the *Comprehensive Examination Guidelines* as a resource.

Once the student receives the question(s), there should be no contact between the student and any committee members regarding the exam. This includes student questions to the committee and committee feedback for the student.

3. **Oral Defense**
    An oral defense must occur within 10 academic days of submission of the final essay response and is expected to last up to three hours. The purpose of the oral defense is to test if a student: has an adequate knowledge base in their area of specialization; is able to articulate complex concepts; and is able to engage in extemporaneous intellectual exchanges. Only the student, supervising committee members, and PhD Program Director (at the director's discretion) attend the defense. Defenses typically begin with an overview by the student of her/his essay responses. Committee members will pose follow-up questions and facilitate discussions to assess the student's knowledge and abilities.

Assessment of Comprehensive Examination

Once all questions have been answered at the defense, the committee will assess the student's performance on the written and oral components of the exam and make a collective determination on each, using the *Comprehensive Examination Guidelines* as a resource. This assessment and consequent recommendations will be provided in writing to the student as soon as possible. This may occur immediately after the defense and at least within two weeks. The PhD Program Director is notified of the examination outcome and may request a copy of the written examination.

Each essay will be rated as: **pass with distinction**; **pass**; **marginal**; or **fail**. The oral defense will be evaluated as **pass** or **fail**. Based on these assessments, the following outcomes are possible:

- **Successful Completion.** This is predicated on the student passing the oral defense and each essay being designated as pass or pass with distinction. The student may advance to PhD candidacy upon submission of the *Application to Candidacy*.

- **Revision Required.** If the student passes the oral defense but one or two essays are considered marginal or failing, the student will have one opportunity to address the committee's concerns as per terms set by the committee. If corrections are accepted, the exam will be considered successfully completed. If corrections do not satisfy the committee, the exam will be designated as failed.

- **Exam Failure.** An exam is considered failed when one of the following occurs: the oral defense is failed (regardless of essay quality); three or four of the essays are considered marginal or failing. If an exam is failed, the student will have one opportunity to retake exams. At minimum, repeating exams requires new or substantially revised essay questions and an oral defense. The committee also may request revisions to literature tables.

In cases of exam failure, students will have one opportunity to retake exams. **Upon a second failed exam, the student will be dismissed from the program.** Students who violate standards of academic integrity are not entitled to a second examination opportunity.

DISSERTATION

The dissertation is the final stage of the PhD program. It consists of a research project designed and carried out by the student with the approval of and in consultation with her/his supervising committee. The

substantive scope, theoretical framework, research questions, data sources and types, and analytic strategies may vary widely across students. However, expectations of quality are consistent. All dissertations must: build on existing knowledge; include rigorous analysis; offer sound interpretations of findings; possess critical depth; and be well-composed.

Dissertation Proposal

From the earliest stages of developing a dissertation research project, a student should work closely with committee members, especially the chair. Prior to formally beginning the dissertation, the student must present her/his plans for the work to the committee. This involves the written dissertation proposal and an oral defense thereof. The proposal and proposal defense have two purposes: 1) for the committee to vet the project's meaningfulness, design, and feasibility; and 2) for the committee and student to establish common expectations for the dissertation project and process (e.g., timetable, frequency of contact).

The **written proposal's** format and content will be determined by the student's area of study and the preferences of the committee. At minimum, the proposal must include:
- Thorough, well-organized literature review of the substantive area and theoretical framework(s)
- If secondary data analysis: an overview of study method (i.e., participants, procedure, measures)
- If original data are to be collected: a detailed plan that addresses ethical standards for human subjects research, data collection processes, and anticipated outcomes (e.g., sample size, measures)
- Description of planned analyses and corresponding rationale
- For those electing a three-paper dissertation, please also see the *Three-paper Dissertation Guidelines* on UB Learns and include responses to the guiding questions in that document.

At the **proposal defense**, the student will present their planned project and respond to questions from the committee members. The committee will offer feedback and recommendations to strengthen the proposed work and to ensure its feasibility. The defense should also include discussion of: a schedule for meeting project goals over the course of the dissertation including a target date for the final defense; expectations for committee members' involvement (e.g., communication regarding drafts, analyses, findings). The committee makes one of the following determinations on the *Dissertation Proposal Defense* form:

- **Pass, no revisions required.** The student may begin work on the dissertation.

- **Pass, contingent upon revisions.** Revisions detailed on the *Dissertation Proposal Defense* form must be completed before dissertation research may proceed.

- **Revision and redefense required.** Revisions detailed on the *Dissertation Proposal Defense* form must be completed and successfully redefended before dissertation research may proceed.

Dissertation Preparation & Defense

While **preparing the dissertation**, a student should:
- Refer to the Graduate School's PhD Candidate Requirements to ensure eligibility for degree conferral.
- Familiarize her/himself with the Graduate School's Guidelines for Electronic Thesis/Dissertation Preparation and Submission. It provides details regarding the dissertation's required format (e.g., reference styles, font, pagination), applicable copyright policies, and steps for final submission.

- Recall that the expectations and consequences set forth in the *Academic Integrity Agreement* form (signed and submitted prior to the comprehensive exam) are applicable to the dissertation. Any violation of this may result in immediate dismissal from the program.
- Consult periodically with her/his committee as per the expectations set forth at the proposal defense.
- Set a mutually convenient defense date once the committee agrees there is sufficient evidence that the dissertation is nearing completion and that it will meet standards of accuracy, clarity, depth, and rigor.
- Submit a full and polished final version to the committee at least two weeks in advance of the defense.
- Inform the PhD Program Director and PhD Program Assistant of the defense time and location.

The **oral dissertation defense** resembles the comprehensive exam and dissertation proposal defenses insofar as it consists of a brief presentation by the student followed by questions and comments from the committee. Alternative formats are allowable at the discretion of the chair and in consultation with committee members. The dissertation defense is open to the public.

After the question and comment period, the committee confers privately to reach a determination. The chair notes all feedback and recommendations and is responsible for providing the student with a written summary thereof following the defense. The student is then invited to rejoin the committee and is informed of the outcome, which may include:

- **Unconditional Pass.** No revisions needed. Committee members sign and submit the *Multi-purpose Form* (M-Form) to the Program Director. The student may proceed to the final steps for PhD conferral.

- **Conditional Pass.** The dissertation is passed contingent upon adequate revision. Committee members sign the *M-Form*. The student must make required revisions and obtain the approval of all committee members. The chair signs the *M-Form* again to attest that revisions have been approved by all committee members. Once the *M-Form* is received by the Program Director, the student may proceed to the final steps required for degree conferral.

- **Determination Postponed: pending revision.** Any committee member who feels that extensive revisions are required and that the dissertation is not passable – even on a contingent basis – in its current form may decline to sign the *M-Form*. In this case, the student must make revisions and submit these to the abstaining committee member in order to obtain her/his approval. Once the *M-Form* has been signed by all committee members and all final revisions have been accepted, the student may proceed to the final steps required by the Graduate School for PhD conferral.

- **Determination Postponed: pending revision & redefense.** If the dissertation and defense are considered inadequate, the committee may offer the student an opportunity to make substantial revisions and redefend the dissertation. In such cases, a strict schedule for revision and redefense must be established and communicated to the student. If the student does not meet the deadline for redefense or is not passed upon redefense, the student will be dismissed from the PhD Program.

CONFERRAL & COMMENCEMENT

The Graduate School confers degrees three times per year: February 1; June 1; and September 1. Refer to the Graduate School's details on degree conferral deadlines and requirements.

Each May, the SSW holds a commencement ceremony to acknowledge graduating students. This is only a ceremonial event; it is neither equivalent to degree conferral nor is participation required.

- Students who pass the oral defense **before April 1** may participate in commencement; they must still abide by the Graduate School's deadline for all revisions and degree documents for June conferral.
- Students with a defense date scheduled for **after April 1** may participate in commencement only if the committee chair formally attests, on behalf of all other committee members, that the committee has unanimous and unequivocal confidence that the student will complete the oral defense and all required revisions in time to make the Graduate School's deadline for June conferral.
- In all other cases, students must wait until the next academic year's ceremony.

Students who wish to participate in commencement must provide the event coordinator with the following information no later than April 1: full name; undergraduate institution and degree; MSW institution; month and date of official PhD conferral; committee chair and members; name of hooder; and dissertation title.

SECTION IV: EXTRACURRICULAR COMPONENTS

The PhD Program's required curriculum is supplemented by many opportunities for further intellectual and professional development. Beyond the assistantship duties that may be entailed in funding packages, students are encouraged to contribute and participate in ways that are meaningful and beneficial.

FUNDING & MATERIAL SUPPORT

Funding packages offered to students accepted to the PhD Program typically consist of tuition support, and a stipended assistantship (see below for descriptions of each component) for a specified number of years or credit hours. Terms may vary by available funds and students' circumstances and qualifications. Students may decline all or parts of the funding package at their discretion. Support may be reduced, suspended, or rescinded if a student does not meet assigned responsibilities or standards.

- Domestic students are eligible to become New York State residents after one semester of a graduate assistantship or fellowship. Domestic students are expected to apply for NYS residency by December 1 of their first year as a Graduate Assistant or Fellow. The SSW will only cover tuition at the out-of-state rate for the first semester. If an eligible student fails to become a NYS resident during that time, they will bear financial obligation for the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates. Detailed information and instructions are listed here: http://www.buffalo.edu/studentaccounts/nys-residency/ta-ga-ra-fellow.html

Students are encouraged to seek out grants, fellowships, and scholarships to support academic study, conference travel, or research projects. Students are free to pursue paid positions through other units at the SSW (e.g., Field Education, Continuing Education), on grant-funded project, as a GA in another university unit, or at another institution or agency. They may take such positions in lieu of the GA portion of their funding package or once their guaranteed funding package is complete.

Tuition Waivers

The SSW provides PhD students with tuition coverage for up to 47 credits for PhD students and 50 credits for MSW/PhD students. Students are only charged up to 12 credits per semester; any credits over 12 are not counted against the tuition waiver. The tuition waiver is typically sufficient to cover all seated coursework and some portion of registration for Directed Reading and Dissertation credits. Once tuition credits are exhausted, students are personally responsible for registration fees.

Graduate Assistantships

Assistantships may entail a wide range of duties and responsibilities, with some research-oriented and others more administrative in nature. A "full" 10-month GA assignment is equal to 20 hours/week over the calendar year starting in August. Half-time GA positions (10 hrs/week) are sometimes available and students may be assigned to two 10hr GA positions. All aspects of the position (e.g., duties, timesheets, feedback) are overseen by the supervisor and SSW Resource Management unit.

Each year, the Doctoral Programs Committee will solicit requests for a PhD GA from SSW faculty, staff, and research institutes conducting research. This entails completing the *Matched PhD Assistantship Request* form, outlining the nature of the work to be completed. The form also specifies the conditions and expectations with which the supervisor must adhere. Requests judged by the Doctoral Programs

Committee to be sufficiently enriching for the student will be included in the pool of GA slots that the PhD Program Director assigns to students eligible for a SSW-funded GA. The PhD Program Director makes these assignments in consultation with students and assistantship supervisors. Assistantship assignments may continue as long as both the supervisor and student wish and as long as the student is still within the period of guaranteed assistantship support.

Teaching Assistantships

Students may teach MSW courses in lieu of a GA if: they have met all academic and conduct standards; they have adequate knowledge and pedagogical aptitude; and there is a need for part-time instructors in the MSW Program. These factors are determined by the MSW Program Director. PhD students serving as TAs teach independently and are regarded as part-time faculty. Two courses per semester is equivalent to a 20 hr/week GA. TAs are 9-month appointments. Students may teach fewer than two courses per semester if they wish or may pair a TA with other positions.

If a student wishes to serve as a TA but lacks sufficient prior experience, the MSW Program Director may arrange for the student to complete a **volunteer teaching mentorship** with a faculty member. The unpaid semester-long mentorship is meant to equip students with strategies and skills required for independent course instruction. This includes but is not limited to: syllabus development; assignment design and assessment; content preparation and delivery; discussion facilitation; and student and classroom climate management. Students will have opportunities to practice these skills and receive feedback from the faculty mentor; however, students should not bear sole or majority responsibility for course instruction and tasks.

Conference Travel Grants

To offset the expenses associated with academic conference travel and registration, a limited number of conference travel grants (up to $500 each) are offered each year to students whose funding packages do not already include a research/travel allowance. Students who are presenting at any academic conference or who will be interviewed at CSWE or SSWR are eligible to apply. See the *PhD Conference Travel Grant Request* for details regarding eligibility, allowable expenses, and procedures.

Facilities

The majority of SSW faculty and staff are located on the 6th floor of Baldy Hall, North Campus. Some offices are on the 5th floor. PhD students may also use the shared office in Baldy 437, which is equipped with computers and a printer. Students may request UB ID swipe card access by contacting the UBSSW IT department. A SSW student lounge in Baldy 631 is equipped with a microwave, mini-fridge, and two computers. The SSW makes use of several conference rooms throughout Baldy. Students should email the Program Assistant to reserve a room (e.g., for a defense).

The SSW's [Buffalo Center for Social Research](#) (BCSR) is located on the 2nd floor of Parker Hall, South Campus. The BCSR serves as a home base for many PhD students given its provision of critical material resources and supports. Foremost among these for PhD students' purposes include: PhD computer lab with individual cubicles equipped with desktops and shared workstations; virtual data analysis lab; statistical consultation; trainings and workshops; meeting space and interview rooms for private data collection. Most of these physical spaces can be accessed using the swipe card system (request permission through the UBSSW IT department). Through the virtual lab, students are able to access analysis software and data stored on UBSSW servers.

SSW Awards & Honors

PhD students are eligible for the following SSW-specific annual awards. Students and advisors/chairs are encouraged to seek out other extramural awards and honors.

- **Outstanding Part-time Faculty Member:** awarded based on voting by MSW students
- **Nochajski Essay Award:** cash prize awarded to a PhD student for outstanding written work composed over the course of the program
- **SSW/BCSR Research Award:** awarded to faculty/staff, students, or community partners for outstanding research contributions to social work knowledge
- **Child Sexual Abuse Research Award:** awarded to a UBSSW PhD candidate studying child sexual abuse and/or the rights and well-being of CSA survivors.
- **Susan M. Nochajski Research Grant:** funding to support a student's independent research project.

SCHOOL & PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT

Service

PhD students may serve on some SSW and SSW-affiliated committees. Regular committees that include PhD student representative(s) are listed below. Students may also be invited to participate in ad hoc committees (e.g., Student Adjudication Committees). The process for identifying PhD student members varies depending on the committee's charge. In most cases, PhD student representatives will be voted on by their peers through a process overseen by Navigation.

- **Doctoral Programs Committee**. Develops program policies and procedures and monitors program functioning. Voting members: PhD Program Director (co-chair); DSW Program Director (co-chair); two faculty members; one DSW student; and one PhD student who has completed at least 12 credits of coursework. Student members are not involved in application or award reviews or decisions.
- **Recruitment Committee.** Carries out searches for faculty candidates. At minimum, members include: one tenure/tenure-earning faculty member; one clinical faculty member; one student (MSW or PhD).
- **Committee on Students.** Reviews admissions/retention policies and procedures, hears grievances and student conduct concerns, and oversees student awards. Voting members: five faculty members; one Field Education staff member; two MSW students; one PhD student.
- **BCSR Research Advisory Committee.** Advises the BCSR Director on policies and functions and participates in Center activities at the Director's discretion. Members selected by the BCSR Director.

Engagement

Students may participate in other extracurricular organizations and initiatives at the SSW, in other academic departments, and at the university more broadly. Professional organizations also often incorporate roles for student representatives.

At a minimum, students should prioritize attendance at the PhD Program-sponsored professional development sessions and events; and SSW-sponsored series such as the BCSR Grand Rounds and Global Interest Group lectures.