

## **ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MSW PROGRAM - For Students**

These are the essential requirements necessary to provide reasonable assurance that students can complete the Master of Social Work (MSW) program and participate in all aspects of social work education and practice. Students are expected to be able to meet these standards in the classroom and in the professional practicum. If you intend to enroll in an MSW program at King's University College, please review the outline of essential requirements listed in this statement.

### **Rationale**

These are essential requirements of the Masters of Social Work program. The MSW provides eligibility for membership to the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and to practice as a social worker. Social workers in Ontario must adhere to and know the Ontario Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as that is the only code of ethics that an Ontario social worker will be disciplined by.

These essential requirements are necessary because of the nature of working with vulnerable people, groups and communities. This means social work students will often be exposed to highly complex human situations and will be required to engage and respond responsibly, in a manner that centers the well-being of clients, while also attending to the student's own needs. This also requires the capacity to seek supervision and support when needed. In addition, written communication, including record keeping, written reports, policy briefs, and case notes are vital in the professional practicum context. The ability to read, decode, interpret and comprehend multiple sources of information is fundamental for safe and effective assessment, intervention and professional support in the professional practicum.

Social work also requires being able to undertake critical reflection about inequality, our own biases and assumptions, and the nature of people's issues and needs. This involves the dual challenge of both assisting people's functioning and identifying and responding to systemic issues that create inequity and injustice. Social work requires an ability to appreciate and reflect on our own social locations and the social, economic, cultural and situational contexts of people's lives and the implications these have for professional practice. An ability to communicate across cultures and respect diversity is essential to social work education across all professional practicum settings.

### **1. Attendance, Participation and Timely Completion**

Students must attend classes and professional practicum settings consistently and reliably in order to respect the continuity of their learning (and that of others), the value of multiple contexts of learning and the commitment to reliable service provision in the professional practicum. When experiencing difficulties, students must advise appropriate contacts (academic or practicum supervisor) and make alternate arrangements in a timely fashion (i.e. in advance of the commitment and as soon as the barrier to participation is known to

or anticipated by the student). Students must demonstrate an ability to sustain physical and socio-emotional performance and alertness, in both the classroom and professional practicum settings in order to actively participate in the activities of the environment (i.e. stay awake during classes or client interviews).

Requirements:

- Participate regularly and consistently in tutorials, lectures, skill development opportunities etc.;
- Attend professional practicum placement regularly and predictably;
- Engage consistently in activities required as part of professional practicum placement experience, before, during and following the professional practicum experience time period;
- Complete tasks or program requirements within specified time frames, meeting all stated deadlines or negotiated extended deadlines, when these have been established between student and instructor/supervisor.

## 2. Wellness and Management of Personal Needs

Due to the high psychological and emotional demands of social work practice, where work-related stress and burnout is possible and where clients remain the central focus of our work, social work students need to be able to recognize (or at least be open to learning how to recognize) their own individual signs of stress or risk to their health and wellness and to develop an appropriate means to address and maintain emotional/psychological wellness. Importantly this requires an ability to recognize, identify and seek supportive resources, and when necessary to articulate their needs for accommodation.

Requirements:

- The capacity to recognize (or at least an openness to learning how to recognize) their signs of stress and/or declining health and wellness;
- The ability to develop an appropriate means to address and maintain emotional/ psychological wellness;
- The capacity to seek supportive resources and/or health care support, if necessary;
- The ability to clearly articulate accommodation requirements and to negotiate their provision in the setting (classroom or professional practicum);
- The ability to rearticulate and renegotiate accommodation requirements at the earliest possible convenience, should these change at any time.

## 3. Judgement, Self-regulation and Relationship Skills

Social work students need to demonstrate an ability to observe, examine and assess complex situations, and to use this information to construct and enact safe and effective professional responses to clients, peers, supervisors, colleagues and the public. Students must possess the insight needed to appreciate persons and situations, including self, and demonstrate awareness of and responsivity to the impact of one's actions on self and on others. Students must be willing to examine and change their attitudes and behaviour when it falls outside of standards for professional social work practice or unduly interferes with working with clients and other collaborative professional relationships.

Requirements:

- The ability to identify and critically reflect on various contexts for the issues people face, including the social, political, cultural, legal and economic contexts of people's situations and experiences, and the implications of these for professional practice;
- The ability to be self-aware and to self-regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour and

attitudes, and to accept feedback on their academic work and professional practice and respond constructively;

- The ability to identify, critically reflect on relevant contexts which influence how people experience difficulty, and use this reflection to develop integrated responses to academic and professional practicum challenges;
- The ability to appreciate and respond to complexity in social work practice;
- The ability to identify when a practice issue is outside your scope of expertise or when one's practice may be negatively affected by personal experience and/or reactions;
- The ability to establish and maintain respectful relationships with clients, academic staff, supervisors and peers;
- Ability to develop, articulate and maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- Demonstrate appropriate boundaries in professional relationships consistent with the professional practice setting and social work standards;
- Manage tensions and challenges in relationships with clients, individuals, groups and communities appropriately while on placement;
- The awareness of how one's personal actions (including use of social media) impacts their professional life and to manage their behaviour accordingly;
- Apply ethical decision-making;
- Managing conflict in professional practicum or classroom setting. Negotiating conflict is an essential skill for social workers in multiple arenas - advocacy, family conferencing, group facilitation, etc.

#### 4. Professional Commitment

Social work students need to possess a commitment to the values and ethical standards of professional social work. Students are expected to be knowledgeable about and adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics in a manner that aligns with and is generally accepted by the professional social work community.

Requirements:

- Appropriate behaviour with confidential information in classroom and professional practicum placement settings;
- An ability to reflect on ethical considerations and issues and take responsibility for ensuring own awareness of ethical behaviour;
- An ability to apply ethical principles and processes to decision making in professional practicum settings;
- The capacity to promptly notify instructors or practicum supervisors when there is a possible conflict between the student's cultural or religious beliefs and academic or professional practice expectations that would make it difficult to uphold a generally accepted ethical standard of practice.

#### 5. Communication skills

Social work students need to communicate effectively and respectfully with other students, faculty and instructors, staff, clients and other professionals, across diverse cultures. Students must be able to express their ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and ability to listen to others within diverse styles and means of human expression and understanding. They must also recognize the power of non-verbal communication, and reflect on its impact within these relationships. The academic and professional practicum education components of the programs require communication in English.

Requirements:

- Sensitivity to individual and/or cultural differences in their communication;
- The ability to communicate coherently, and to understand verbal and written communication accurately, and respond verbally and in writing in an appropriate and timely manner;
- The capacity to recognize, interpret and respond appropriately to what is being communicated by others and maintain appropriate awareness of their own behaviours and their impact on others;
- The capacity to understand and implement academic and professional practice conventions to construct written text in an appropriate manner for the intended audience;
- The ability to write academically (high quality, appropriately referenced papers) as well as professionally (assessments and case notes).

## 6. Empathy

Social work students need to comprehend another individual's way of life and values and question their own biases and assumptions. They must be able to communicate empathy and support to the client or client group as a basis for a productive professional relationship.

Requirements:

- Capacity to recognize situations from another person's perspective and when this is difficult, the capacity to seek support and information about another person's perspective and to remain open to having our assumptions about others challenged;
- Capacity to understand and relate to the feelings of others;
- Ability to validate another person's perspective.

## 7. Linking Knowledge to practice

Social work students need to recognize the components of the bio-psycho-social-spiritual perspective of social work practice and various social work practice methodologies (e.g. clinical practice, policy analysis, community work, research). They are expected to use this knowledge in conjunction with a respect for alternative and marginalized knowledges, when making informed decisions to engage clients, client systems and other professionals.

Requirements:

- Capacity to locate appropriate and relevant information for social work practice;
- Ability to process information relevant to professional practice and seek out alternative ways of knowing;
- Ability to integrate and implement professional and marginalized knowledge in practice;
- Ability to locate, conceptualize, and use appropriate knowledge in response to academic assessment items;
- Ability to apply professional and marginalized knowledge of policy and procedures in the professional practicum placement;
- Ability to identify, critically analyze and synthesize theoretical and empirical knowledge from various appropriate sources to inform assessment and the development of professional practice responses.