THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM
Join a community of scholars who advance an interdisciplinary approach to social work and social welfare scholarship.

ssa.uchicago.edu

UCHICAGO SSA/PHD 1920 – 2020
Our 100th cohort of doctoral students invite you to apply.
The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (SSA) is dedicated to working toward a more just and humane society through research, teaching, and service to the community. As one of the oldest and most highly regarded graduate schools of social work, SSA prepares professionals to handle society’s most difficult problems by developing new knowledge, promoting a deeper understanding of the causes and human costs of social inequities, and building bridges between rigorous research and the practice of helping individuals, families, and communities to achieve a better quality of life.

SSA’s Doctoral Program has been the premier training ground for social welfare scholars since 1920. A PhD from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration opens doors to rewarding careers in research and teaching. Building upon the School’s founding principles, doctoral students receive rigorous training in the history of the social work profession, the foundations of social welfare provision, and interdisciplinary social science theories and research methods. The program prepares students to pursue independent and innovative scholarly inquiry in social work and related fields that advances understanding and shapes solutions to the most pressing problems of our time.

The Doctoral Program of Study

The diverse theoretical and methodological training of SSA’s faculty uniquely positions the Doctoral Program to support a wide array of student interests. Current doctoral students study topics such as child welfare, urban education, health care, youth violence, poverty and inequality, urban politics, criminal justice, low-paid employment, immigration, child and family policy, and substance use and abuse. They research public policies, human service organizations, and social programs affecting diverse populations in the United States and globally: immigrants and refugees; racial/ethnic and sexual minorities; low-income workers, parents, children, and adolescents; and individuals with health and mental health challenges and special needs.

The Doctoral Program is flexibly structured so that students can pursue a curriculum matched to their individual interests. It is at the forefront of schools of social work that emphasize the role of social science theory and rigorous empirical methods in guiding the investigation of social problems and interventions. In consultation with a faculty advisor, each student develops a program of study that includes two years of coursework, a qualifying examination, a publishable pre-dissertation research project, and a dissertation thesis. Doctoral students also have the opportunity to collaborate with faculty in their research and to serve as teaching assistants or instructors.

Students in the program are encouraged to design a course of study that harnesses the strengths of SSA and the wider University. Students take SSA courses that explore the theoretical underpinnings of social work and social welfare scholarship from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and levels of analysis. Students also take courses across the University in such departments as Anthropology, Economics, History, Human Development, Political Science, Public Health Sciences, and Sociology; and in the professional schools of Business, Law, Medicine, and Public Policy.

SSA’s Doctoral Program enjoys full access to a rich network of scholars, libraries, institutes, and centers that only a research university such as the University of Chicago can offer. Many of our students work with scholars at Chapin Hall, the Center for Health Administration Studies, the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, the Consortium on School Research, and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, to name a few.

The Doctoral Program at SSA is a PhD program for people who want to have a career in research and teaching. We do not offer a DSW or provide specific clinical training for practitioners beyond the master’s level.

RECENT DISSERTATIONS:

- Postsecondary Pathways in Chicago Public Schools
- Disrupting Criminal Legal System Involvement Among Young Transgender Women: A Mixed-Methods Study Examining the Roles of Gender-Based Violence, Discrimination, and Social Support
- The Effects of Organizational Factors on an Integrated Service Intervention and Outcomes for Substance-Involved Parents in the Child Welfare System
- The Importance of Place: An Examination of Area Disadvantage and Outpatient Addiction Treatment Services Access Within the Context of Healthcare Reform in the U.S.
- Low-Income Mothers’ Involvement with Doula Home Visiting Services
- Moving Beyond the Racial Triangulation: An Empirical Study of the Racialization Experience of Asian American Youth and its Influence on Developmental Outcomes
- Progressive Prosecution? An Analysis of Decision-Making Processes in Deferred Prosecution
- The Effects of Organizational Factors on an Integrated Service Intervention and Outcomes for Substance-Involved Parents in the Child Welfare System
Requirements for the PhD Degree

Students are required to take a minimum of fifteen courses: one on the history of the social work profession, five on statistics and research methods offered at SSA and across the University, and nine additional substantive courses, at least three of which are in other departments or professional schools at the University of Chicago. It is expected that these three courses be in a single discipline or substantive area.

Students are expected to complete a pre-dissertation research project during their first two years of study. This project should be an empirical report, a critical analysis of the literature, or a theoretical piece, written while a doctoral student and submitted for publication in a journal or book.

Students must pass a qualifying examination that assesses their understanding of the historical foundations of social work as well as their understanding of core literatures in two of eight conceptual domains informing their area of scholarship. The examination process includes a take-home, open-book examination completed during a one-week period at the end of the summer following the second year.

Finally, students are required to successfully complete a dissertation project. As the culmination of the Doctoral Program, the dissertation thesis reflects the student's ability to use theoretical knowledge and analytic tools to advance knowledge in a particular area of concern to social work and social welfare scholarship.

Combined PhD/Social Work, Social Policy, and Social Administration AM program

The combined PhD/Social Work, Social Policy, and Social Administration AM program allows a small number of students who have been admitted into the Doctoral Program to earn a master's degree from SSA with one extra year of study, including field work. You may apply even if you have a master's degree in another discipline.

GENERAL TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF THE PHD

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Chicagoland

As one of the world's great cities, Chicago is home to renowned cultural institutions such as the DuSable Museum of African American History, the National Museum of Mexican Art, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Art Institute; legendary sports teams including the Bears, Blackhawks, Bulls, Cubs, and White Sox; and a stunning lakeshore with parks, beaches, trails, and harbors. Chicago is an innovative scene for blues, jazz, and rock music; theater; and improv comedy. Chicago is a city of neighborhoods—each with its own personality—ready for you to explore.

The University's neighborhood of Hyde Park has lots to offer. A family-friendly and racially integrated neighborhood, Hyde Park shares the University's vigorous intellectual and cultural life. Known for its many new and used bookstores, Hyde Park boasts the Seminary Co-op that's said to be the best academic bookstore west of Oxford, England.

Along the lakefront, you'll be able to cycle and jog the trails; swim and sail the waves; and picnic with your friends and family in the parks.

Hyde Park's local restaurants serve Cajun, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisine. Other Hyde Park attractions include the Smart Museum of Art, the Museum of Science and Industry, the annual Children's Book Fair, the 57th Street Art Fair, the Silver Room Block Party, and the Hyde Park Brew Fast. Ready access to expressways and public transportation makes it easy to run errands or go out on the town.

Doctoral student parents face unique pressures and demands on their time. To support families, the University provides a Family Resource Center, which is a drop-in center with family-friendly programs, information, and a support network. The University also offers PhD Child Care Grants, which are need-based stipends to PhD students with children. As a residential community, Hyde Park has many opportunities to meet and network through community and religious organizations, neighborhood activities such as Movies in the Park and ice skating on the Midway, and at local farmers markets.
Visit our Academic and Financial Support page for their scholarship, and completing their doctoral studies in a timely manner on fulfilling the requirements of the program, developing a strong work ethic, and completing requirements on time. Financial support is provided to allow students to concentrate their time and effort on their studies. The Doctoral Program involves a full-time commitment. Stipend and fellowship support is provided to allow students to support travel to conferences and preparation of professional papers. A variety of financial resources are available to doctoral students to support travel to conferences and preparation of manuscripts. Many SSA doctoral students receive additional funding through outside training and fellowship programs.

The Doctoral Program involves a full-time commitment. Stipend support is provided to allow students to concentrate their time and energy on fulfilling the requirements of the program, developing their scholarship, and completing their doctoral studies in a timely manner. SSA does not currently offer a part-time PhD program.

Visit our Academic and Financial Support page for detailed information:

ssa.uchicago.edu/academic-financial-support#Financial-Supports

Non-Discrimination Statement

Enrollment in the School of Social Service Administration is limited each year, and applicants are advised that the Committee on Admissions selects for admission only those applicants who, in its judgment, appear best qualified and capable of using the resources the School provides. The Committee considers all evidence that may indicate academic and professional promise. Criteria include the academic achievement, academic potential, work experience, letters of recommendation, and accomplishments and experience. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or other protected classes under the law (including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). For additional information regarding the University of Chicago's Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct, please see http://harassmentpolicy.uchicago.edu/page/policy.

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Questions

ssa.uchicago.edu/doctoral-program-admissions

Inquiries about admissions or about the progress of a particular application should be addressed to:

Office of Admissions
The University of Chicago
The School of Social Service Administration
969 East 60th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637
ssa.uchicago.edu/admissions
admissions@ssa.uchicago.edu

Students are encouraged to schedule a virtual visit with one of our Admissions staff and a faculty member prior to admission.

Distinguished Alumni

Our alumni serve and have served on the faculties of most of the top-ranked schools of social work and are leaders in the field of social work and social welfare.

James Clark, PhD '95
Dean, Florida State University
College of Social Work

Fay Lomax Cook, AM '72, PhD '77
Former Assistant Director, National Science Foundation
· Former Director, Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (NSF)
· Professor Emerita of Human Development and Social Policy, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University

Edwina Uehara, PhD '87
Ballmer Endowed Dean, University of Washington School of Social Work
· SSA’s Edith Abbott Award Recipient ‘07

Lynn Videka, AM '76, PhD '81
Dean, University of Michigan School of Social Work
· SSA’s Edith Abbott Award Recipient ‘19
· Former Dean at NYU Silver School of Social Work
· Vice President for Research at UAlbany
· Former Dean and Distinguished Service Professor of the School of Social Welfare at UAlbany

Earlie Washington, PhD ’90
Former Dean, Western Michigan University
College of Health and Human Services
· SSA’s Elizabeth Butler Award Recipient ‘98
· NASW—Michigan Chapter, Legislative Policy Committee Member

Yan Searcy, PhD ’99
Dean, California State University Northridge, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Former Assistant Director, National Science Foundation
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