

Saint Louis University  
School of Social Work

Ph.D. in Social Work  
Student Handbook

2025-2026



**SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY**  
—  
**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

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<https://catalog.slu.edu/colleges-schools/social-work/social-work-phd/>

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## I. Section 1

### A. Program Overview

The PhD Program in Social Work (PhD SW) is built upon four pillars.

- *Theoretical and methodological sophistication.* The heart of our PhD critical thinking toolkit is theoretical and methodological sophistication, which is actively expressed inside the classroom with extensive coursework in the foundations of theory development, research design, measurement, and statistical methods. Outside of the classroom, interaction with faculty and fellow doctoral students acts to enrich the intellectual experience of our doctoral students.
- *Transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries.* Solving complex social problems includes increasing the well-being of individuals and communities and not only involves multiple disciplinary perspectives (i.e., multidisciplinary) and the integration of discipline (i.e., interdisciplinary) but perhaps more importantly involves transcending these boundaries in the search for solutions (i.e., transdisciplinary).
- *Evidence-informed teacher training.* Realizing that most PhDs in social work will eventually teach and are typically unprepared to competently do so we embrace active evidence-informed teacher training. *Accelerated development and high productivity.* Recognizing the need for doctoral students to complete their training in a timely manner we have constructed our program with mechanisms to increase the speed at which doctoral students develop dissertation research proposals and execute and defend their dissertation. We do so with a head start pre-program training guide, professional development seminars and our summer Institute in research proposal development. We also expect our graduates to leave with a minimum of 7 peer-reviewed articles published or under review and a fundable grant proposal.

This program competitively selects, admits, and enrolls students with proven academic skills and the potential to successfully complete the doctoral and make significant contributions to their fields. Mentorship - the essential component of doctoral education is an ongoing period of rigorous training under the direction of an appropriate faculty mentor. Each mentor will work with the student to structure a successful doctoral experience by selecting course work, facilitating professional experiences, shaping and directing the development of the dissertation experience, and providing professional guidance, thereby leading to a successful transition into a professional career.

### 1. Program Objectives

The objectives for the PhD SW Program are:

- To select, prepare, and graduate individuals for academic careers, private and public research, and consulting organizations.
- To provide students with expert skills in research design, methods, and dissemination.
- To train future researchers in an apprenticeship model in which students are matched, on admission, with mentor(s) in their chosen fields of study who have an active research agenda.

### 2. Learning Objectives

There are two sets of learning objectives for PhD SW Program:

- The first set focuses on the “core” knowledge, skills, and abilities that are expected of all individuals receiving the PhD degree. This set of knowledge, skills, and abilities includes the multidisciplinary, scientific fields of social work and criminology and criminal justice and the research design, methods, and dissemination techniques that facilitate scholarly contribution to one of these fields.
- The second set is specific to the student's research focus and should include both methodological and topical knowledge. Courses in this second set usually are taken outside the school of social work.

### 3. Core Program Competencies

The specific knowledge and skills provided within the PhD SW Program are based on a set of eight core competencies. These competencies reflect the expectations of accrediting bodies as well as the faculty.

- Critically evaluate and identify gaps in current scientific knowledge and develop alternative explanations and research strategies.
- Design, conduct, and defend dissertation research that expands scientific knowledge.
- Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of a specific area of research in your discipline.
- Communicate effectively about scientific information for diverse audiences through scientific publications, lay documents, and grant applications.

#### 4. Curriculum Components

There are three components to the PhD curriculum.

- The first is the core doctoral curriculum required of all students, comprised of a total of 15 credit hours. These are divided between four shared courses and the research area synthesis. In addition, students are encouraged to participate in teaching experiences that prepare students to teach their own course(s) in either the BSSW or MSW program or in the Applied Behavior Analysis or Criminology and Criminal Justice degree programs. Further, there are required professional development workshops that provide students with the opportunity to build their unique professional skills outside of formal coursework or research.
- The second is the elective curriculum comprised of courses totaling 51 credit hours. Some of these credits may be for specific required courses and some may be for courses that are tailored for each student to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed to achieve their research and professional goals. *Students will have up to 24 credit hours of electives count toward the 72-hour total from an approved MSW or closely related master's degree.*
- The third component consists of the dissertation, including 12 dissertation credit hours.

*The objective of phase one is to develop a strong foundation in the interrelated nature of theory, research, and analysis. An additional objective is to develop a dissertation topic. The objective for phase two of the program is to build on the foundation established in phase one by developing knowledge and skills that are directly linked to the dissertation topic and specific to career goals. An additional objective is to add breadth and depth in a specialization area through the use of elective coursework. The objective for phase three is to deepen and integrate the knowledge and skills obtained in phases one and two as demonstrated by tangible progress on the dissertation, passing of a written exam, and writing and orally defending a dissertation.*

Each student must complete the program within five (6) years of matriculation or submit a formal request to extend their studies, providing justification and a calendar for completion. If the petition is granted, the student must maintain their status by enrolling for zero (0) credit hours in dissertation research until they have completed and defended their dissertation.

#### 5. Annual Graduate Student Review

The PhD SW Program Director will review progress of each student annually with their mentor and reach out to student about potential concerns.

## II. Section 2

### A. Application and Admissions

The PHD SW Program seeks to attract applicants with superior academic and professional records and strong potential for continued academic study and research in social work and related fields such as criminology. The program is designed primarily for individuals already possessing a Masters' Degree in Social Work or a related field (e.g., Criminology). Students not possessing an MSW may be required to complete additional coursework. Through structured classroom and independent research experiences, the PHD SW Program prepares students for a wide range of careers in academia, community, and government.

Most full-time students accepted in the program are guaranteed funding. Graduate Assistantships require a commitment of 20 hours of work per week and many provide tuition benefit(s), health insurance and a stipend. Part-time students are accepted given the discretion of the PHD SW Program Director and the ability to successfully work towards their degree while studying part-time and working part-time.

#### 1. Application Process

- Current application requirements and processes are described in detail in the [Graduate Education Catalog on the university website](#)
- The application deadline is February 15th for Fall admission. Students will only be admitted for the Fall semester.
- Formal application requirements for ALL students:
  - 1) Official transcripts (and WES evaluation if International Institution)
  - 2) Two letters of recommendation
  - 3) Curriculum vitae/resume
  - 4) Statement of purpose (2-3 pages single spaced)
  - 5) Writing sample (previous academic research publication or paper)
  - 6) GRE scores at this time are optional

#### 2. Admissions Process

- Applications will be received through the SLU graduate admissions portal, [SLATE](#).
- The PhD SW Director reviews applications and identifies applicants to recommend for admission through conversations with students and potential mentoring faculty.

- The PhD SW Director notifies the SSW Director of Recruitment and Admissions (AD) to admit an applicant, who is then admitted by the AD before final admission by SLU Graduate Education.
- The PhD SW Director notifies the SW Business Manager and SSW Program Coordinator when an applicant will be admitted and if they will be offered funding, and if so, what the funding will be. The SSW Program Coordinator should also be advised who their faculty mentor will be.
  - 1) SW PhD program funding is decided at the aggregate level by the PhD SW Program Director in collaboration with the SSW Dean to ensure adequate funding before any offers are delivered. The SW PhD Program Director makes all decisions about specific student and new applicant funding.
  - 2) The School business officer should review draft of the offer letter template to ensure correct “GRA appointment term” for newly funded students.
- The SW PhD Program Coordinator drafts the admission/offer letter based on admission, funding and appointment details. After the SLU letter of admission has been sent, the SW Business Manager sends the letter (as a PDF) to the admittee and includes the PhD SW Director, SSW Dean, SW Program Coordinator, and the SLU International Office (if the applicant is an international student).

### 3. Admissions Criteria

The decision to admit is complex and driven by many factors. The following criteria guide these decisions.

- Evidence of exceptional intellectual ability (e.g., grades and GRE scores) and personal and interpersonal skills necessary to complete the Doctoral Program requirements.
- Evidence research commitment demonstrated by being part of a research team or faculty member’s research project.
- Research “fit” with the School and presence of a willing and suitable mentor in the SSW.
- Availability of financial support through one of the mechanisms described below or the ability to demonstrate a strong commitment to fund his/her own doctoral education

### 4. Funding Decisions

Assistantships will be distributed by the PhD SW Program Director in collaboration with the School. *Assistantships will only be available for 10 months and are renewable only for full-time funded students for the first two years.* After that time, stipend and tuition scholarship funding is based on the discretion of the PhD SW Director given student performance, research pathway, faculty mentoring availability, and undergraduate teaching needs. All admitted part-time students are funded at the discretion of the PhD SW Director.



### III. Section 3

#### A. Individualized Program of Study (IPS) Overview

The IPS is a planning tool which identifies the specific courses for which a student should register to complete all the requirements of the degree. Although key components of the Doctoral Program are required for all students, much of the coursework and research will be tailored to match the student's interests and goals.

Development of the IPS is an important step for the student and mentor to undertake together. This process will facilitate discussions about the student's interests and goals, the courses that are available, and the research and practice experiences that will be part of the student's training. The IPS is intended to serve as a valuable guide for ongoing communication between the student and mentor and serves as a way for the student and mentor to monitor progress throughout the program. The PhD program IPS is as follows:

PhD Program, School of Social Work  
Individualized Program of Study (IPS)

[Link to Catalog and Roadmap](#)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Ph.D. Program, School of Social Work Individualized Program of Study (IPS)

Student:	Phone:			
Email:	Banner ID #:			
Mentor:	Address:			
Semester Program Began:				
Date of Written Examination:				
Date of Oral Examination:	Date of Dissertation Defense			
	Date Filed for Degree Candidacy:			
Doctoral Course Series	<i>Must be taken by all doctoral students prior to written exams; cannot be taken until student has fulfilled requirements for a master's degree [18 credits]</i>	Credits	Semester Planned	Semester Taken
SWRK 6000	Foundations of Theory Development	3	Fall year 1	
SWRK 6010	Principles of Statistics and Data Analysis	3	Fall year 1	
SWRK 6020	Research Design and Measurement	3	Spr year 1	

SWRK 6030	Multivariate Data Analysis	3	Spr year 1	
SWRK 6040	Advanced Social Work Data Analysis	3	Fall year 2	
SWRK 6050	Research Area Synthesis	3	Spr year 2 or 3	
Methods Electives	9 credits (3 credits must be in a qualitative methods course)			
	Methods elective	3		
	Methods elective	3		
	Methods elective	3		
General Electives	<i>To be determined by the student and mentor based on the needs for the overall plan of study. Can be taken in departments inside or outside of the College [9 credits]</i>			
		3		
		3		
		3		
		3		
Written Examination (Date planned: _____) - Written exams based on theory, methods, and research topic knowledge as determined by the research area synthesis committee.				
General Electives	<i>Students receive up to 24 credit hours of electives from a previous master's degree that count toward the 72-hour total. Courses for students with graduate degrees outside of those offered by the School of Social Work may be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and students may be required to take additional classes. Below is all advance standing as well as any additional courses that may be required. [24 credits]</i>			
Oral Examination (Semester planned: _____)				
Dissertation Hours	<i>In Progress (IP)" grade given until Successful Defense; cannot begin until passing all written exams [12 credits]<sup>1</sup></i>			
SW 899	Dissertation Research	3		
SW 899	Dissertation Research	3		

SW 899	Dissertation Research	3		
SW 899	Dissertation Research	3		
	Total Degree Hours	<u>72</u>		

Guidelines for mentors and students:

- Student substantive knowledge in an area of research is demonstrated by the research area synthesis, which critically summarizes major theories, findings and research issues. The research area synthesis serves as a transition between coursework and the dissertation.
- Students are to be competent in an area of concentration, developed by the Research Area Synthesis course and the dissertation.

Any deviation from this plan will likely result in extending the length to degree completion. Self-registration requires electronic approval from your faculty advisor to assure compliance to this plan. Failure to do so places you in jeopardy.

#### IV. Section 4

##### A. Progress Checklist

This checklist is intended to guide you as you progress through the program. The information in this checklist is not a comprehensive list of each requirement for successful degree completion; however, it is intended to provide you guidance and tips on the major steps along the way. Reading this checklist should not, under any circumstance, replace reading the PhD Program Student Handbook in its entirety! Also, please keep in mind that these steps may not always be completed in the order as they are outlined, and that it is your express responsibility to work closely with your mentor as you work through each area. Talking to other students who have gone through these steps may also be helpful during your journey.

The SW Program Coordinator for the PhD Program, [Shelby Tarkington](#), is a resource for student administrative questions, as is the Candidacy Specialist in Graduate Education. All curricular questions should go to the PhD SW Program Director or your faculty mentor.

##### 1) Begin PhD Program

- ☐ Meet with PhD SW Program Director to overview program and discuss first courses to take.
- ☐ Register for first semester of classes with SW Program Coordinator.
- ☐ Read the PhD Program Student Handbook that explicates policies and procedures for the Doctoral Program.

- ☐ Read the Advanced Standing section in the PhD Program Student Handbook.
  - ☐ Confirm with PhD SW Program Director what previous credits completed as part of a graduate degree program will be applied toward completion of PhD.
  - ☐ Complete and submit forms for [Advanced Standing](#) and/or [Transferring Credit](#), available from the [Graduate Education website](#). Submit to [SW Program Coordinator](#).
  - ☐ Before beginning of semester, ensure you have filled out all necessary payroll with the SSW Business Manager: [Jessica Kilmade](#) and worked through any HR or Visa issues, and gotten your SLU ID.
  - ☐ At beginning of semester, receive key to PhD student lounge (if full-time and working in Tegeler Hall).
- 2) Program Director Approval: Classes and Research
- ☐ Meet each semester before registration for next term with PhD SW Program Director to complete plan classes.
  - ☐ Regularly meet with PhD SW Program Director and/or mentor to meet to discuss research/dissertation plan.
- 3) Complete Doctoral Course Series, Methods Core and required Concentration Courses, as detailed on Individualized Program of Study (IPS) Form
- ☐ Complete the Doctoral Course Series.
  - ☐ Complete the Methods Coursework.
  - ☐ Complete the Specialization Electives Courses.
  - ☐ Complete my Research Area Synthesis.
- 4) Confirm Committees
- ☐ Confirm Written Examination Committee members.
  - ☐ Confirm Oral Examination Committee members.
  - ☐ Confirm Dissertation Committee members.
- 5) Written Exams
- ☐ Re-read Section 7 of the PhD Program Student Handbook, Written Examination.
  - ☐ Inform via email the PhD SW Program Director and exam committee of intent to pursue written exams and discuss process.

- ☐ Plan dates with PhD SW Program Director (and your RAS Committee) to take written exams.
- ☐ Email [SW Program Coordinator](#) to arrange dates/times and confirm room location of written exam.
- ☐ Submit written exam at end of each day to faculty committee and SW Program Coordinator

If you pass written exams:

- ☐ Communicate with mentor and PhD SW Program Director regarding plans to register for Dissertation hours, SWRK 6990.

If you do not pass written exams:

- ☐ Communicate with the Program Director, exam writers, and mentor on what is required next.

#### 6) Complete Institutional Review Board (IRB) Requirements

- ☐ Should [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\) approval](#) be needed for your dissertation, complete through them.

#### 7) Oral Exam

- ☐ Re-read Section 8 of the PhD Program Student Handbook, Oral Examination.
- ☐ Discuss and confirm with mentor and committee that you are prepared to take your Oral Examination.
- ☐ Arrange a time for Oral Examination with committee at least four weeks prior to the desired exam date.
- ☐ Work with Program Coordinator to reserve a room for Oral Exam.
- ☐ Complete the following and submit to Program Coordinator at least three weeks prior to scheduled exam date.
- ☐ [Doctoral Oral Examination Form](#), to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate Dean/Center Director (available on Graduate Education's website)
- ☐ Degree Audit Form, to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate Dean/Center Director (emailed to you by the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor).
- ☐ If not previously submitted, submit [Advanced Standing](#) or [Credit Transfer](#) forms (See # 1 above). These forms must be submitted to Graduate Education before you

take your oral exam. A degree audit is conducted by SLU Graduate Education Candidacy Specialist and sent to you for signature.

- ☐ Complete oral examination.

If you pass oral exams:

- ☐ Communicate with mentor and PhD SW Program Director regarding plans to register for Dissertation hours, SWRK 6990.

If you do not pass oral exams:

- ☐ Following procedures outlined above, schedule a new oral exam time
- ☐ Receive official notice of passing status from the Associate VP of Graduate Education and Letter of Candidacy (you are now a PHD Candidate and have “all but dissertation” status).
- ☐ Apply to graduate via [Banner Self Service](#) within the first two weeks of the semester you plan to graduate in.

#### 8) Dissertation Hours

- ☐ Successfully complete 12 dissertation hours.
- ☐ If necessary, remind mentor to submit a grade for each semester of dissertation hours.

#### 9) Apply to Graduate

- ☐ Plan with mentor and PhD SW Program Director regarding plans for when you anticipate to defend your dissertation. You need to [apply to graduate](#) that semester (and within the first two weeks of semester). Your application can be moved to forward terms if you do not defend in the intended semester.
- ☐ Ensure you check Graduate Education site before each [semester for deadlines](#) for that semester for final dates of defenses.

#### 10) Dissertation Defense

- ☐ Re-read Section 9 of the PhD Program Student Handbook, Dissertation and Dissertation Defense.
- ☐ Read the [Graduate Education Formatting Guides](#)
- ☐ Compare dissertation to [Formatting Guide](#) to ensure accuracy.
- ☐ Discuss and confirm with mentor and committee that your dissertation is ready, and you are prepared for your Dissertation Defense. All committee members should have reviewed and approved your completed dissertation.

- ☐ Arrange a time for Dissertation Defense with committee at least four weeks prior to the desired exam date.
- ☐ Work with SW Program Coordinator to reserve a room for Defense at least three weeks prior to scheduled exam date. Submit your title of your dissertation and the abstract with the request.
- ☐ Complete the following and submit to SW Program Coordinator at least three weeks prior to scheduled exam date:
- ☐ [Notification of Readiness Form](#), to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate (available on Graduate Education's website).
- ☐ Complete the following and submit to Dissertation Committee at least two weeks prior to scheduled exam date:
- ☐ A copy of your completed dissertation.
- ☐ Complete Dissertation Defense.

If you pass your defense:

- ☐ Make any corrections or revisions suggested or required by committee at Dissertation Defense.
- ☐ If required, resubmit dissertation to committee with corrections.

If you do not pass your defense:

- ☐ Following procedures outlined above, schedule a new defense time
- ☐ Following procedures outlined above, complete and submit a new Notification of Readiness Form.
- ☐ NB: A new outside committee member will be added to the committee in order to assure that policies and procedures are appropriately followed.

#### 11) Format Review

- ☐ Email the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor in Graduate Education for a style and format review of your dissertation. Include your dissertation as an attachment.
- ☐ Make any corrections or revisions that were suggested or required during my format review with the Candidacy Advisor.
- ☐ Following directions from Candidacy Advisor, electronically submit dissertation to ProQuest for digital archiving and publication. Go to [www.etsdadmin.com/slu](http://www.etsdadmin.com/slu) to begin the process.

- ☐ Make any corrections or revisions required by Candidacy Advisor and resubmit as necessary to ProQuest.

#### 12) Commencement

- ☐ Respond to all communication regarding commencement as soon as possible.
- ☐ Confirm that your chair will attend commencement and is able and willing to hood you. If chair is unavailable, ask another committee member.
- ☐ Direct any questions regarding commencement to the Program Coordinator.

#### 13) Final Notes

- ☐ Return key to SSW Business Manager.
- ☐ Return any other University owned property to proper individual(s).
- ☐ Request final transcript via [Banner Self Service](#) when “Awarded” shows next to Degree Conferral Date on unofficial transcript on Banner Self Service.

## V. Section 5

### A. Annual Evaluation of PhD Students

Each academic year the PhD SW Program Director and mentor (will evaluate the progress and performance of each student. Although we expect our PhD students to achieve exemplary evaluations, in some cases students will not be progressing as expected. In these cases, the annual evaluation will serve to point out areas of improvement, result in non-renewal of the graduate research assistantship, or termination from the program.



## VI. Section 6

### A. Graduate Education Forms

*SLU's Graduate Education website serves as an official source of current policies and procedures. These are subject to change without notice.*

*It is the student's responsibility to check the website for the official policies and procedures.*

<https://www.slu.edu/academics/graduate>

*Also it is important to note important due dates and deadlines each semester for oral exams, defenses and degree conferrals.*

*Academic programs do not have the ability to override these deadlines.*

#### 1. Sample Graduation Education Forms

The attached forms were printed from the [Graduate Education website](https://www.slu.edu/academics/graduate) for reference purposes only. Please visit the website for the current version of each form.

- [Petition for Transfer Credit](#)  
This form is to be used to transfer graduate coursework credit earned elsewhere as a non-degree or transient student.
- [Petition for Advanced Standing of a Doctoral Student](#)  
This form is to be used to document completed, advanced coursework taken elsewhere that is applicable to a student's current doctoral program
- [Doctoral Oral Examination Form](#)  
Used to notify the Doctoral Candidacy Adviser that a student is ready for his/her oral exam. Outlines the title, time, date and committee members so ballots can be sent.
- [Notification of Readiness](#) for the Public Oral Presentation of the PhD Dissertation Used to notify the Doctoral Candidacy Adviser that a student is ready for the public presentation of his/her

research. Outlines the title, time, date and committee members so the final preparations can be made for presentation and publication of the dissertation.

## VII. Section 7

### A. Written Examinations

#### 1. Purpose

As required by Graduate Education, the Doctoral Program administers written examinations following successful completion of the Doctoral Course Series, the Methods Core coursework and the required elective courses. The written examinations are structured to assess the student's knowledge and skills in the foundational, contextual, methodological and analytical skills needed of all social work researchers.

The written examination assesses students' achievement of the doctoral competencies covered within the general and concentration curricula and also reflects their expertise in a specific area of research. The written examinations combine two components:

- 1) Foundation (theory, methods, statistics) material
- 2) Research area.

The written exam is conducted by a committee of three (3) faculty who are likely to comprise the dissertation committee. Questions are approved by the Director of the Doctoral Program. The exam takes place across two sequential days (8 hours per day) and can be arranged anytime during the school year. The written exam should reflect competencies covered in the Doctoral Course Series and reflected topically in the research area synthesis. As such, questions can be generated that focus on a research area but are also tied to theoretical and methodological issues.

Specific written background material *may* be given, in advance, to students taking the written examination. Students will be informed in advance if materials will be distributed to them.

#### 2. Process

The written examination will be administered after completing the Doctoral Course Series, the Methods Core coursework and the required elective courses and Research Area Synthesis (RAS). For a full-time student, the written examinations will normally be completed on the summer of fall following successful completion of the RAS. All sections of the written exams must be passed prior to beginning dissertation research.

Students desiring to take the written examinations will inform the Director of the Doctoral Program and the exam committee of their intent. The exam committee will coordinate the development, administration and grading of the examinations.

Multiple faculty members should be involved in the development of each exam (usually the three member RAS committee). All materials will be held strictly confidential throughout this process.

### 3. Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain [academic integrity](#) during the exam process.

### 4. Grading

Grading of the written examinations is conducted by the three-member faculty committee (usually the same faculty from student's Research Area Synthesis committee).

In most circumstances, exams will be graded within one to two weeks. A student who fails any component of the written examinations may repeat that component once, preferably the next scheduled time it is offered. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they have adequately overcome any weaknesses prior to taking the exam a second time. Should the outcome of the second examination be unsatisfactory, the student will be terminated from the program. Appeals may be filed with Graduate Education as outlined in the Graduate Education Catalog.

## VIII. Section 8

### A. Oral Examination

#### 1. Purpose

The oral examination is intended to focus on the proposal of the dissertation. The presentation usually consists of a statement of the problem, literature review, and the research design prepared for the investigation. The exam is structured to assess the student's comprehensive knowledge of prior literature, ability to integrate knowledge across the discipline, and ability to design an appropriate research approach that significantly expands this body of knowledge. This is when the student presents a proposal for what they intend to do prior to starting their research.

The oral examination must follow the written exams and is only scheduled after the student has completed all structured academic coursework.

#### 2. Process

The student works with their mentor to determine if they are ready for the oral exam. Once it is determined that the student is ready, they should work with their committee to determine an appropriate day and time.

The student must inform the Doctoral Program Coordinator and Director(s) of the intended date for the oral exam at least four weeks prior to the scheduled examination.

The student is also responsible for working with the SW Program Coordinator to reserve a room large enough to accommodate observers.

The student should complete the following and submit to the SW Program Coordinator at least three weeks prior to the scheduled exam. Forms are available on the Graduate Education website.

- [Doctoral Oral Examination Form](#), to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate Dean/Center Director.
- A one-paragraph abstract of proposal defense to be sent out with exam announcement. This short abstract is intended to provide interested faculty and students an overview of the research proposal.
- Degree Audit Form, to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate Dean/Center Director.

If not previously submitted, the student must submit their [Advanced Standing](#) or [Credit Transfer](#) forms to the PhD SW Program Director prior to the oral exam.

After the oral examination, the [Doctoral Examination Form](#) will be signed on behalf of the committee by the chairperson of the dissertation committee along with formal approval from the Associate Vice President of Graduate Education.

### 3. Oral Exam Committee

The Oral Exam Committee consists of five (5) or more members that are normally the same as that of the written examination. The student's mentor serves as chairperson and moderator of the examination. The other members of the committee include the two additional members of the student's presumptive dissertation committee (selected by the student in consultation with the mentor) and members at-large as needed.

Graduate Education does not allow a formal dissertation committee to be set up until after the oral exam. In some cases, the student may be ready to start on a specific research project earlier in their program. These instances will require that:

- 1) The committee chair works with the student to create the dissertation proposal;
- 2) A committee to be set up informally prior to the written exams. This committee will require a full proposal (introduction, background/literature review, methods) and/or scope of work to be shared and reviewed by all committee members;
- 3) An informal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA);

- 4) If the doctoral student or committee members want to change the methods or structure of the dissertation, this will need to be outlined in a formal MOA and cannot be submitted until after successful completion of the oral exam.

#### 4. Examination Structure

The formal presentation is intended to last approximately one hour and is followed by questioning from the oral exam committee members. As moderator of the exam, the student's mentor welcomes the audience, introduces the committee members, and explains the presentation structure. The mentor calls upon the student to make the presentation without interruption for questions. The student is expected to present a formal and thorough lecture about the field of study informing their research area, followed by an exposition of their specific dissertation project. Presentation of the proposed dissertation should include:

- Key questions
- Aims
- Objectives
- Preliminary findings (if applicable)
- Design and Methods

The information should be given in enough detail to relate the research to the prior literature. The presentation should clearly articulate how the proposed research will significantly advance current knowledge.

Following the presentation, the mentor conducts formal rounds of questions from the committee members, and then permits follow-up questions and additional inquiries until the committee is finished. The mentor will, depending on available time, invite questions from the audience. *It is very important that the student demonstrates their command of the topic by answering the questions and not relying on the committee members for assistance.* At the appropriate time, the mentor will close the public portion of the examination. The non-committee members are excused, and the committee will meet with the student privately to go over additional questions not suitable for the public forum.

The committee then meets in private to discuss the examination and complete confidential evaluation of the student's performance. The mentor will sign on behalf of the committee and return the form to Graduate Education. The committee will then share the results with the student.

A student receiving two or more unfavorable evaluations from the committee fails the examination. The Graduate Education office will formally communicate the outcome of the examination in writing to the student. Upon authorization by Graduate Education, a student who fails the oral examination may repeat it once. Ordinarily, the second attempt should not be scheduled within the same academic term as the first. The committee that administered the first exam will also administer the second examination. The mentor will submit a written request for a second examination to Graduate Education at least two weeks in advance.

of the desired date of that exam. It is the student's responsibility to work with the committee to identify and remedy any weaknesses. Should the outcome of the second examination be unsatisfactory the student will be terminated from the program.

## IX. Section 9

### A. Dissertation and Dissertation Defense

The ability to extend the knowledge base in the major field is a qualification distinctive to the doctoral degree. A candidate for this most advanced, earned degree must present substantial evidence of this ability by presenting and defending a piece of original and independent research on a topic of importance that has been previously unresolved within the major field. This is perhaps the most valuable stage in doctoral training.

Students in the research phase of the program must formally enroll in Dissertation Research (SWRK 6990). A minimum of twelve (12) credit-hours of dissertation research is required. (*Students may not enroll in SWRK 6990 until they have passed their written examinations.*) Only after accumulating the total credit-hours required may the student register for SWRK 6990 for 0 credit hours.

- The student's mentor or dissertation chair are required to submit a grade of IP ("in progress") for each semester that the student is enrolled in Dissertation Research. In the semester the student successfully defends their dissertation, the chair will enter a grade of S ("satisfactory"), indicating the student has satisfactorily completed the dissertation.

The research for and writing of the dissertation generally must be completed in residence at the university. A doctoral student may, for good reason, seek and receive permission from the School of Social Work and Graduate Education to undertake portions of the research and/or writing "in absentia." A request to complete the entire dissertation 'in absentia' will not be approved for any student.

The organization and formatting of the dissertation is critically important and is described in [Graduate Education's formatting guide](#).

Important Note: Graduate Education has very strict deadlines for the final dates each semester that the defense may happen and/or the dissertation be reviewed, and the degree conferred. [Please ensure you check these dates on Graduate Education's website each semester.](#)

The doctoral student is expected to complete all requirements for the degree in a reasonable amount of calendar time. The student, admitted into the Doctoral Program after earning a Master's degree in the same or a similar field (such that the Master's degree work wholly or in large measure contributes to the preparation

for research in the doctoral field), must anticipate completion of degree requirements within five (5) years of initial matriculation in the Doctoral Program. The student must contact the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor if they are nearing their allowed completion date and do not anticipate receiving degree conferral before this date.

#### 1. Public Presentation and Defense of the Dissertation

The doctoral program requires a public, oral presentation and defense of the dissertation. The presentation should be scheduled after all committee members have reviewed and approved the completed written dissertation.

The student should arrange a time for the defense with the committee at least four weeks prior to the desired exam date. After confirming a date, the student should contact the Program Coordinator to reserve a room for the defense. When requesting a room, students should submit their dissertation title and an abstract.

At least three weeks prior to the defense, the student must electronically submit the following materials to the Program Coordinator:

- [Notification of Readiness Form](#), to be completed in full, apart from the signature of the Dean/Associate.
- Abstract for public announcement posting.

The public presentation and defense are structured in much the same way as the oral exam. The student is expected to present their work for approximately 60 minutes. Following the presentation, the student must be prepared to respond to questions from the committee members and audience. The dissertation committee chairperson (faculty mentor) serves as the moderator for the presentation and defense. As of Fall 2020, dissertation defenses can also be held online.

- As moderator of the defense the mentor welcomes the audience, introduces the committee members and explains the presentation structure.
- The mentor calls upon the student to make the presentation without interruption for questions.
- Following the presentation, the mentor facilitates formal rounds of questions from the committee members, and then permits follow-up questions and additional inquiries until the committee is finished.
- The mentor will, depending on available time, invite questions from the audience.
- At the appropriate time, the mentor can close the public portion of the examination and the audience will be excused.
- At this time the committee will meet to review the defense. Occasionally the committee may develop a list of modifications needed for final committee approval. The committee determines the outcome of the defense and conducts balloting according to Graduate Education policies.

- The mentor will call the student into the committee meeting to present and discuss the results of the defense. This conversation should include specific recommendations regarding what must be done for the dissertation to be considered complete.

Following the defense, the ballots are returned to the Graduate Education office. If any final modifications are requested by the committee, the student will complete these prior to final signing and submitting of the ballots.

If the student fails the dissertation defense, the formal procedures from Graduate Education to plan and request a second defense will be followed. [See Grad Ed process here.](#)

After both the written dissertation and defense of the dissertation ballots have been submitted to Graduate Education by the Program Coordinator, the student finalizes their format review with the Graduate Education Candidacy Advisor. All formatting and style errors must be corrected in preparation for publication on ProQuest, the University's site for electronic submission of theses and dissertations.

## 2. Electronic Dissertation Submission and Final Requirements

Students are required to electronically submit their dissertation to [ProQuest](#) before degree will be awarded. The Graduate Education Candidacy Advisor will provide complete instructions on the submission processing, including embargoes for publications, etc.

## X. Section 10

### A. Additional Degree Requirements and Graduation

Students apply to graduate via Banner Self Service within the first two weeks of the semester the student plans to defend and graduate.

Students will work with School staff to respond to communication regarding pre-commencement. If planning to participate in the School pre-commencement ceremony, students should confirm with their chair if they can attend commencement and are able and willing to hood them. If the chair is unavailable, the student should ask another committee member. Any questions regarding commencement should be directed to the Program Coordinator. Degree conferrals are done through Graduate Education and the Registrar's office. No diploma is provided during participation in ceremonies.



## XI. Section 11

### A. Student Resources

These resources are intended to give students an overview of the many resources available on SLU's campus. While this list will be updated regularly, contact information is subject to change.

Saint Louis University Resources	
<p><u><a href="#">Graduate Education</a></u></p> <p>Christine Harper, PhD. Doctoral Candidacy Advisor <a href="mailto:Christine.harper@slu.edu">Christine.harper@slu.edu</a> DuBourg Hall, 420D 314-977-2243</p> <p>Advises students, faculty, advisors, and department chairpersons of candidacy protocol, degree requirements, and necessity for petitions. Reviews dissertations for style and format, authorizes preparation and release of diplomas.</p>	<p><u><a href="#">University Writing Services</a></u></p> <p>Student Success Center <a href="mailto:writing@slu.edu">writing@slu.edu</a> Busch Student Center, Suite 331 314-977-3484</p> <p><u><a href="#">Graduate Writing Resources</a></u></p> <p>University Writing Services offers a range of resources to help students meet the elevated expectations of graduate writing</p>
<p><u><a href="#">Office of International Services</a></u></p> <p><a href="mailto:internationalservices@slu.edu">internationalservices@slu.edu</a> Des Peres Hall, 102 <a href="#">3694 West Pine Mall</a> St. Louis, MO 63108 Phone: +1 314-977-2318 Fax: +1 314-977-3412</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Parking, ID Cards, and Campus Transportation</a></u></p> <p>3545 Lindell Blvd Wohl Center, First Floor, Suite 130 314-977-2957 Hours: Monday-Friday – 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. For parking permits, SLU ID cards, Billiken Bucks, Campus Transportation/Shuttle Information.</p>
<p><u><a href="#">Student Financial Services</a></u></p> <p><a href="mailto:sfs@slu.edu">sfs@slu.edu</a> One Grand Blvd DuBourg Hall, Room 119 314- 977-2350</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Saint Louis University Libraries</a></u></p> <p>Social Work Reference Librarian <a href="mailto:piusref@slu.edu">piusref@slu.edu</a> Pius Library, Room 202H 314-977-3106</p>

<p><a href="#">The Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:ctl@slu.edu">ctl@slu.edu</a>  Pius Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Ste. 221 3650  Lindell Blvd.  314-977-3944</p> <p>The Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning has three major service components: teaching enhancement, learning technologies, and service learning.</p>	<p><a href="#">Department of Campus Ministry</a></p> <p>Wuller Hall  314-977-2425</p> <p>Campus Ministry offers opportunities for cultivating an informed faith, a commitment to social justice, and an integrated way of life</p>
<p><a href="#">Career Services</a></p> <p>Social Work Contact:  <a href="mailto:career_services@slu.edu">career_services@slu.edu</a>  Griesedieck Hall, Lower Level, Suite 130 314-977-2828</p> <p>Drop-In Hours: Monday-Friday (1-2)  Other Hours by Appointment</p> <p>Career Services helps individuals explore, discover, and connect their personal definition of career to the community and world of work</p>	<p><a href="#">University Counseling Center</a></p> <p>Wuller Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  314-977-8255 (TALK)</p> <p>The experienced counseling professionals at the University Counseling Center provide care and consultation to SLU students. Staff members can help students with a variety of issues and the center is fully accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS).</p>

## XII. Section 12

### A. Policies – University, School and Program

SLU policies can be found at these sites:

- Provost Website – [Faculty and Academic and Course Policies](#)
- General Counsel Website – [Office of Institution Equity and Diversity](#) (which includes information, reporting guidelines, and resources for Affirmative Action, Harassment, Hate Crimes, and Sexual Assault)
- University Catalog – <https://catalog.slu.edu/academic-policies/academic-policies>

### Academic Integrity

The PhD Program expects all students to adhere to Saint Louis University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), which can be found in its entirety on the Office of the Provost's website and in the [Saint Louis University Student Handbook](#).

### Academic Probation

If a student's cumulative GPA falls below a 3.0, then the Program Director shall place the student on academic probation and notify the student, in writing, of their changed status. Within the next 12 credit hours of coursework, the student needs to show an improvement in grades and raise his/her cumulative GPA to 3.0. While students are on academic probation, there may be restrictions placed on the number of courses/credit hours and/or kinds of courses they may complete.

### Dismissal from Program

Doctoral students earning below 3.0 GPA in one semester are subject to dismissal or probation upon the recommendation of the Doctoral Committee. Students who fail to emerge successfully from probation in their next semester are also subject to dismissal. Please note that this academic dismissal policy is intentionally more stringent than the policy governing Master's students. Students may be automatically dismissed from the Program for any of the following reasons:

- 1) If, at any time during the course of study, the student receives one "F" grade.
- 2) If the student fails to move off academic probation within 6 credit hours.
- 3) If, by the end of the 7-year limit for completion of PhD degree requirements, the student does not have a 3.0 GPA.
- 4) If, by the end of the 7-year limit for completion of degree requirements, the student has not completed all required degree requirements including not passing written or oral exams or not completing or failing dissertation requirements.

Dismissal decisions and notification are handled by the Program Director. Students may appeal a program dismissal within 10 days by submitting a written letter to the Dean of the School of Social Work.

### Grievance

A "grievance" is defined as a formal inquiry or complaint requesting a review related to a school policy or procedure or a situation where the student feels that they were treated unfairly or unprofessionally by a faculty or staff member. Students are first encouraged to meet with and try to resolve any course related issues or conflicts with the specific faculty or staff member and any overall program policies with the Director of the MSW program. Any appeals related to academic integrity must follow the procedures under the University Academic Integrity Policy.

Any student enrolled in a School of Social Work (SSW) degree program (SW/ABA/CCJ/PhD) may submit a formal written grievance to the appropriate Program Director (PD). The PD will review the grievance and convene a meeting with the student within 10 business days. The student may bring a person for support, but the support person may not speak for the student or ask questions during the meeting. Recording of the

meeting will not be allowed. Within an additional five business days, the PD will provide a written response to the student.

If the student wants to appeal the Program Director's decision, the student may submit a written appeal to the SSW Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA) within 5 business days from receipt of the PD's decision. The ADAA will review the written appeal and may convene a meeting with the student and other parties as needed within 10 business days. The ADAA will provide a written response to the student within 5 business days. If a satisfactory solution is not reached, the student may submit a written appeal to the Dean of the School of Social Work within 5 business days from receipt of the ADAA's decision. The matter will be reviewed by the Dean for adherence to process(es), and the student will be informed of the findings within 10 business days. The decision of the Dean of the SSW is final.

Approved 10/2/2024 for 2025/2026 program handbooks

### Leaves of Absence

A leave of absence means the student remains in the Program and intends to finish their degree here at SLU but seeks a semester or year away from coursework to take care of other issues in his/her life. Students are urged to use caution in requesting a leave of absence. During the leave period, students do not have enrollment status for purposes of health insurance, loan deferment or access to campus libraries and computer services. Doctoral Students cannot be funded while on leave. The time taken during an approved leave of absence will not be included as part of the time students have to complete their degree. Complete the [Leave of Absence form](#) and give the complete/signed form to the Program Director. There is no guarantee that a leave of absence request will be granted.

### Parental Leave Policy

See SLU's [Graduate Student Parental Leave Policy](#)

### Withdrawal from Program

A withdrawal from the Program means the student will not remain in the degree program and does not intend to finish the Program at SLU. In order to fully withdraw from the PHD Program, students must complete the [Intent to Withdraw form](#) and give the completed/signed form to the Program Director: