

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

The Loma Linda University DSW Program in Clinical Leadership is underpinned by the practitioner-scholar model of education, which emphasizes an ideal of professional excellence that bridges practice, theory, and research. Through this approach, practitioner-scholars 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 Projects must be designed to cultivate and demonstrate the Core Expertise and Skills essential to doctoral-level social work practice. The Applied DSW Project fulfills the doctoral program's culminating requirement and serves as the student's demonstration of advanced social work leadership, scholarship, and applied practice innovation consistent with CSWE's 2025 Practice Doctorate Standards.

1. Advance professional practice through innovative and evidence-informed approaches;
2. Critically evaluate and apply research and knowledge to address complex practice challenges;
3. Engage in scholarly inquiry that reflects the rigor and standards of doctoral-level work;
4. Generate and disseminate practice-relevant knowledge through teaching, scholarship, professional presentations, mentoring, and/or leadership in administration;
5. Exhibit leadership within social work practice and education; and
6. Develop and sustain substantive expertise in one or more specialized areas of social work practice.

In addition:

- Applied DSW Projects need not be 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 (*please note that projects requiring IRB review by the full board are not permitted*):
 - Program evaluation with data (satisfaction surveys are not acceptable; qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method evaluation designs are required)
 - Needs assessment with data (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method designs are required)
 - Project using secondary or faculty research data (independent data collection is not allowed – must use a faculty supported data collection process or an approved secondary dataset; data from qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method studies are acceptable)
- 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 typically follow a five (5) chapter format including an introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion section (see Appendix A for a sample outline).
- All Applied DSW Projects require the successful completion of a project proposal and final oral defense.
- The final Applied DSW Project must have full committee approval and conform to guidelines provided in the School of Behavioral Health’s *Professional Doctoral Project Formatting Handbook* and *Sample Table of Contents*. (This document is available on TEAMS).

Process and Timeline for Completion of the Applied DSW Project

- During spring of **Program Year 1** students are assigned a Chair and develop a concept paper, which supports the development and further understanding of their 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 the Applied DSW Project Proposal
 - The Applied DSW Project Proposal consists of the following chapters (see Appendix B for detailed description of each chapter):
 - Fall Quarter: Chapter Two - literature review;
 - Winter Quarter: Chapters One and Three - problem statement/introduction and methods; and

- Spring Quarter: Revisions, proposal defense, and IRB review (if needed).
 - The Applied DSW Project Proposal must be successfully defended in an Oral Defense before the project can proceed. This should be completed by the end of year 2 spring quarter.
- During **Program Year 3**, four courses are designed to support the completion of the last two chapters of the Applied DSW Project.
 - The completed Applied DSW Project consists of the first three chapters from the Proposal and the following chapters and processes (see Appendix B for detailed description of each chapter):
 - Summer Quarter: Completion of IRB process and data collection;
 - Fall Quarter: Continued data collection and data analysis (Chapter 4 - results section should be complete by the end of fall quarter);
 - Winter Quarter: Chapter 5 – discussion section;
 - Spring Quarter: Revisions and final defense. Must be completed by the last Monday in May for June graduation.
 - All project work is subject to Committee review, oral defense and approval before going on to the next phase, graduation.

DSW Applied Project Committee Assignment Process

1. DSW Applied Project Committee consist of a minimum of two members: the Chair and an additional Loma Linda University faculty member.
2. Matching with a DSW Project Chair: In spring of year 1, students will be paired with a DSW Project Chair based on faculty expertise and availability. This strategic pairing is designed to ensure a successful collaboration throughout the project.
3. Inviting a Second Committee Member: In winter quarter of year 2, students and their Project Chairs will jointly extend an invitation to a second committee member. This faculty member must be a doctoral faculty member of Loma Linda University, bringing an institutional perspective to the committee and will need to be approved by the Program Director.
4. Consideration for Additional Committee Members: In rare cases, there may be a need for additional committee members. When this occurs students must seek explicit approval from the Project Chair. The inclusion of new members must be driven by a specific expertise requirement that greatly enhances the overall quality of the research. When possible, if input from someone outside of LLU is needed, we suggest the student consider this person's role as a consultant rather than an official committee member.

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.

Although the project proposal defense is not open to the public, it can include the attendance of other DSW current students 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. A 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 introduction welcoming the committee and describing the process by the Chair to lay out expectations and allay fears.
2. A brief oral presentation (approximately 30 minutes) consisting of an overview of the applied project.
 - The student should provide an introduction, the major objectives, a summary of relevant literature and theoretical underpinnings, and the proposed methodology.
 - A slide deck developed in PowerPoint (or Canva) should be presented.
 - Students are encouraged to engage with the audience by discussing their slides, rather than reading them verbatim, to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of the content.
3. 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 as well as the relevance of the project and its scientific contribution.
 - The Committee is expected to take the discussion to 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.
4. 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 relay the approval/pass status 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.
 - Once the Project Proposal revisions are complete and approved by the committee, the student can submit the Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy form. This form is located in the Banner Student Portal under Forms.
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 (please note that projects that require full IRB board review are not allowed). The committee Chair is responsible for reviewing the decision tree with the student and providing guidance throughout the IRB process. 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.

Students using primary or secondary data from Kaiser Permanente or another outside source must seek guidance from their committee Chair and obtain the necessary IRB approval from Kaiser, the other organization, and/or LLU as appropriate before beginning the data collection process.

Regarding the LLU IRB process see Appendix C for general guidelines and the following link for all needed forms and instructions.

<https://researchaffairs.llu.edu/research-compliance/human-studies/irb-toolkit>.

Applied DSW Project Defense Guidelines

A public defense of the DSW Applied Project is required, serving as a scholarly discourse between the candidate and their Applied DSW Project committee. This defense demonstrates the candidate's successful completion of publishable scholarly work and mastery of their chosen subject and methodology.

Preparation and Scheduling

- The candidate must submit a copy of their final draft to their chair, committee, and the DSW Program Director at least 45 days before the end of the spring term. This timeline allows for review, edits, and compliance with the two-week public notice requirement for the oral defense.
- The student's committee chair, in consultation with the full project committee, is responsible for scheduling the Applied DSW Project Defense. The chair and committee must first determine that the student is ready to proceed based on the likelihood of success.
- Students do not set the defense date. Attempts to pressure the chair or committee to schedule the defense prematurely due to personal reasons, such as wanting to participate in a specific graduation ceremony or pre-arranged travel plans, are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

Defense Approval

- Once the oral defense is approved, the student must work with the DSW Program Director's office to:
 1. Provide an abstract (not exceeding 250 words) summarizing the project.
 2. Verify that a copy of the final draft is available for review through the DSW Program Director's office.
 3. Confirm the date, time, and location of the defense.
- The DSW Program Director's office will develop and disseminate the official announcement of the oral defense.
- The defense announcement must be published at least two weeks before the scheduled date. Faculty, students, and members of the collaborative professional social work community are invited to attend.

Defense Proceedings

1. Introduction: The Applied DSW Project chair introduces the committee members and describes the defense process.
2. Student Presentation: The student presents an overview of their project, including objectives, purpose, significant literature, methodology, findings/outcomes, and implications for practice and education. This presentation includes a PowerPoint and is generally 30-45 minutes.

3. Audience Questions: Following the presentation, the audience may ask questions. This discussion may extend beyond the student's specific topic to related areas of scientific knowledge and relevance to practice and education.
4. Committee Questions: After the audience is dismissed, the chair and committee will ask additional questions.
5. Deliberation: The student is dismissed while the committee deliberates. They decide if the defense has been successful and if any revisions are needed before final approval. This decision is confidential and conducted in a closed session.
6. Decision Notification: The student is invited back into the room, and the chair reports the defense outcome. If revisions are required, a specific timeline for completion is provided both verbally and in writing.
7. Approval Notification: The chair notifies the School of Behavioral Health Office of the Dean of the student's pass/fail status to support their participation in the next graduation ceremony.
8. Final Approval: Only after all revisions are approved and formatting requirements met does the student receive final written confirmation that their Applied DSW Project is complete. The signature page is then signed by the chair and committee members, and the chair notifies the School of Behavioral Health Office of the Dean of the candidate's completion.
9. In preparation for graduation the student will need to write a brief 75 word abstract that needs to be approved by the Chair and sent to the Dean's office. The abstract should provide a context sentence, methods and a results sentence. If space allows, a discussion/conclusion/implication statement should be added.
10. An IRB checkout is required once the final Project has been approved. In completing this process, the student obtains the IRB checkout survey from the SBH Dean's office. Once complete, the survey should be sent via email to Dr. Sussanne Montgomery at smontgomery@llu.edu. The process is considered complete once the students receives an approval email that they have been IRB cleared.

These guidelines ensure a rigorous and fair process for the defense of the Applied DSW Project, maintaining the high standards of scholarly work at Loma Linda University.

Preparing the Final Applied Project Manuscript

The handbook and guidelines for the doctoral project formatting are available in TEAMS.

Students must follow the required formatting guidelines and submit the final committee

approved manuscript to the School of Behavioral Health Records Office for review and final formatting approval. This should occur after the defense and following any additional post-defense edits are complete. See the submission deadlines in Appendix D. Following the final formatting approval, the student must submit **the** final copy of the DSW Applied Project to the School of Behavioral Health and work with the department to receive up to two free bound copies of their project (there is a fee for additional copies).

Form D must accompany the final copies of the DSW Applied Project manuscript and should be signed by the student's committee once all edits are complete (see Appendix D for deadlines). Your Chair will provide you with form D.

Professional Conference Presentation

As part of the requirements for the Doctor of Social Work (DSW) program, candidates are required to present their DSW proposal or initial findings at a professional conference prior to graduation. This requirement is designed to ensure that candidates engage with the broader professional community, disseminate their research, and receive feedback from peers and experts in the field. Students will work with their Chair on the submission process. The chosen conference must be recognized by the student's project committee and can be presented online or in-person depending on the conference requirements. It is suggested that students submit their presentation following the proposal defense or shortly following data collection. Suitable types of conferences include but are not limited to:

National and International Social Work Conferences:

- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Annual Conference
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting
- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) World Conference

Specialized Social Work Conferences:

- Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Annual Conference
- American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEH CY) Conference
- National Conference on Ending Homelessness by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH)

Regional and State Social Work Conferences:

- State-level NASW chapter conferences
- Regional social work education conferences
- Local conferences organized by social work schools or agencies

This requirement ensures that DSW candidates gain valuable experience in presenting and/or sharing their research with a professional audience, receive constructive feedback, and contribute to the advancement of the social work profession.

Appendix A

Sample Applied DSW Project Design

Following is a sample outline 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.

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

- Study Design
- Sample
- Data Collection Procedures
- Key Informants
- Key concepts/variables/instrumentation
- 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

Appendix B

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.

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.

Appendix C
IRB Tips for Doctor of Social Work (DSW) Students
(developed and written by Dr. Elana Berman, DSW, LCSW)

1. After passing your project proposal defense
 - a. Incorporate edits received at your proposal before completing IRB materials
 - b. Confirm your methodology and sample size
2. Define project workflows
 - a. Identify the workflow for participants to complete the Informed Consent Document and participate in your research
 - b. Identify how you will maintain confidentiality of participant data such as a password protected Google or Microsoft Drive
3. Identify and learn to use new tools
 - a. Identify resources such as an LLU Zoom and Qualtrics accounts and ask for student access from edtech@llu.edu
 - b. If using Qualtrics, work with Dr. Qais Alemi and/or your chair as Qualtrics has a learning curve
4. Locate LLU's IRB Toolkit [here](#), you will need:
 - a. Application: identify the appropriate application on the IRB website in consultation with your chair such as an anonymous survey, minimal risk, or other application type
 - b. Protocol
 - c. Informed Consent Document (ICD): identify the appropriate ICD for your project
 - d. Recruitment materials (telephone script, flyers, social media posts, etc.)
 - e. Abstract sample is [here](#)
 - f. Research instrument: survey, interview guide, demographic questionnaires (not on IRB website, this is from your Chapter 3)
5. Additional Information
 - a. Application: to select a box double click and a pop-up window will populate to allow you to mark it with an "X" to denote selected
 - b. Protocol:
 - i. Number 7a "Rationale": use APA citations and note those citations under references
 - ii. Number 7c "Endpoints": work with your chair
 - iii. Number 7g "Deception": work with your chair
 - c. Recruitment materials
 - i. Obtain LLU Behavioral Health School Logo for recruitment materials (example flyers) by emailing Doreen (Department Assistant) at doflores@llu.edu

- ii. Consider using AI/ChatGPT to create social media posts (there are no samples on IRB website)
 - iii. Include a place on recruitment materials for IRB Application # _____ (indicative of where you'll notate the number once received)
 - d. In all materials:
 - i. Remove language about becoming ill or injured while participating in this study, needing to see a doctor or contacting 911, and replace with: **"IMPARTIAL 3RD PARTY CONTACT** You may contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any questions, concerns or complaints by calling 909-558-4647 or emailing patientrelations@llu.edu for information and assistance."
 - ii. Remove language about cells, blood, bioproducts, etc.
 - iii. If you have a range of target number of participants, state the high end of that range, example do not state 15- 25 participants, state 25 participants
6. Approval process
- a. Send application with supplemental documents to your chair for edits and approval
 - b. Once your chair approves, send application with supplemental documents to Dr. Qais Alemi, this department's IRB representative
 - c. Incorporate edits and send to chair for approval again
 - d. Once approved by chair again, request signatures on the application (don't use a pre-populated digital signature and instead use a unique signature sometimes easier to create on a phone)
 - i. On Page 9, student researcher signs, your chair signs and then your chair requests Dr. Buckles or Dr. Freeman to sign
 - e. Chair submits your application to irb@llu.edu
7. Wait for IRB Feedback
- a. You do not necessarily need to adopt all feedback

IRB Check Out and Close Out

1. After your study is complete and you've passed your oral defense, begin IRB Check Out and Close Out.
2. Initiate IRB Check Out with School of Behavioral Health/Social Work:
 - a. Email Dr. Susanne Montgomery smontgomery@llu.edu and state that you are initiating close out of IRB for your study.
 - b. She will reply to request you send her the following:
 - Program:
 - Degree:
 - Name and contact information of your chairperson:
 - Dissertation/Doctoral Project title:

- Primary data collected: i.e. consent forms, survey hard copies or recorded interviews that were transcribed
- IRB stipulations: if you have it the IRB protocol number and attach a hard copy of the approval.
- Attach a final copy of your project (note that your final draft will not be available until Elizabeth Sundstrom has provided final formatting edits, likely one week before or the week of graduation)

3. Initiate IRB Close Out with IRB

- a. Email irb@llu.edu with your IRB Study Number to request close out. They may respond and ask the following questions for which you can consult your chair and/or Dr. Alemi.
 - i. IRB#:
 - ii. Title:
 - iii. PI:
 - iv. Status: Completed or Terminated:
 - v. Date of Closure:
 - vi. How many records used or subjects enrolled:
- b. Note that as of 2025, IRB is in the process of digitizing their Close Out process to expedite it
- c. IRB may request for you to complete additional documents if there was a protocol violation or protocol change. These documents are accessible via IRB's online portal in InfoEd. You'll need your chair's signature on each document.
- d. Follow-up with IRB regularly to ensure timely processing of your close out.

Appendix D
SBH Form and DSW Applied Project Deadlines

Academic Variances (due before these dates): Spring/Summer=Oct 1; Fall=March 1;
Winter=July 1

QUARTER	START/END TERM	SBH FORMS	SBH DEAN'S OFFICE BY NOON
SUMMER 2025 (202601)	6/23/25-9/5/25	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	November 1, 2024 November 1, 2024
		Form IIB/IIC	June 6, 2025
		Form D	August 29, 2025
FALL 2025 (202602)	9/22/25-12/12/25	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	April 1, 2025 April 1, 2025
		Form D	December 5, 2025
WINTER 2026 (202603)	1/5/26-3/20/26	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	August 1, 2025 August 1, 2025
		Form D	March 13, 2026
SPRING 2026 (202604)	3/30/26-6/12/26	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	November 1, 2025 November 1, 2025
		Form IIB/IIC	June 5, 2026
		Form D	June 5, 2026
SUMMER 2026 (202701)	6/22/26-9/4/2026	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	November 1, 2025 November 1, 2025
		Form IIB/IIC	June 5, 2026
		Form D	August 28, 2026
FALL 2026 (202702)	9/21/26-12/11/26	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	April 1, 2026 April 1, 2026
		Form D	December 4, 2026
WINTER 2027 (202703)	1/4/27-3/19/27	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	August 3, 2026 August 3, 2026
		Form D	March 12, 2027
SPRING 2027 (202704)	3/29/27-6/11/27	Form A/ATC Graduation Petition	November 2, 2026 November 2, 2026

		Form D	June 4, 2027
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***Form A** - Advancement to Candidacy ***Graduation Petition** - Formally Form C

***Form D** - Statement of Completion of Requirements for Degree

**** Form IIB** (minor edits to dissertation/doctoral project) or **IIC** (clinical hours) – Petition for summer graduates to participate in Spring Commencement

SBH Project Due Dates

QUARTER		Final Draft Due
Summer 2025		August 18, 2025
Fall 2025		November 24, 2025
Winter 2026		March 2, 2026
Spring 2026		May 5, 2026
Summer 2026		August 17, 2026
Fall 2026		November 23, 2026
Winter 2027		March 3, 2027