



Stony Brook *School of Social Welfare*

PhD PROGRAM

2026-27 STUDENT HANDBOOK

**School of Social Welfare
Health Sciences Center, Level 2, Room 092
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, New York 11794-8231**

Stony Brook University/SUNY is an affirmative action, equal opportunity educator and employer.

I. Welcome From the Program Director

To our incoming PhD students,

On behalf of our School, I am pleased to welcome you to the PhD Program in the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University. You are beginning an intensive intellectual undertaking designed to foster your development as a leader in social work research and education.

The pursuit of a PhD represents a substantial academic commitment. During your tenure in this program, you will be expected to engage in critical inquiry and master advanced research methodologies. Attaining these competencies will enable you to conduct independent research that informs social work across various domains, preparing you to mentor future practitioners and scholars.

We are pleased to have you join our academic community and remain dedicated to supporting your progress throughout your doctoral studies.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Ely, PhD, MSW

Director, PhD Program in Social Welfare
Stony Brook University

II. Introduction

This handbook serves as a formal guide to the doctoral program within the School of Social Welfare (SSW) at Stony Brook University (SBU). Although intended to be comprehensive, this document is not exhaustive, and its absolute accuracy cannot be guaranteed, as institutional policies at the Graduate School or university levels may be subject to amendment between revisions. Students requiring clarification or encountering program-related challenges are encouraged to seek formal advice from the PhD program director, the graduate programs assistant, research assistant supervisors, instructors, dissertation chairs and committee members, and/or the Graduate School.

III. School of Social Welfare Mission Statement

The SSW is committed to building a more equitable society based on the values of human dignity, inclusiveness, diversity, equality, and economic, environmental, and social justice.

The full mission statement is accessible via the School's [official website](#).

IV. The Stony Brook University Graduate School

A. General Student Body

Graduate-level education at SBU is governed by the Graduate School's [policies and regulations](#). These directives encompass essential information regarding registration, grading criteria, leaves of absence, financial assistance, grievance procedures, and degree candidacy.

Graduate students are obligated to maintain a current understanding of the policies and procedures delineated in the [Graduate School Catalog](#), which undergoes annual revisions.

B. Student Resources

Comprehensive resources for graduate students — including health and counseling services, campus employment, career development, financial aid, and advocacy services — are centralized on the Division of Student Services webpage under [Graduate Student Services](#).

C. Student Accessibility Support Center

Students requiring accessibility accommodations are directed to contact the [Student Accessibility Support Center](#) (SASC) to investigate available resources and support options.

D. International Students

It is incumbent upon international students to remain current with all policies governing their educational and residency requirements. The SBU Graduate School provides additional guidance about [international student requirements](#) and offers [resources for new international graduate students](#). The Graduate School also provides guidance about [documentation](#) for international students.

V. Program Admission

Admission follows the [graduate school checklist](#). Additional details regarding the [Social Welfare PhD](#) are available on the SSW website. Applications are submitted via the [health sciences page](#).

SSW PhD students begin the program in the fall. Those seeking to defer must reapply for admission.

International applicants should review [supplemental requirements](#) on the graduate school website.

VI. The PhD Program Overview

The [PhD program at the School of Social Welfare](#) prepares the next generation of scholars and educators for careers grounded in data analysis methods with an emphasis on the social determinants of health; research based on ameliorating racial, ethnic, and identity-based disparities in access to quality treatment; and policy-based solutions.

Graduates of PhD programs in social welfare/social work are generally prepared to assume roles in social work research, education, and/or industry leadership. PhD students in the SBU SSW are members of a community of scholars in the allied health sciences, which, in addition to social welfare, includes nursing and public health. The list of allied health science programs at Stony Brook can be found on the [Graduate School's academic programs webpage](#) under Health Sciences Programs.

Upon completion of the PhD program, students will be equipped with the skills to do the following:

- Conduct independent, methodologically sound research;
- Advance a scientific research agenda;
- Communicate scientific findings effectively; and
- Transmit social work knowledge, skills, and values.

VII. PhD Student Professional Expectations

A. Program Entry

Students must establish a professional presence within the SSW immediately upon arrival. This is primarily done by attending and fully participating in class, fully engaging in RA duties, attending SSW events, displaying professional behavior aligned with the [NASW Code of Ethics](#) and [CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards](#) (EPAS), and meeting and engaging with faculty members.

B. Webpage Profile

Early in the fall semester, new students should submit a professional photo, CV, and bio for the SSW website.

C. Professional Standards

Students should be proactive, ethical, and self-directed, adhering to the [NASW Code of Ethics](#) and the [CSWE EPAS Standards](#).

Core expectations include:

- Knowing policies and degree requirements;
- Engaging in ethical, professional behavior;
- Communicating professionally and promptly;
- Attending and engaging in all classes;
- Mastering course concepts;
- Establishing and maintaining a professional presence.

D. Student Reviews

The PhD faculty will review each PhD student's progress annually. For example, PhD faculty will discuss each student's progress in key areas such as competency in coursework and progress toward the completion of the qualifying exam, proposal, and dissertation. The faculty will also discuss PhD students' progress with professional standards and development. Students must be adequately advancing towards degree completion to remain in the program and to continue to receive their RA funding package.

International students must follow specific U.S. study requirements. The Graduate School provides details, including information about [visa and immigration services](#). Students should monitor policy updates throughout their enrollment.

E. Graduate Student Organization

The [Graduate School Organization](#) represents all SBU graduate students and serves as a liaison to the administration. PhD students are encouraged to fully engage with the organization whenever possible. This is beneficial for building community and gaining important knowledge.

F. Communication

[Email](#) is the primary medium for official SBU communication. Students must use their SBU email address for official PhD program business. Students must check their email regularly and are expected to respond to important inquiries within 24 hours, during the business week, to ensure no critical information is overlooked.

VIII. Graduate Research Assistantships (RA)

Information about graduate student employment can be found on the [Graduate Student Employment Guidelines page](#).

A. RA Details

Most students admitted to the SBU SSW PhD program receive a Research Assistantship (RA) package. This is typically a 10-month (minus June and July), 20-hour weekly commitment from August to May. RA support usually lasts three years and includes a stipend, health insurance, and tuition remission, subject to the SSW budget. Funding renewal is subject to the student's adequate and continued performance in the RA and in the PhD program.

B. Fees and Other Costs

The RA package covers tuition, health insurance, and student fees. Students may be responsible for paying some fees, including any fees incurred due to late registration, and covering textbook costs. Once the RA expires, students are responsible for covering all of their tuition expenses and health insurance costs until graduation.

C. Employment Status

SSW RA students are categorized as graduate student employees, and information about this status and corresponding benefits can be found on the SBU website under the [Graduate Student Employees](#) section.

D. Work Schedule

Students on an SSW RA are expected to consult with their supervisors to understand expectations for the RA work schedule. This includes clarifying working hours, meeting schedules, and other expectations with their supervisors at the beginning of each academic year. Students on an RA are not obligated to work during the summer when not receiving the RA stipend, but they are welcome to continue research-related activities that are agreeable to them in consultation with supervisors and mentors.

RA assignments begin mid-August, before the start of the fall semester, and continue through May 31 each year. Students are not expected to work when the university is closed, but may be expected to work when students are out of class (i.e., spring break), yet the university is open. Work schedules will differ for each RA and depend on the needs of the faculty supervisor. Questions about a student's expected schedule and work expectations should be directed to the student's RA supervisor or the PhD program director.

E. Permitted Work Hours

Students are not permitted to work over half-time (20 hours weekly) within the university, leaving an additional 20 hours weekly for study.

International students are strictly limited to working 20 hours per week and can only seek employment on campus during the academic year. Any violations of this policy could impact a student's visa and immigration status and result in a student's visa being revoked.

F. Illness

In the event of an illness or sickness, students must communicate with RA supervisors and instructors to take sick time as needed, in consultation with the PhD program director.

Students should inform relevant people, in advance when possible, including supervisors, instructors, and the PhD program director, if there is a need to adjust their schedule due to illness. Students should avoid in-person activities and classes when they have a transmissible illness.

G. Health-Related Schedule Adjustments

Students experiencing illness or health concerns are expected to work with their instructors, RA supervisors, and/or committee members to make arrangements to attend class virtually and/or make up any RA or other work missed as soon as possible if they cannot meet expectations in an agreed-upon manner.

H. Long-Term Absences

Students who need longer-term absences should consider seeking support from the [Student Accessibility Support Center](#) and/or taking a [leave of absence or withdrawing from the program](#), as is appropriate to their circumstances.

I. Health Insurance

Students on an RA are considered SBU employees and are eligible for health insurance at a nominal cost. During the summer months, students can opt in to purchasing gap coverage. Questions about health insurance can be directed to the graduate programs coordinator. Information about options for [domestic student health insurance](#) and [international student health insurance](#) is provided on the University's webpages.

J. Expiration of Three-Year RA Package

Students who have reached the three-year RA funding limit but have not yet graduated will need to plan for how to continue their studies and cover the cost of their tuition and health insurance. Obtaining the PhD degree in the SBU SSW typically requires 4-5 years of study.

Options such as working on a grant, part-time employment, adjunct teaching, and/or student loans are often available for students once the RA funding expires. Efforts will be made to match students up with available opportunities, but these cannot be guaranteed.

K. Questions

Students who have questions about the financial aspects of the RA, such as paychecks, contracts, health insurance, tuition coverage, and account balances, should direct those to the SSW's assistant dean for finance and administration. Students who have questions about their RA responsibilities should discuss those with their supervisors and/or with the PhD program director.

IX. Research Assistant Responsibilities

A. Students

Students receiving an RA are assigned to work under the supervision of one or more SSW faculty members.

Students receiving an RA should expect to work on meaningful research-related activities and scholarly projects. It is understood that students enter the RA with varying skill levels. Students should be forthcoming with the RA supervisor about their own strengths and limitations.

The RA experience is a time for students to grow into social work researchers and scholars. Students should engage professionally with their assigned RA responsibilities, which include completing assigned activities by agreed-upon deadlines and being forthright about skills and limitations.

Failure to engage in RA responsibilities will result in termination of the funding package and can result in dismissal from the program without being put on academic probation.

B. Faculty Supervisors

RAs will be supervised by one or more faculty members who will mentor the students and assign and oversee research activities. RA supervisors should involve students in meaningful research activities that advance the research of the faculty member. Supervisors should also support students to define, develop, and advance their own distinct areas of research.

C. Work and Meeting Schedules

RA supervisors are expected to meet with students at the beginning of each academic year to develop a student work plan for the RA. Expectations for the following should be discussed:

- Meetings;
- Communication;
- Research activities;
- Deadlines;
- Professional behavior;
- Scheduled time-off; and
- Other requirements for working in the RA.

RA supervisors are expected to ensure that students on an RA are involved in 20 hours per week of supervised research-related work activities. Some students may be paired with one faculty member for 20 hours per week, and some students may split their time between multiple supervisors.

D. Meaningful Research Activities

RA supervisors are expected to expose students to meaningful research activities and scholarly development opportunities, provide guidance to help students build their research agendas and scholarly profiles, and help prepare students for post-graduate careers.

Research-related opportunities can include:

- Conference submissions and presentations;
- Peer-reviewed publications; data collection and/or analysis;
- Grant writing; and
- Other relevant scholarly activities, whenever possible and appropriate.

RA supervisors are expected to collaborate with students around their class schedules. RA supervisors are encouraged to allow students time to attend conferences and relevant professional development activities as appropriate.

If an occasion arises in which RA supervisors are unable to provide students with suitable RA opportunities, supervisors should inform the PhD program director so alternative arrangements can be made.

E. Completion of RA Duties

RA duties can be completed either in person or remotely using electronic communication, such as email, phone calls, and video conferences, but this must be arranged in agreement with RA supervisors.

F. Once the RA Expires

Students are expected to plan for the professional conclusion of all RA projects before the expiration of the RA package. It is in the student's best interest to continue to develop research collaborations with faculty members even after the RA officially expires, as collaborations and resulting research products enhance research skills and make students more competitive in the job market.

G. RA Evaluations

1. Assessing the Progress of the RA

Toward the end of each fall and spring semester, the RA supervisor and the RA student should meet to discuss and evaluate the student's RA performance for that semester. Successful accomplishments and concerns should be identified and discussed directly with students.

2. Student Performance

Students should be informed when their performance needs to be adjusted at the time that this concern is identified, not just during end-of-semester evaluations. Students who are not performing adequately in the RA should be provided with direct feedback and given the opportunity to improve their performance.

3. Opportunity for Improvement

Once a student is informed that their RA performance needs to be improved, it is expected that the student will address those concerns as quickly as possible and to the best of their ability. Students should seek clarification to inform their performance anytime clarification is needed. Once a student has attempted to improve the RA performance based on feedback, the student should communicate with the supervisor to confirm that the improvements are adequate. Students who do not improve their RA performance after receiving direct feedback will have their funding package suspended for failure to meet academic expectations for the RA, in accordance with the

guidelines provided in the initial RA offer letter. Students who do not perform adequately in their RA also risk dismissal from the program.

H. Expectations for RAs

1. Social Work Values

Open, honest, and timely communication that reflects adherence to [social work values and ethics](#) is paramount to having a successful RA experience. Dedication to fulfilling agreed-upon responsibilities is expected.

2. Professional Communication

Students are expected to engage in communication that would usually occur in a professional work setting. As such, students are encouraged to communicate clearly, directly, and frequently with the RA supervisor, and RA supervisors are expected to communicate clearly, directly, and frequently with students.

3. Professional Expectations

- Students who receive an RA are expected to ask questions and clarify expectations to try to avoid misunderstandings about RA responsibilities.
- Students are expected to contact their RA supervisor on time, in advance whenever possible, anytime a deadline, agreement, or responsibility cannot be met.
- Students should understand that it is acceptable to ask for assistance. It is incumbent upon each RA student to inform the RA supervisor when a student is lacking the knowledge or skills necessary to perform any assigned tasks. In turn, supervisors understand and expect that RAs often require guidance, and supervisors who agree to supervise an RA student should be equipped to provide such guidance. Students are responsible for requesting the guidance that they need.
- Academic progress: Students must maintain adequate academic standing, meet academic standards, and make adequate progress towards attaining their degree in order to remain eligible to continue to receive their RA funding.

4. Time Off for the RA

Students who need to take time off should try to do so during winter break or during the summer months when the RA is not in effect. Students needing time off for special circumstances during the academic year are expected to request time off in advance and in collaboration with the RA supervisor.

Students should inform their RA supervisors when they need to miss their RA work, scheduled meetings, or other activities. Students are expected to make up RA-related work missed during time off once they return to their RA duties. Students experiencing extenuating circumstances may need to consider applying for a [leave of absence](#).

X. Teaching

PhD students begin teaching preparation by completing the seminar in social work education (HWC 613) and a teaching practicum (HWC 614). Once these are complete, students are eligible to serve as co-instructors or independent adjunct instructors. Students who are interested in independent teaching should inform the program director. Independent teaching opportunities must also align with the needs of the SSW and are not guaranteed.

A. Teaching Practicum: Students

The purpose of the PhD teaching practicum is similar to that of the MSW or BSW practice practicum, as students are paired with an experienced social work faculty member to observe, learn about, and participate in teaching under direct supervision.

Students are responsible for contacting a faculty member in advance of the spring semester of the year they plan to complete the practicum to arrange a teaching practicum experience. This translates into getting an agreement from a faculty member to supervise the student's teaching practicum.

- Students should arrange an agreement for their teaching practicum in the fall semester while they are taking the teaching pedagogy course, in preparation for completing the practicum in the spring.
- Once a student obtains an agreement to complete the practicum with a faculty member, the student should register for their practicum class under the section that corresponds to their faculty member's name.
- Students should seek to pair up with faculty members who can provide them with a practicum experience that meets their teaching goals.

B. Teaching Practicum: Faculty

Faculty who supervise the practicum will be responsible for designing an experience that allows the PhD student to both observe the process of teaching and participate in some co-teaching and independent teaching activities under faculty supervision. The teaching practicum differs from a teaching assistant (TA) assignment. The SSW does not participate in TA assignments.

- This experience is intended as a learning-by-observation model akin to the practicum that MSW and BSW students must complete. As such, the role of the teaching practicum instructor is similar to the role of the practicum supervisor.
- Typically, students would begin the practicum mostly observing the faculty and evolve to take on more independent teaching tasks as the practicum proceeds.
- Students should learn and participate in typical teaching activities such as syllabus and assignment development, designing and offering lectures, and providing supervised student feedback, among other activities.
- The faculty member is responsible for entering a grade once the practicum is complete.
- Students can complete the teaching practicum with any full-time faculty member in the SSW.

XI. Program Probation, Conduct, and Grievances

A. Academic Probation

Students will be put on academic probation if their GPA falls below 3.0 or if they earn a grade of C or lower in their coursework; the guidelines for this process are available on the [SBU Probation, Conduct and Grievances webpage](#). Students will be given one semester on academic probation to allow them the opportunity to raise their GPA or satisfactorily retake a failed class. Students who do not raise their GPA/satisfactorily complete the failed class in accordance with a plan approved by the program director by the semester following their initial placement on academic probation will be referred to the Graduate School for dismissal from the program.

B. Academic Conduct

The university expects all students to cooperate in developing and maintaining high standards of scholarship and conduct. More information is available on the [SBU](#)

[Probation, Conduct, and Grievances webpage](#). For detailed information, view the [university's Conduct Code and Maintenance of Public Order](#).

C. Attendance

Students in the PhD program are expected to attend every class each semester. Students are expected to inform their instructor if they are experiencing illness or extenuating circumstances and cannot attend class. When a student cannot attend class, the student should seek to make arrangements to attend remotely, if possible and appropriate. If a student cannot attend via video platform (e.g., Zoom), the student must reach out to classmates and the instructor to get information about what was missed in class and how to make it up. Students who consistently miss class or who do not fully participate in class violate the NASW code and CSWE expectations for professional behavior and acceptable academic expectations, and risk being directly referred to the Graduate School for dismissal from the program without being placed on academic probation.

D. Academic Honesty and Scholarly Misconduct

Graduate student conduct falls under the rules and regulations outlined in the Grievances and Appeals section of the SBU Graduate Catalog.

More information is available on the [SBU Probation, Conduct and Grievances webpage](#) and in the [SBU Policy Manual](#).

E. Grievance and Appeals Procedures

SBU and the Graduate School encourage the prompt resolution of suspected academic misconduct violations and grievances as they arise. The SSW has its own grievance policies, and more information about university-level policy is available on the [SBU Probation, Conduct, and Grievances webpage](#).

PhD students can appeal an academic decision by following the organizational hierarchy of the SBU SSW. Students with a grievance or appeal should describe the issue in writing and email the concern to the following people in this order:

- Students should begin by talking directly with their instructor or supervisor;
- If that does not resolve the problem, students can escalate their concerns to the PhD program director;
- If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached with the program director, then students can further escalate their concerns to the associate dean for academic affairs and then the dean, if necessary;

- Students who wish to appeal a grade should follow the policies outlined by the SBU Graduate School.

F. Academic Dismissal

SSW PhD students can be referred to the Graduate School for dismissal from the program for a lack of acceptable academic or professional performance. The following are examples of reasons that students may be referred for dismissal. This list is not exhaustive:

- Dropping below the required 3.0 GPA for more than one semester or not satisfactorily completing a failed class the second time it is taken;
- Earning a C or lower in two or more required courses;
- Not adhering to professional behaviors as guided by the [NASW](#) and [CSWE](#);
- Not fulfilling agreed-upon RA responsibilities;
- Not attending class regularly, not submitting assignments, not paying attention/engaging in class, not accepting redirection;
- Not responding appropriately to feedback that is provided by graduate faculty/PhD instructors/PhD program committee;
- Violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism, cheating, or inappropriate use of AI to aid preparation of coursework or scholarship;
- Inability to achieve/demonstrate competency in the core PhD coursework;
- Failure to advance through the program appropriately.

Students in the SSW PhD program are expected to earn a grade of B- or better in all required PhD coursework. Students who earn a grade of C or lower in a required PhD class, or whose GPA drops below the required average of 3.0, will be put on probation in a manner consistent with the policy outlined above and with expectations outlined by the Graduate School. Students who make a C or lower in a required class must repeat that class, which can disrupt degree progression because our classes are only offered once annually. Students experiencing unusual circumstances that negatively impact their academic performance can appeal for an exception to this policy.

G. RA Performance

Students in the SSW PhD program who are receiving an RA are being paid with state funds to learn to be researchers. Students on an RA are expected to take this responsibility seriously by fully engaging in the RA activities and completing

assigned responsibilities. Students are expected to complete approximately 20 hours weekly of RA tasks as assigned and promptly.

Students who are not performing successfully in the RA will be informed about performance concerns and allowed to correct identified problems by the end of the current semester. Students who are unable to correct identified problems or who are unable to successfully engage in their RA duties as expected, after being redirected, will have their funding terminated, and they risk being dismissed from the RA and the program without being put on academic probation.

More information about the SBU dismissal process can be found on the [SBU Probation, Conduct, and Grievances webpage](#).

XII. Use Of AI

A. Academic Writing and Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools

The SSW expects that, upon entering the program, PhD students will be equipped with the skills to generate original research ideas and original academic writing.

See Appendix A for additional information about use of AI.

B. Writing Center

Students are encouraged to make use of the [SBU Writing Center](#), the [Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching \(CELT\)](#), and other resources that enhance their writing, learning, and teaching, as needed or when required by an instructor, committee member, or the PhD program director. Students can be required, at any time, to incorporate consultation with the writing center and demonstrate proof of this consultation as part of completing assignments, exams, scholarly papers, the dissertation proposal, or the dissertation, particularly in relation to needing support to produce original academic work that is not overly reliant on AI tools.

C. Benefits and Challenges of AI Tools

PhD students in the SSW are expected to understand both the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools into their written work. Students are also expected to understand how AI impacts teaching and learning in social work classroom settings, particularly in preparation for independent teaching. Information about the use of Artificial Intelligence in Learning and Teaching is available on the SBU Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching [webpage](#).

D. Original Academic Work

All written work submitted to fulfill a requirement for the PhD degree must represent original thought and human-generated ideas. All ideas that were generated by another expert must be cited in accordance with APA style. All academic work must adhere to academic integrity guidelines as outlined by the Graduate School.

In relation to the use of AI tools and PhD students' academic work, in our PhD program, it is expected that AI tools may be used only to *enhance* academic work that is submitted to fulfill any requirement for the PhD degree. AI cannot replace original writing or critical thinking in relation to academic work. Students cannot rely on AI to be scientifically accurate. An example of enhancing written work includes using an AI program for proofreading written work that was originally generated by the student. The use of AI must be identified anytime it is used in academic work. Each instructor should have an AI policy in each syllabus, and students are expected to discuss each professor's stance on AI use before submitting assignments.

PhD students are expected **not to** engage in the following in relation to academic work:

- Plagiarism;
- Misuse or inappropriate use of AI;
- Cheating or collaborating with another student to cheat;
- Falsification of research results, misrepresentation, or inaccurate reporting of research results; or
- Any other violation of academic integrity.

E. Evidence of Original and Evolving Academic Work

SSW PhD students are expected to be able to provide evidence of the process of the original development of their academic work. This expected evidence may vary across instructors and settings. Generally, this means that students should be able to produce evidence of iterative written work in the form of products such as evolving drafts. Students should also be able to defend their scholarly ideas orally to demonstrate that their written work is grounded in their own original ideas.

It is expected that ideas and concepts that are expressed orally are consistent with what is expressed in writing. Students should also be able to demonstrate written work spontaneously within the classroom setting or in another setting. An example of this would be the ability to successfully express ideas in writing, upon

spontaneous request, without the use of AI tools, within a class or as part of the RA work, such as during a “pop-up” exam.

Faculty members, RA supervisors, and committee members reserve the right to request that students sign agreements attesting to the originality of their work and/or describing the role of AI in their work.

F. Failure to Meet Expectations

Students who are unable to generate evidence of original academic work without the assistance of AI tools will violate expectations for academic integrity and professional performance and may be referred to the Graduate School for requested immediate dismissal from the program, without being put on academic probation.

Guidance for the use of AI that is specific to our SSW PhD program is provided as an attachment to this handbook.

G. Statements on AI from SBU

1. The Graduate School

The official SBU statement on the use of AI is available on the [SBU Probation, Conduct, and Grievances webpage](#).

2. SBU Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)

Additional information, including information about understanding the use and challenges of AI, language around AI for a course syllabus, common AI policy frameworks, teaching resources, and information about AI detection tools, is available on several of the SBU CELT websites:

- [CELT Innovative Technology page](#), with resources for AI and VR.
- [CELT Design and Teach page](#), which features teaching related resources.

XIII. PhD Program Degree Requirements

A. Registration and Required Coursework

Students will be responsible for registering for **coursework** by the published deadlines. Students should follow the [model for required coursework](#) for each

semester and adhere to registration deadlines. For assistance with registration, please contact the graduate program coordinator.

Late registration fees will be the responsibility of the student. All courses taken by PhD students using the tuition benefit covered by the RA package must count towards degree completion.

Students must complete a qualifying examination and dissertation proposal to advance to PhD candidacy status; those program components are explained in more detail below.

B. Advising

Students can seek advising anytime from the PhD program director, RA supervisors, course instructors, and dissertation chairs and committee members (once committees are formed). The PhD director provides general advising, particularly before the formation of the dissertation committee, and is the default advisor for new students.

C. Course Completion

Students must complete all required PhD coursework with a grade of B-minus or better. Students who earn a C or lower in a required PhD course must retake the course, which may disrupt the student's progress towards their degree. The PhD funding package has a three-year limit, even for a student who has to repeat a class. Failure to complete a PhD class or earning grades that result in a GPA below 3.0 will result in termination of the RA funding package, since adequate academic progress is required for funding continuation. As noted above, students who earn a grade of C or below in two or more required PhD courses, or whose GPA drops below 3.0 for two semesters (consecutive or nonconsecutive), will be referred for dismissal from the program.

D. Course Substitutions

Students can substitute required courses for other courses that may better align with the student's research goals or for previously completed courses (in cases where previously completed courses are compatible with the content of a required course). Course substitutions are approved at the discretion of the program director, and requests for approval are not guaranteed. Students wishing to substitute a course will need to submit a written request via email to the program director, including a description of the alternative course and a rationale for the request. In

instances where a previously completed course is requested as a substitution, students should submit a copy of the syllabus for that course with the request.

XIV. Independent Studies

Students wishing to develop a skill or research project in an area of individual interest may seek a faculty member to provide an independent study course experience, which can be counted as one three-hour elective. Students can use an independent study once to count as one elective.

Students must get a faculty member to agree to lead the independent study course and submit a written email request outlining the plan for the independent study to the program director for approval. Approval is up to the discretion of the program director and is not guaranteed. If approved, students should register for the independent study course under the faculty member's name for three hours of credit.

XV. Student Services and Resources

A. Student Offices

Students have access to a common PhD student office in the middle of the SSW's office suite. Students should contact the graduate programs assistant to gain access to that space.

B. Financial Aid

Information about financial aid at SBU can be found on the [financial aid webpage](#).

C. Travel Support

The SSW encourages PhD students to attend professional conferences and to submit conference abstracts for consideration for presentation, in collaboration with their RA supervisors or other faculty members. Students who wish to attend a professional conference should contact the PhD program director to request funding support for conference attendance.

Support is currently provided at the discretion of the dean; it is approved on a case-by-case basis, and while every effort is made to support students whenever possible, it is dependent on the SSW budget and is not guaranteed. Students who are accepted to present at a conference will be prioritized for funding.

XVI. Leave of Absence/Withdrawal

Information about taking time off from your studies is available on the [Registrar's Taking Time Off](#) webpage. Students facing extenuating circumstances can request a leave of absence (LOA) from the program. The link to the form for this process can be found [here](#).

A. How to Request a Leave

Graduate students may request a leave of absence by submitting a request form to the Graduate School. Program approval is not a requirement for requesting a leave of absence from the Graduate School. However, it is strongly suggested that students who want to request a leave discuss this with their program before form submission.

Whenever possible, the student and program should develop a tentative re-entry plan before the leave of absence period. Additional information and links to forms can be found in the Graduate Catalog on the [Leaves and Withdrawals](#) website.

B. Withdrawing from the University

The process of withdrawing from the university is a formal procedure that the student must initiate. A student finding it necessary to withdraw from the university must submit a letter of intention to the graduate program director and the Graduate School. More information about this is available in the Graduate Catalog on the [Leaves and Withdrawals](#) website.

Students who need to take a leave of absence may qualify for paid family leave through the State of New York under certain circumstances. Information can be found on the [New York State paid family leave website](#).

C. International Students

International students who need to take a leave of absence must inform the SBU Visa and Immigration Office to process this withdrawal as outlined on their [website](#). Once the leave is processed, the F1 student visa will expire within 15 days. Information specific to the F1 visa can be found on the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security website](#). International students who need to take a leave of absence from the program should communicate closely with the SBU Visa and Immigration Office.

XVII. Qualifying Exam and Dissertation Committees

Information from the SBU Graduate School about the SBU [requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree can be found here](#).

A. Committee Structure

In the SSW, students are required to form their own committees, before undertaking the qualifying exam, by choosing one chair, and one committee member from within the SSW, and one committee member from outside the SSW, but within some area related to health equity (i.e. public health), or whose research is pertinent to their area of study, to create a committee comprised of a minimum of three total members.

Students can choose to add an additional member to their committee if there is a reasonable justification for this. It is expected that all committees contain a minimum of three members, and it is recommended that committees contain no more than five members. Students should closely collaborate with their committee chair to strategize about which faculty members might be most appropriate for serving on their particular committee.

B. External Members

The external member can be either internal or external to the university. Any tenured or tenure-track faculty member who is external to the SSW but who works at SBU is eligible to serve on our PhD committees. Committee members outside of SBU must be approved by the program director.

To get approval for a committee member outside of SBU, students must submit a CV and a short paragraph to the PhD program director detailing the proposed member's relevant expertise. Committee members external to the university must have a CV reflecting accomplishments that are commensurate with what would be expected for a tenured or tenure-track faculty member here at SBU. Approval of requested committee members who do not work at SBU is not guaranteed.

C. Co-Chairs

Students can choose to have co-chairs for their committees. Co-chairs also count as committee members, so a committee with two co-chairs still only needs one additional member to meet the minimum membership requirements.

D. Eligibility to Serve on Committees

Tenured or tenure-track faculty members within the SSW are eligible to serve as dissertation chairs, and any full-time faculty member within the SSW who holds a doctorate is eligible to serve as an internal committee member.

E. Requirements for Chair

Committee chairs must be tenured or tenure-track faculty members internal to the SSW. Tenure-track faculty members who have never served as a chair or member of a committee are encouraged to co-chair before chairing independently.

F. Expectations for Service

Students should expect the committee to guide the qualifying exam, proposal, and dissertation, unless circumstances require the committee's membership to be altered between these phases.

G. Qualifying Examination

The qualifying examination offers students the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise in their chosen research topic. To complete the qualifying exam, students will review relevant published literature and current scientific findings in their chosen topic area, then prepare a written, methodologically rigorous literature review paper that culminates in an oral defense before their committee.

To initiate this process, students should select a committee chair and members for the committee, preferably towards the end of the spring semester of their second year of the program, so that the committee is in place by the beginning of the third year. Students are expected to get approval for their plan for the literature review paper from their committee before commencing the review.

Before the beginning of the fall semester of the third year, students must form a committee in preparation for taking the HWC 615: Dissertation Seminar I course in the fall of year three, which is the class that corresponds with the qualifying exam. Students in this class will develop a plan for their qualifying exam literature review paper in conjunction with their committee and then conduct the literature review in accordance with that plan. The HWC 615 course will be graded as pass/fail, and it can be repeated if necessary.

The qualifying exam literature review paper must represent a comprehensive, methodologically sound review of the relevant extant literature in the student's substantive area that adheres to the PRISMA literature review framework for formal scientific literature reviews in the form of [scoping reviews](#), [systematic reviews](#), meta-analyses, or another type of formal literature review approved by the student's committee.

The qualifying exam literature review paper is expected to accomplish the following general goals:

- Outline a formal research question(s) and objectives;
- Detail the methods for the literature search;
- Detail the screening process for inclusion and exclusion of literature;
- Assess the quality of relevant studies;
- Extract data/summarize/analyze the current status of findings in the literature;
- Identify gaps in the current literature that need to be addressed by future research (including gaps that the student will propose to address in the subsequent dissertation proposal);
- Include literature tables (or other approved visual representation) summarizing the literature that is included in the analysis; and
- Include sections discussing:
 - The analysis;
 - Methods;
 - Results;
 - Findings;
 - Gaps;
 - Recommendations for future research to fill prominent gaps; and
 - Any other elements as required by the student's committee.

The qualifying exam literature review paper will represent the student's original work and demonstrate the student's capacity to attain doctoral-level expertise in their chosen area of scholarly focus. Students must present their exam in writing and in an oral defense. Students must generate iterative drafts of their work to demonstrate the development and evolution of original scholarly ideas and provide their committee members with a defensible written draft of this exam at least two weeks before the scheduled defense, to give adequate time for committee members to consider and prepare to provide feedback.

Students can expect that their committee will ask for final edits that will form a final draft after a successful defense. Students who do not pass the qualifying exam on the first try will be given one opportunity to edit their written work and schedule an additional oral defense. Students who do not pass their qualifying exam on the

second attempt will be put forward to the Graduate School for dismissal from the program.

H. Timing of Qualifying Exam

Students must pass the written and oral qualifying exam defense before they can present and defend the dissertation proposal, which is described below. Students under the current program model cannot register for their proposal class (HWC 616) until they have successfully passed and completed their qualifying exam class (HWC 615).

I. Use of AI and the Qualifying Exam

The use of AI to solely generate the qualifying exam is not permitted in this program. Students may choose to incorporate the use of AI tools to enhance the written work after they have generated an original document using human-informed critical thinking guided by the NASW Code of Ethics. For example, students may choose to use AI to assist with proofreading, editing and/or improving grammar. Students who choose to use AI in the preparation of their qualifying exam must cite this and explain how it was used and at what stage.

Students who are unable to demonstrate original, iterative written work, or who cannot adequately orally defend their processes and ideas in a manner consistent with what is represented in the written work, risk having to rewrite the exam, failing the exam, and/or being dismissed from the program without being put on academic probation.

See Appendix A for additional information about use of AI.

XVIII. Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to integrate the knowledge from their PhD coursework into a feasible plan to conduct independent research.

The dissertation proposal should be designed in a manner that will allow the student to demonstrate the skillsets learned in coursework (review of relevant literature, appropriate application of research methods, statistical analysis, qualitative analysis, implications for policy, etc.) and it will consist of a proposal for a three-paper dissertation (also known as a multi-article dissertation) outlining a proposed research plan for three papers, representing studies focused on the student's chosen research topic.

- Paper 1 will be a peer-reviewed journal article-style publishable literature review paper analyzing literature pertinent to the research topic.
- Papers 2 and 3 are two independent, peer-reviewed journal article-style research papers that each answer separate but related research questions focused on the topic introduced in Paper 1.
- The three papers will be united by an introduction and conclusion.

The plan for these three papers should be presented in writing and in an oral defense to the student's dissertation committee.

The proposal will outline the plan for the dissertation in detail:

- Paper 1: Literature review adapted from the qualifying exam literature review into a format appropriate for a publishable, peer-reviewed journal article (usually about 20 pages).
- Paper 2: Plan for an original study written in the format of a peer-reviewed journal article.
- Paper 3: Plan for another original study, also written in the format of a peer-reviewed journal article.

The proposal should also include:

- A statement of how the proposed work will fill a gap in the literature that was identified in the qualifying exam literature review paper;
- The plan for research questions/hypotheses for Papers 2 and 3;
- An explanation of the proposed methodology to be used for Papers 2 and 3;
- A plan for all data analyses;
- A proposed timetable for completion; and
- Any additional information required by the student's committee.

Students who have passed their qualifying exam and corresponding class (HWC 615: Dissertation Seminar I) are eligible to register for the proposal class (HWC 616: Dissertation Seminar II) and present and defend their written proposals for the three-paper dissertation.

Students must be registered for HWC 616 in the semester that they wish to present and defend their proposal. Under the current program model, the proposal must be presented and defended in the semester following the successful passing of the qualifying exam.

HWC 615 is a prerequisite for HWC 616, and both are graded as pass/fail and can be repeated as necessary. Students who do not pass their dissertation proposal defense

will be given one additional opportunity to edit and defend their plan. Students who do not pass the proposal defense on the second attempt will be dismissed from the program.

A. Use of AI in the Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal will represent the student's original work and demonstrate the student's capacity to conceptualize and design a three-paper-style dissertation research project that fills identified gaps in the literature in the area of chosen scholarly focus.

The use of AI to solely generate a dissertation proposal is not permitted in this program. All dissertation proposals should represent the student's original thoughts and ideas that are generated by the student using human-informed critical thinking informed by the NASW Code of Ethics. While students may choose to incorporate AI tools to *enhance* written work after it is originally developed by the student, (for example, by assisting the student with editing and improvement of grammar), it is expected that PhD students in the SSW will generate original written work for their proposal and provide evidence of the iteration of this work to their committees, in accordance with committee guidance and the policies stated in this handbook and the guidance provided in the appendix.

Students who use AI tools to enhance written work are expected to cite this use and describe how it was used and at what stage the use occurred. Students who are unable to demonstrate original, iterative written work that is not overly informed by AI, or who cannot adequately orally defend their processes and ideas in a manner consistent with what is represented in the written work, or who use AI inappropriately (e.g., use of "ghost reference" generated by AI) risk failing the exam and being dismissed from the program.

See Appendix A for additional information about use of AI.

XIX. Dissertation

A. Purpose and Corresponding Course Requirements

The purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate the integration of knowledge gained in PhD coursework into an independent research project. Students should expect the dissertation to take one to two academic years to complete, after the qualifying exam and proposal have been successfully passed and defended.

SSW PhD students in the dissertation phase should register for the dissertation hours under the name of their chair for course HWC 699, which is graded as pass/fail (S/U) and is repeatable. Students must register for HWC 699 each fall and spring semester until the dissertation is completed and graduation requirements are met.

Once students are in the phase of working solely on the dissertation, they should register for enough hours of HWC 699 to ensure they meet graduate school requirements, such as the requirement that international students maintain full-time status.

B. Preparation and Defense

Students must prepare to write and orally defend their dissertations in accordance with what was approved by their dissertation committee, as outlined in their dissertation proposal. As noted above, the SSW requires students to prepare a three-paper dissertation, consisting of Paper 1, which is the comprehensive literature review, and Papers 2 and 3, which are studies that answer original research questions and are written in the format of peer-reviewed journal articles, plus an introduction and conclusion uniting the three papers.

In their dissertation, students will demonstrate that they can design and conduct research independently, with the guidance of their committee. Dissertations should also include an introduction explaining the topic and an overview of the three papers, as well as a conclusion that reemphasizes and wraps up the main unifying points.

Students will present their dissertations in writing and defend their work orally, in detail, in the presence of their dissertation committees. Students must provide all committee members with a full draft of the dissertation at least **two weeks before** the scheduled defense to ensure that members have adequate time to review and provide feedback before the scheduled defense. Students who do not successfully pass the dissertation defense will be given one additional opportunity to schedule and present their defense. Students who do not pass the defense on the second attempt will be dismissed from the program.

C. Authorship

The three-paper dissertation format will result in the student having three publishable papers upon completion of their dissertation. Students should consult with their chair and committee members about authorship on papers that are

written for the dissertation and get advice about when to time the submission of those papers to journals.

The decision about whether or not the student's committee members should be included as authors on papers from a student's dissertation should be made in consultation with the committee.

D. Guidelines for Official Submission

Students are responsible for understanding and meeting all deadlines for formatting and submission of the dissertation in alignment with the Graduate School's [Dissertation and Thesis Submission Guidelines](#). Students who do not meet the requirements can risk delaying their graduation.

E. Academic Integrity and Use of AI in the Dissertation

Dissertations will represent original work that is initially generated by the student using human critical thinking informed by the [NASW Code of Ethics](#). All ideas and sources that are not original to the student must be cited in accordance with APA style.

Students are expected to have an [APA manual](#) to use to guide formatting and citations. Students who choose to use AI to enhance written work are expected to consult with their committee, cite the use, and provide details of how AI was incorporated and at what stage.

Using AI to solely develop any component that meets a requirement for the PhD degree, including the dissertation, is not permitted in this PhD program.

Inappropriate use of AI for dissertation preparation in this program is grounds for immediate dismissal. Students may choose to incorporate AI to *enhance* writing, but only after the dissertation has been originally drafted by the student, in compliance with the AI policy outlined in this handbook and the additional guidance provided in the appendix. Students will be expected to provide evidence of the iterative process of preparing the dissertation in the form of written drafts that evolve in a manner consistent with professional writing processes and in compliance with the expectations of their committee.

Students who are unable to demonstrate original writing that is not generated by AI or overly informed by AI, who cannot produce evidence of the iterative drafting of their writing, who use AI inappropriately, who rely on information falsified by AI, who do not site their use of AI, or who cannot adequately orally defend their ideas in a manner consistent with what is represented in the written work, risk having to

completely rewrite their dissertation, failing the dissertation, and/or immediate dismissal from the program. Students who have questions about how to use AI in their work should discuss this issue with their dissertation chair and committee.

See Appendix A for additional information about use of AI.

F. Formatting

Information about how to format a dissertation is available from the Graduate School's [Dissertation and Thesis Submission webpage](#). More information about thesis and dissertation requirements is also available on the [Dissertation and Thesis webpage](#).

XX. Admission to Candidacy

Students are eligible for PhD candidacy once they have passed and defended both their qualifying exam and dissertation proposal, including submitting any requested revisions and required paperwork.

The Graduate School has minimum requirements for PhD candidacy that must be met, and these can be found in the latest version of the [Graduate School Handbook](#). Students must sit in candidacy status for one year to be eligible for graduation and are not eligible to defend their dissertations until the second semester of the first year in candidacy.

XXI. Time Limits

Per the Graduate School, students must qualify for the PhD (i.e., complete all coursework, exams, and proposal) within four years of enrollment and complete the PhD within seven years of initial enrollment. [Information about time limits can be found here](#).

XXII. Graduation Requirements

Information about graduation requirements can be found on the Graduate School's [Graduation Information and Requirements](#) webpage.

XXIII. SBU Statement on Sexual Assault and Misconduct

Stony Brook University is “committed to creating and maintaining workplace, educational, and recreational environments that are safe, accessible, and free from all forms of discrimination.”

More information on the SBU policy on sexual assault and misconduct, as well as information about resources for assistance, can be found on the [Sexual Assault and Misconduct webpage](#) in the SBU Policy Manual.

Appendix A. Guidelines for Decision-Making Around Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the PhD Program

The Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare (SSW) recognizes that generative artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly emerged as a transformative technology that presents both opportunities and challenges for social work PhD students in preparing academic work, conducting research, teaching, and providing service.

This policy is intended to guide PhD students and faculty in the use of AI for PhD coursework, scholarly work, and required PhD program components (i.e., the qualifying exam, dissertation proposal, and dissertation), in a manner aligned with the values and ethics of the social work profession's NASW Code of Ethics and the expectations of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

A. Personal Responsibility in Use

As social workers, we value the dignity and worth of the person and the importance of human relationships as part of our ethical code. When considering the ethical use of AI tools to inform PhD-level scholarly work, research ideas, and academic writing, these ethical principles should also apply. As such, students' use of AI tools for informing any academic work should be limited, purposeful, and carefully considered.

AI tools can be an aid to writing in areas like proofreading or improving flow or tone, after the work is originally generated from a human perspective. If a student decides to use AI as a tool in any academic work, the SSW expects that it will not be used to serve as the primary generator of the work. Human engagement and human-generated ideas are expected to be the foundation of all scholarly and written work in our PhD program. When students use AI in their work, they are expected to cite this use in the same manner they cite other scholarly sources.

B. Bias and Equity

As social workers, we value service and competence as ethical principles. AI tools can contribute to societal conundrums, including reinforcing bias and misuse of environmental resources, which could perpetuate inequity in a manner counter to social work values and ethics.

As such, when considering the use of AI, students are encouraged to consider the impact of AI use on individuals, groups, and communities, taking care to ensure that any use of AI does not exacerbate social injustice when applied.

C. Integrity and Critical Thinking

The responsibility associated with scholarly and written work lies solely with the human authoring the work. AI should not be used in a manner that replaces a PhD student's ethical responsibility for generating original, human-informed academic work. AI should not be used to substitute for human-generated critical thinking grounded in social work values and ethics. As such, AI should be considered a tool that can be used, if applied ethically, to enhance scholarly work.

However, AI should not be considered a definitive or authoritative source, and it is not appropriate as a sole means for developing academic work. AI should not be used as the primary generator of research ideas, written assignments, PhD program components, or other scholarly work. In the SSW, it is expected that all PhD students will use their own original, human, and social work-informed critical thinking as the basis of all work produced for the purposes of completing the PhD degree.

D. Academic Integrity

When a student's work is presented for the purpose of meeting a requirement for the PhD degree, the PhD program expects it to be the student's original work. Any student misrepresenting AI-generated work as original work is violating social work ethics and SBU principles of academic integrity.

The SSW reserves the right to request that students present evidence that their work is original. For example, students should be prepared to present iterative written drafts that demonstrate the original, written evolution of work, and they should also be prepared to orally discuss and defend all written work in a manner consistent with what is written. Students are responsible for ensuring that any submitted work is original to them.

E. Transparency in Use

The SSW only allows the use of AI tools to enhance scholarly work. It does not allow students to submit any academic work that has been solely or primarily generated using an AI tool. Anytime AI is used, students are expected to disclose this as a citation in their work and provide details on how AI was applied to the work.

F. Academic Freedom in Allowable AI Use

Faculty teaching in the PhD program and serving on PhD committees have the academic freedom to decide whether AI use is acceptable in their courses and the projects that they supervise, what use is allowable, which assignments/required program components (i.e., qualifying exam, proposal, dissertation) it can be used for, and the requirements for disclosing that use.

While the limited use of AI to enhance academic work is permitted in general in the SSW PhD program, PhD faculty have the right to limit this use in a manner that they believe is the best fit for each course, assignment, or PhD work that they are supervising.

G. Professional Readiness

PhD students should be prepared to use AI tools ethically and responsibly in their research, teaching, and service in a manner that aligns with social work ethics. This means that students will need to stay informed about emerging technologies and continue to consider how best to apply them ethically in relation to social work academic settings during their time as PhD students and as their careers evolve.