

# **MSSW Program Overview**

## **Kent School of Social Work    University of Louisville**

**PROGRAM OF STUDY:** The Kent School of Social Work offers a graduate program of study leading to the Masters of Science in Social Work (M.S.S.W.) degree. The program is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The M.S.S.W. program is designed to help students achieve their maximum potential through a carefully structured curriculum of foundation and specialized courses.

**Mission:** The Kent School of Social Work seeks to prepare well-qualified social workers who practice from a strong professional value base to serve the metropolitan mission of the university. Our graduates promote social justice through their practices with diverse client systems. In the context of a research institution, Kent School is committed to knowledge development that informs social work practice, recognizing the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to solve complex social problems.

**Kent School Curriculum:** Cognitive Flexibility Theory as developed by Spiro (1990) guides the underlying curriculum philosophy. The main premise of the curriculum is to provide students strategies to learn challenging materials, to encourage flexibility in the use of knowledge, and to change the underlying ways of thinking. At the end of their studies students will achieve a deeper, more complex understanding of social work, they will be able to critically evaluate and contemplate the material while experimenting with the flexible application of the knowledge in a variety of contexts. This higher order of thinking that will be developed and promoted with the curriculum is referred to as critical thinking. This curriculum philosophy responds well to social work as an ever changing and evolving profession which responds to the radically changing needs and demands of society. It is impossible for any curriculum to address each problem or case example social work graduates may face in their practice. Cognitive flexibility theory provides avenues and tools for students to integrate their learning experiences in such a way as to maximize their potential to meet the demands of the profession upon graduation. The curriculum is designed to enhance students' ability to enable the diverse client systems they work with to make decisions that contribute to the quality and health of these clients systems. The focus will also be on decisions that promote social justice. The curriculum is designed to deliver graduate social workers who think critically about what they do, why they do it, and what outcomes they hope will result from the social work practice they do.

**Critical thinking** is defined as “the intellectual disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief or action” (Scriven & Paul, 2004). Critical thinking includes specific skills such as problem-solving and the ability to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines and theories of human behavior. Throughout the curriculum, there is an emphasis on critical reflection, or appraisal of various points of view no matter what the source. The curriculum draws heavily on social science knowledge and integrates this with problem-solving phases such as assessment, intervention, and evaluation. In this respect, the curriculum is designed to teach students to access, integrate, and assess practice and policy related research to solve social problems and to work towards social justice. When critical thinking skills are used effectively, it leads to transparency and promotes social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.

Bruner's spiral curriculum format (1991) is used to implement the above mentioned cognitive flexibility philosophy in the development of higher order critical thinking skills. With this format, topics are revisited throughout the curriculum, while increasing the level of difficulty, complexity and depth of the area and linking new knowledge or information to previous levels of learning on the same topic to

increase the competency of the students. Students will be introduced in the foundation curriculum to different strategies on how to develop critical thinking. In the advanced curriculum, students will move towards a higher level of complexity in their thinking because they will be required to analyze problems from multiple perspectives, evaluate multiple sources of evidence, and address complex issues and problems incorporating multiple level forces on client systems.

**Foundation Curriculum:** The foundation curriculum promotes a generalist perspective in which the simultaneous impact of many systemic levels (individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities) on clients' lives is critically analyzed and recognized. The foundation builds upon a liberal arts base that fosters an understanding of society as a complex organization of diverse people and ideas. Social problems are understood as occurring within the nexus of culture, conflict, development, ecology, and systems and as such, efforts to help or intervene must include consideration of these forces. Students will be able to critically identify and assess social problems, specifically attending to 1) how such problems are maintained, 2) how they impact the quality of people's life, 3) a cultural sensitivity and appreciation of marginalized people, and 4) how to actively promote social and economic justice. In the foundation year, the focus is on the development of critical thinking skills in all the areas mentioned.

**Advanced Curriculum/Advanced Social Work Practice:** The advanced curriculum seeks to develop the utilization and application of critical thinking on all levels—reading, professional writing and research, students' practicum, the classroom, and in the students' own thinking. Consistently monitoring practice ethically, evaluating theoretical principles and epistemologies, and utilizing technological advances become basic practice patterns. Specific skill sets developed include: 1) Creating, organizing and integrating ideas and action on engaging diverse client systems effectively in change; 2) Assessing, conceptualizing and analyzing theoretical, practice and research problems from multiple perspectives and utilize critical thinking skills to formulate impressions based upon the data; 3) Analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating the evidence available to guide advanced social work practice; 4) Synthesizing, formulating and implementing a plan of action for social work practice that addresses complex issues and problems, builds consensus and incorporates multiple-level forces on client systems; 5) Analyzing and evaluating data of client progress and outcomes and assess implications and consequences of this progress and outcomes; 6) Synthesizing, creating, and organizing ideas from theory, research and practice for social justice; and 7) Demonstrating the ability to integrate culturally competent skills into all aspects of social work practice.

These skills will be used to actively pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed client systems. Students will learn how to become leaders in social change efforts focused primarily on issues of poverty, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice.

To assist graduates in their future professional careers, these skills are organized around three practice foci: 1) children and families, 2) health and mental health, and 3) community and international practice. These domains give opportunity for students to focus on clustered learning within the context of these fields of practice. Recognizing that the employment of students after graduation is often a function of geography and personal circumstance, the school allows students the programmatic option of combining interests among focus areas.

While curricular options do exist for students to develop a certain subject-matter expertise, the recognition of the School that it needs to prepare students more broadly places the principal focus of the concentration work on a high-level critical thinking about social work engagement and also on the translational knowledge and skills that support the graduates' movement from one field of practice to another. Once students learn how to learn and how to think about social work practices, and they understand the components of ethical practice and the responsibility to increase specific field-of-practice

expertise, they will be better equipped to practice in a world where knowledge changes and transforms what we do on a rapidly accelerating curve.

**Specializations:** In the second semester of the first year students may decide to choose one of the following specializations:

Alcohol and Drug Counseling  
Gerontology  
Mental Health  
Psycho-social Oncology

**FINANCIAL AID:** Please see documents entitled *Scholarship Information and Application*.

**COST OF STUDY:** Tuition is \$660/credit hour. Tuition is subject to change without notice.

**STUDENT GROUP:** Kent School enrolls over 350 M.S.S.W. degree students. A majority of the School's students enter with prior social work experience, although it is not uncommon for students to enroll immediately upon completion of their undergraduate study. The student body is well diversified in ethnic origin and cultural background, and although a majority of students come from Kentucky and Indiana, numerous other states are represented. Graduates work in a variety of roles in public and voluntary agencies as well as in private practice. Many alumni hold leadership positions in public and private agencies throughout the country. For more information, take a look at Prominent Alumni at: <http://louisville.edu/kent/Kent%20Alumni/kent-alumni.html> The Kent School also has an active student organization called the Kent School Student Association (KSSA) which plays a significant role in school matters.

**LOCATION:** Louisville, an urban community of nearly 1 million, combines urban sophistication and small-town friendliness. In addition to its vital industries and businesses, the city's attractions include historical neighborhoods that maintain their identities; bustling nightspots, theaters, and restaurants; quiet tree-lined suburbs; and abundant resources for outdoor recreation. Louisville is also a major cultural center. Actors' Theater and the Kentucky Center for the Arts are alive with the best in theater, ballet, opera, and symphonic programs. Performances of jazz, blues, country, rock and roll, and new wave are also showcased in Louisville <http://www.gotolouisville.com> .

**THE UNIVERSITY AND THE SCHOOL:** The University enrolls over 24,000 students and, as Kentucky's metropolitan university, is committed to the highest standards of instruction, research, and community service. The Kent School has offered the master's degree in social work since 1936. In 1994, the Family Therapy Program was added to the school, through which counseling in marriage and family therapy is offered. Additionally, as of 1997, the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky offer a collaborative program of doctoral study in social work. In the fall of 2007, the University of Louisville began offering the Bachelor of Social Work degree.

**APPLYING:** New students enroll in the fall semester. Each fall, approximately 200 new students enter the MSSW Program. Admission to the Kent School of Social Work is competitive. The selection process includes an evaluation of each applicant's demonstrated and potential abilities as a student, practitioner, and leader in the social work field. Applicants should utilize the Application Checklist to ensure that all application requirements are met.

**APPLICATION DATES:** Consideration of applications begins in November. The final deadline varies as explained below, but because entry into the program is highly competitive, applicants are encouraged to submit their applications early to ensure a space. All admissions materials must be received at Graduate Admissions by

the deadline date in order for an applicant to be considered for admission by a particular deadline. Earlier applicants have more options and enjoy clear advantages. Kent School **deadlines for admission** are classified as follows:

**May 15**            **Traditional Admission**  
**July 30**            **Late Admission**

**ADMISSIONS**— A student must meet the following requirements:

- (a) A bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher learning;
- (b) A minimum of 27 credit hours in the social sciences, i.e. communications (6), natural sciences (3), humanities (9), and social sciences (9); and
- (c) A minimum of 3 credit hrs in each of the following courses: statistics, research methods and human biology.

Additionally, an undergraduate GPA of 3.00 is recommended for you to be considered for admission to Kent School. While we consider applicants whose undergraduate GPA does not meet this standard, applicants with GPAs less than 2.75 must submit an acceptable score on either the Miller Analogies Test or the Graduate Record Exam. The School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies' standards require a minimum cumulative G.P.A. of 2.5, therefore students applying to the Kent School with a G.P.A. of 2.5 or less will rarely be considered.

**An application to the MSSW program is only complete** when Graduate Admissions has received all of the materials outlined in the **Application Checklist**, which can be found in the MSSW Application Information section of our website here <http://louisville.edu/kent/students/future-students/future-students-information> .

Application documents may be submitted all at once **OR** one at a time, as you prefer.  
**Applications will be considered by the Admissions Committee only when complete.**

**Send/Email all application materials/documents to:**

**Graduate Admissions  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, KY 40292  
502-852-3101  
or  
gradadm@louisville.edu**

## **CORRESPONDENCE AND INFORMATION**

### **M.S.S.W. Program**

Kent School of Social Work  
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### **Administration**

**Joseph G. D'Ambrosio**, Ph.D, MSSW, Online Director  
**Terry L. Singer**, M.Div., M.S.W., Ph.D., Dean

4/1/12

**Riaan van Zyl**, M.A., Ph.D., Associate Dean of Research

**Annatjie Faul**, M.A., Ph. D., Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

**Pamela Yankeelov**, M.A., Ph.D., Associate Dean of Student Services

**Martha A. Fuller**, M.S.S.W., Director of Field Instruction

**Thomas Lawson**, Ph.D., Director of International Programs

**Faculty and Staff** : For a list of faculty and staff, see <http://louisville.edu/kent/faculty-staff>