PhD in Social Work

The objective of the PhD in Social Work is to educate scholars for research careers in the social and behavioral sciences. The program is highly interdisciplinary, mentoring students with interests in such areas as social and economic development, child welfare, gerontology, addictions, health, mental health, and public health. Our PhD program in Social Work involves intensive study in social science research methods and personalized mentoring by some of the leading scholars in the field. In addition, our curriculum focuses on research methodology, theory, and data analysis.

We have a very high completion rate, and nearly all of those graduates go on to teaching and research positions in social science institutions throughout the world. An academic career in most large universities requires faculty who can maintain a rigorous research agenda, while teaching and providing service and leadership to the school and the profession. Thus, we teach doctoral students to excel in such areas as conducting individual and collaborative research projects, writing and publishing research findings, sharing knowledge with academic colleagues at professional conferences, and bringing the latest knowledge into the classroom for the benefit of future students, practitioners and educators.

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Degree Requirements

A completed master’s degree in social work, public health, or related social science is required of all applicants for admission; a minimum of two years of post-master’s practice and/or research experience is strongly recommended. The deadline for applications to the PhD in Social Work is December 1 of the year preceding enrollment.

Students need a minimum of 72 graduate credit hours for a PhD from the Brown School. These can include 21 master’s-level credits. While in the program, the student takes a variety of theory and research methods courses, plus 15 units of elective credits outside the traditional social work curriculum. Electives may include classes in psychology, psychiatry, public health, anthropology, education, law, economics, or political science. Teaching practicums, research assistantships, and the writing of an "area statement" round out the required credits. Competence is assessed through a qualifying examination and the defense of the dissertation. We are unable to offer distance learning or part-time study.

The curriculum at the Brown School emphasizes substantive, theoretical and methodological preparation. Courses (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/brownschool/#courses) include:

- Introduction to Advanced Research
- Conceptual Foundations of Social Science Research
- The Role and Use of Theory in Applied Social Research
- Foundations of Data Analysis
- Applied Linear Regression Analysis
- Structural Equation Modeling

The first year of study includes basic principles in research, statistics, measurement, as well as theoretical orientations and content underlying the knowledge base of social work and social welfare.

The second year turns to a more individualized program of study. A curriculum plan is developed by each student and the adviser, focusing on an area of specialization within the field of social work.

The orientation of the PhD program is interdisciplinary, requiring 15 credits of course work in the social sciences. Social science courses are selected that are related to the student's developing area of specialization. Courses in research methodology, research and teaching practica, and specialized courses also help to build the student's expertise as a social work scholar.