

DOCTOR OF SOCIAL WORK (DSW) PROGRAM APPLIED DSW PROJECT GUIDELINES

DSW Scholar-Practitioner Research Context:

The Loma Linda University DSW Program in Clinical Leadership is underpinned by the scholar-practitioner model of education, which emphasizes an ideal of professional excellence that bridges practice, theory, and research. Through this approach, scholar-practitioners serve as innovation leaders by integrating advanced practice knowledge with theory and rigorous data driven processes, thus achieving a deeper contextual understanding of human needs and services to solve practical problems.

Applied DSW Project Requirements:

All Applied DSW Projects must conform to the goals of the LLU DSW program, to:

- Prepare students with expertise in clinical leadership;
- Advance students' understanding of and skills needed to develop, implement, and disseminate knowledge and innovation in behavioral health practice and social work education; and
- Equip students to be transformative leaders in the integration and promotion of social justice in behavioral health services and social work education, embracing ADEI (anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion) goals.

In addition:

- Applied DSW Projects are not hypothesis driven studies. Instead, they are more exploratory or descriptive studies aimed at generating new insights to applied practice issues.
- All projects are required to be guided by sound empirical objectives that require data driven inquiry.
- All projects must be supported by an in-depth literature review including comprehensive theoretical underpinnings, and supporting empirical research.
- Projects must adhere to one of the following designs (See Appendix I for detailed outlines of each of the following):
 - Program Evaluation
 - Proposed Innovative Practice with Underserved Population
- All project aspects (design and content) must be preapproved by the student's designated Applied DSW Project Committee before the student progresses to the next steps in the project.
- Applied DSW Projects are 75 to 100 pages in length and follow a six (6) chapter format (See Appendix B for description of chapter content)

- The final Applied DSW Project must conform to guidelines provided in the School of Behavioral Health's *Professional Doctoral Project Formatting Handbook* and *Sample Table of Contents*. Students should also familiarize themselves with the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) Format Guide. (These documents are available on the SBH Canvas shell).

Process and Timeline for Completion of the Applied DSW Project¹:

- During summer of **Program Year 2** students develop a concept paper which supports the development of further understanding of the topic of the Applied DSW Project, e.g., information about population needs to support framing project objectives.
- During **Program Year 2** three courses are designed to support the development of Project Proposal that consists of Chapters One, Two, and Three. (See Appendix II for description of these chapters.)
 - The Applied DSW Project Proposal must be successfully defended in an Oral Defense before the project can proceed.
- During **Program Year 3**, four courses are designed to support the completion of the last three chapters of the Applied DSW Project, which includes a manuscript for submission to a journal for publication.
 - All project work is subject to Committee review, oral defense and approval before going on to the next phase, graduation.
 - The process of the final oral defense is presented in the DSW Handbook.

Project Proposal Defense:

The proposal defense of Applied DSW Project occurs at the end of the second year in the program and is scheduled by the student's DSW Committee Chair, when the DSW Committee Chair and Committee members believe that the student's successful defense is likely.

The project proposal defense is not open to the public and is commonly characterized by four components:

1. A brief introduction of the Committee members and description of the defense process by the DSW Committee Chair;
2. The presentation by the student of required content (see below) followed by discussion;
3. Confidential voting/approval by the DSW Committee Chair and all Committee members regarding the student's development of the project proposal; and
4. Reporting of the DSW Committee Chair and Committee decision to the student followed by a discussion of next steps.

The content of the proposal defense consists of:

1. A brief oral presentation (under 20 minutes) consisting of an overview of the applied project.

¹ See current curriculum guide in the DSW Student Handbook Addendum for specific courses.

- The student should provide an introduction, outline the major objectives, and discuss the proposed methodology and summary of relevant literature.
2. The presentation will be followed by questions from the Committee on the proposed project and any relevant background material. The defense will also likely include discussions of how the research plan and/or methodology might be improved. The discussion may not be limited to the student's specific topic.
 - As such, the Committee is expected to take the discussion away from the project itself and into related areas of basic scientific knowledge and the related relevance of the project for practice and education.
 - The DSW Committee Chair moderates the discussion as necessary, and may ask questions. This second portion of the defense will typically take between 40 and 60 minutes.
 3. At the end of the proposal defense the student will be dismissed for a short period while the DSW Committee Chair and all Committee members discuss the student's project proposal.
 - It is the responsibility of the DSW Committee Chair to promptly relate the approval/pass to the student and to the School of Behavioral Health Office of Dean as a measure of candidacy in the DSW program.
 - If the Committee recommends that the student needs to make significant revisions to the proposal a specific timeline/date for revisions (not a second defense) will be provided to the student in writing. Only after revisions have been approved by the Committee does the student receive written confirmation/approval to proceed with their applied project and recommendation for approval of candidacy to the School of Behavioral Health Office of Dean.
 4. Following the successful defense of the project proposal, the student must review their project following the Research Affairs IRB guidance decision tree to decide if they need to apply for expedited review, for exempt determination, or will have no need to submit anything to the IRB. For this the doctoral advisor as part of the proposal writing class will review the decision tree guidance with the students; **if it is determined that IRB approval or an exempt determination letter is needed, this needs to be obtained before data collection or processing of archival data can begin.**

Applied DSW Project Final Defense:

The Applied DSW Project defense is the scholarly discourse between the candidate and their Applied DSW Project Committee, evidencing the successful completion of publishable scholarly work and the individual's mastery of their chosen topic and project design. It is open to public. Students must successfully defend the Applied DSW Projects in order to participate in the LLU graduation ceremonies that occur once a year in early June. In order to meet the conditions related to the defense of the Applied DSW Project, students are required to submit a copy of their approved completed draft of the Applied DSW Project to their Committee Chair, all DSW Committee members, and the DSW Program Director at least six weeks (30 business days) before the end of the spring term prior their anticipated June graduation. This timeline provides the compulsory interval needed for a final review, additional edits, and compliance with the two-week public notice of the oral defense. Students who do not meet these deadlines will delay the completion of their degree to the term in which they are able to comply with required deadlines.

Scheduling the Applied DSW Project Defense is the responsibility of the DSW Committee Chair in consultation with all of the Committee members. As such, before the culminating defense is scheduled, the DSW Committee Chair and all Committee members must first determine that the candidate is ready to proceed to the defense based on the likelihood of success. **Candidates never set the date for the defense.** Any attempt to pressure the DSW Committee Chair or any of the Committee members to proceed prematurely to the defense due to the student's desire to march in a particular graduation ceremony or because they or family members have purchased airline tickets or planned celebrations is inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

Once the candidate is notified that an oral defense is approved they must work in a timely way with the office of the DSW Program Director to provide the following information as part of announcing the defense: a) provide an abstract (not exceeding 250 words) providing a summary of the project; b) verify that a copy of the final draft of the project is available for reading through the office of the DSW Program Director; and c) verify with the DSW Program Director the date, time, and room location of the defense. The actual announcement of oral defense is developed and disseminated by the office of the DSW Program Director.

Once the candidate is notified that an oral defense is approved and scheduled they must also work out their personal obligations to be available at the time arranged for the oral defense. Oral defenses are conducted as online presentations. Also, as the oral defense is a public event the announcement of the defense must be published/disseminated a minimum of two weeks prior to the actual defense date. Faculty and student members of the Department, School, University, and collaborative professional social work community, are invited to attend.

The DSW Committee Chair and all Committee members are responsible for conducting the oral defense proceedings according to protocols established for all doctoral level education at Loma Linda University, including the following components.

1. A brief introduction of the Committee members and description of the defense process by the DSW Committee Chair;
2. The presentation by the degree candidate (see below) that is followed by discussion;
3. Confidential voting/approval by the DSW Committee Chair and all Committee members regarding the candidate's satisfactory completion of the requirements of the Applied DSW Project; and
4. Reporting of the DSW Committee Chair and Committee decision to the degree candidate and to the School of Behavioral Health Office of the Dean in support of degree completion.

The content of the Applied DSW Project defense consists of:

1. An oral presentation consisting of an overview of the applied project objectives, purpose, significant literature, methodology, findings/outcomes, including implications for practice and/education advancement and innovation.
2. The presentation will be followed by questions from the audience for a period of time monitored by the DSW Committee Chair. The discussion may not be limited to the student's specific topic, but include related areas of basic scientific knowledge and the related relevance of the project for practice and education and further inquiry.

3. Following the questions and discussion with the audience, the DSW Committee Chair dismisses the audience. Only the candidate, DSW Committee Chair and Committee remain. At this time the Chair and Committee ask the candidate additional questions and clarify/identify areas that are not clear.
4. After the discussion with the DSW Committee Chair and Committee the candidate is dismissed for a short period while the DSW Committee Chair and Committee members discuss the defense and final Applied DSW Project. The DSW Committee Chair and Committee decide if the defense has been successful and if there are items in the write up of any component of the project that need further attention before final approval is granted. Decisions of the DSW Committee Chair and Committee are based on majority (combined) vote of the DSW Committee Chair and Committee members. This voting is always conducted in this closed session of the Committee.
5. Once a decision has been reached by the DSW Committee Chair and Committee the candidate is invited back into the room. The DSW Committee Chair of the Committee reports the results of the vote regarding the pass or failure of the defense to the candidate immediately. The DSW Committee Chair and members of the Committee are to remain present to provide the candidate detailed and specific information regarding any items that need to be modified before the final Applied DSW Project document can be approved. If the Committee recommends that the student needs to make revisions to the Applied DSW Project document/s, a specific timeline/date for revisions (not a second defense) will be provided to the candidate in verbally and in writing (immediately following the conclusion of the defense process outlined here).
6. Following the defense and it is the responsibility of the DSW Committee Chair to relate the approval/pass of the candidate to the School of Behavioral Health Office of Dean in support of participating in the next graduation ceremony.
7. Only after revisions have been approved by the DSW Committee Chair and Committee and all document required formatting completed, does the candidate receive written confirmation/approval that their Applied DSW Project is completed. Once this occurs, the Applied DSW Project signature page is signed by the DSW Committee Chair and Committee members. It is then responsibility of the DSW Committee Chair to notify the School of Behavioral Health Office of Dean that the candidate has completed all the requirements associated with the Applied DSW Project.

Appendix I: Applied DSW Project Designs

Following are the approved designs and minimum content outlines for all Applied DSW Projects. Final details of each project will be developed in greater detail during the proposal writing classes, discussions with the DSW Committee Chair and Committee, and the additional design requirements identified as part of the DSW Project Proposal and preparation of the final document.

Program Evaluation

Chapter One—Introduction

- Background and content of the project
- Problem statement and research gap
- Purpose, objectives, and aims of the study
- Significance of the study

Chapter Two—Literature Review

- Overview of the relevant literature
- Theoretical framework (key theories, concepts, or models related to the study topic)
- Summary of previous research studies (including gaps in the literature)

Chapter Three—Methods

- Evaluation Design
- Procedures
- Key Informants
- Key concepts/variables
- Measures
- Data Analysis

Chapter Four—Results

- Results
- Tables and Figures

Chapter Five—Discussion and Conclusion

- Discussion
 - Interpret Findings
 - Discuss Implications for Practice Innovation, Education, Organizational and Social Policy, ADEI
 - Dissemination plan
- Conclusion
 - Limitations
 - Future Studies

References

Appendices

Proposed Innovative Practice with Underserved Population

Chapter One—Problem Statement

- Background and content of the project
- Problem statement and research gap
- Purpose, objectives, and aims of the study
- Significance of the study

Chapter Two—Literature Review

- Overview of the relevant literature
- Theoretical framework (key theories, concepts, or models related to the study topic)
- Summary of previous research studies (including gaps in the literature)

Chapter Three—Methods

- Methods
- Design of proposed implementation
 - Target populations and professionals
 - Criteria for included material and techniques
 - Target organizations where treatment program might be implemented
- Proposed evaluation methods

Chapter Four—Results

- Results-Completed Manual
 - Analysis of implementation limitations/constraints

Chapter Five—Discussion and Conclusion

- Discussion/Implications for Practice Innovation, Education, Organizational and Social Policy, ADEI
- Dissemination plan
- Conclusion
 - Limitations
 - Future Studies

References

Appendices

Appendix II: General Description of Applied DSW Project Chapters

Chapter One: *Problem Statement*. This chapter summarizes the nature, breadth and scope of the problem and includes a description of the clinical significance/importance of the project/practice innovation/issue, and concludes with the objectives of the DSW Project.

Chapter Two: *Review of Literature*. Presents a comprehensive review of the literature, including: 1) the relevant background of the problem, 2) an examination of the theoretical explanations that contribute to the issue identified in Chapter One; 3) the research literature/findings that support the DSW Project, and 4) critique the literature regarding problems related to methodology, measurement, analysis and findings with keen attention to clinical innovation and ADEI objectives.

Chapter Three: *Methods*. Identifies the methods of investigation for DSW Project design selected. (See Project Design Outlines.)

Chapter Four: *Results*. Analysis of data consistent with the DSW Project design. Completed Manual (if applicable).

Chapter Five: *Discussion and Conclusion*. Connecting all the previous chapters to a discussion about the DSW Project implications for practice innovation, Social Work education, organizational and social policy, and ADEI. A dissemination plan for your finished project also need to be included. The conclusion is a critique of project limitations and future studies.

References: A comprehensive bibliography of all materials referenced in the DSW Project.

Appendices: Addendum items as relevant to the DSW Project design and determination of the DSW Project Committee.