



Essential Requirements for Honours Bachelor of Social Work

These are the essential requirements^{1,2} necessary to provide reasonable assurance that students can successfully complete the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at Nipissing University 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 practicum.

Rationale

The BSW provides eligibility for membership to the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and to practice as a social worker. 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 centres on the well-being of service users, 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 field placement 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 field. 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 practice. An ability to communicate across cultures and respect diversity is essential to social work education across all fields of practice.

The purpose of the Essential Requirements document is to:

- Provide information to prospective social work candidates so they can make an informed choice regarding an application to social work at NU.

¹ This document was developed with permission from our colleagues at the School of Social Work, Carleton University. We have also consulted the College of Nurses of Ontario Essential Requirements (2019) and have adapted some themes from this document.

² All essential requirements are reflected within BSW specific policy statements and Netiquette Guidelines set out in the BSW Handbook.

- Assist student accessibility advisors, faculty, staff and other professionals in developing reasonable accommodations such that students may meet the essential requirements;
- Help ensure the safety of students during their studies and the safety of service users during field education encounters.

The School of Social Work strives to preserve the academic integrity of the Honours Bachelor of Social Work degree by affirming that all students satisfy the essential requirements of the program.

1. Attendance, Participation and Timely Completion

Students must attend classes and 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 field. When experiencing difficulties, students must advise appropriate contacts (academic or placement 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 practicum settings in order to actively participate in the activities of the environment (i.e. stay awake and alert during classes or service user interviews).

Exemplars -

Social work students will:

- Participate regularly and consistently in lectures, skill development opportunities, etc.
- Organize and exercise excellent time management skills to meet all academic requirements (e.g. individual and group presentations, skill examination, in-class debates, exams)
- Attend field placement regularly and predictably.
- Engage consistently in activities required as part of field placement experience, before, during and following the field 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 service users 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.

Exemplars -

Students will demonstrate:

- Capacity to recognize (or at least an openness to learning how to recognize) their signs of stress and/or declining health and wellness.
- Ability to develop an appropriate means to address and maintain emotional/psychological wellness.
- Capacity to seek supportive resources and/or health care support, if necessary.
- Ability to clearly articulate accommodation requirements and to negotiate their provision in the classroom or field placement setting.
- Ability to rearticulate and renegotiate accommodation requirements at the earliest possible convenience, should these change at any time.
- Capacity to adapt to and manage a range of unexpected, changing, stressful, emotionally charged and ethically challenging situations (e.g. abused children, individuals at the end-of-life, women living with violent partners).

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 be attuned to their social surroundings and be able to understand both the context and the impact of one's actions on self and 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 service users and other collaborative professional relationships.

Exemplars -

Social work students will demonstrate:

- 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 practice.
- Ability to accept feedback on their academic work and professional practice and respond constructively.
- 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 field placement challenges.
- Ability to appreciate and respond to complexity in social work practice.

- 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.
- Ability to establish and maintain respectful relationships with service users, faculty and staff, supervisors and peers.
- Ability to develop, articulate and maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Demonstrate appropriate boundaries in professional relationships consistent with the practice setting and social work standards.
- Manage tensions and challenges in relationships with service users, individuals, groups and communities appropriately while on placement.
- Awareness of how one's personal actions (including use of social media) impacts their professional life and to manage their behaviour accordingly.

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.

Exemplars -

Students will demonstrate:

- Appropriate behaviour with confidential information in classroom and field placement settings. An ability to reflect on ethical considerations and issues and take responsibility for ensuring awareness of one's own ethical behaviour.
- Ability to apply ethical principles and processes to decision-making in field placement settings.
- Demonstrated commitment to promptly notify instructors or field supervisors when there is a possible conflict between the student's cultural or religious beliefs and academic or 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, service users 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 field education components of the programs require communication in English.

Exemplars -

Student will demonstrate:

- Sensitivity to individual and/or cultural differences in their communication.
- Ability to communicate coherently, and to understand verbal and written communication accurately, and respond verbally and in writing in an appropriate and timely manner.
- 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.
- Capacity to understand and implement academic and practice conventions to construct written text in an appropriate manner for the intended audience.

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 service user or service user group as a basis for a productive professional relationship.

Exemplars -

Students will demonstrate:

- 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 eco-biopsychosocial 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 service users, service user systems and other professionals.

Exemplars -

Students will demonstrate:

- Capacity to locate appropriate and relevant information for social work practice.

- Ability to process information relevant to 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.
- Ability to apply an analysis of professional and marginalized knowledge of policy and procedures in the field placement.
- Ability to identify, critically analyze and synthesize theoretical and empirical knowledge from various appropriate sources to inform assessment and the development of practice responses.

Reasonable Accommodation and Academic Obligations

Each student with a disability is entitled to reasonable accommodation that will assist him/her/them to meet the program's standards and academic requirements. Reasonable accommodation does not compromise the essential requirements of a program or service user's safety and well-being. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to ensure the student with a disability has the same opportunity as his/her/their student peers to attain the required academic and practice knowledge and skill. Reasonable accommodation is not meant to guarantee success in the program.

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations. Students who may require a disability related accommodation are strongly advised to consult with the NU's Student Development and Services: sas@nipissingu.ca / 705.474.3450 Ext. 4362. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions.

For non-disability related accommodations (e.g. religious obligations), please contact your Social Work *Oshkabaywis* (Helper) as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.