

Social Work: What Can I Do with This Major?

Public Welfare

Public Welfare is designed to provide services and support for poor, disabled, ill, elderly, or juvenile clients.

Types of Positions

- Administration and Planning
- Case Management
- Program Evaluation
- Policy Development
- Research

Employers

- Public Welfare Agencies
- Private Social Service Agencies
- Local, state, and federal government

How Can I Prepare?

- Volunteer at homeless shelters, soup kitchens, battered women homes, literacy programs, or other social services agencies to get experience.
- Four out of ten social workers work for the government. Learn about the government application process and apply early as the process can take at least four to six months.
- Complete an internship with the federal government.

Criminal Justice/Corrections

Social workers in corrections focus on rehabilitation of clients.

Types of Positions

- Counseling/Therapy
- Rehabilitation
- Probation
- Parole
- Youth Services
- Victim Assistance
- Drug Prevention

Employers

- Prisons and correctional facilities
- Courts
- Police departments
- Probation offices
- Victim services organizations
- Private treatment facilities

How Can I Prepare?

- Obtain experience by volunteering at a corrections facility or victims' programs such as a rape crisis center.
- Gain experience as a juvenile probation officer; many states allow reputable citizens to serve as volunteer officers.

School Social Work

School systems may employ social workers to help students cope with and resolve emotional, developmental, or educational difficulties.

Types of Positions

- Counseling
- Case Management
- Pupil Personnel Services
- Student Advocacy
- Instruction
- Assessment
- Referrals

Employers

- Elementary and secondary schools
- School districts
- Head start centers
- Early intervention programs

How Can I Prepare?

- Gain experience with children at daycare centers, camps, Boys and Girls Clubs, and the like.
- Volunteer with organizations like Big Brothers, Big Sisters.
- You must obtain state certification for work in a school. Check with each state to learn about requirements.

Clinical

Clinical social workers are found in a variety of settings that provide therapeutic counseling to clients.

Types of Positions

- Therapy
- Assessment
- Case Management

Employers

- Community mental health centers
- Psychiatric hospitals
- Behavioral health systems
- Drug/alcohol rehabilitation centers

- Residential and day treatment hospitals
- Employee assistance programs
- Schools
- Family services agencies
- Private practice

How Can I Prepare?

- A Master of Social Work (MSW) is required.
- You will want to obtain licensure as a LCSW since many employers require licensure to practice.

Administration

Administrators are involved with planning, budgeting, public relations, marketing, supervising, operations management, fund raising, and other crucial responsibilities that keep an organization functioning.

Types of Positions

- Management
- Policy Development
- Planning
- Supervision
- Fundraising
- Budgeting
- Grant Writing

Employers

- Family service agencies
- Child welfare departments
- Social service agencies
- State mental health departments
- Employee assistance programs
- Probation departments
- Public welfare agencies
- Public interest groups
- Local, state, and federal government
- Residential and outpatient hospitals/treatment centers

How Can I Prepare?

- Obtain an MSW and gain management experience.
- Consider a minor in business during undergraduate education.

Research and Education

Research provides data and statistics important in program implementation and policy development.

Types of Positions

- Research

- Teaching
- Grant Writing
- Supervision

Employers

- Colleges and universities
- Research institutes
- Research hospitals
- Local, state, and federal government
- Advocacy organizations

How Can I Prepare?

- A Doctor of Social Work (DSW) or Ph.D. is usually required. Some teaching and administrative positions may be available to MSWs.
- Gain research experience as an undergraduate by assisting professors with their work.

Vocational

Occupational social workers help employees to be more productive and satisfied.

Types of Positions

- Counseling
- Education
- Wellness Promotion
- Organizational Development
- Assessment
- Human Resources

Employers

- Larger corporations
- Employee assistance programs
- Labor unions
- Local, state, and federal government: Department of Labor
- Community agencies

How Can I Prepare?

- Gain experience in a university or community career center while in school.
- Earn a relevant certification such as Certified Employee Assistance Professional or Global Career Development Facilitator.

Healthcare

Social workers in healthcare facilitate medical and emotional treatment of patients. They may focus on helping clients and their families cope with acute or terminal illnesses by providing psychosocial support.

Types of Positions

- Case Management

- Counseling
- Prevention and Education
- Program Development
- Administration
- Research
- Child Life Specialists
- Hospice Care

Employers

- Hospitals
- Community health centers
- Outpatient clinics
- Public health programs
- Health maintenance organizations (HMOs)
- Nursing homes
- Group homes
- Hospice
- Veterans Administration hospitals
- Home healthcare agencies

How Can I Prepare?

- Get involved with grassroots causes and community agencies.
- Participate in local government and gain knowledge about city planning.

Gerontology

Gerontology involves working with older adults, health or ill, and their families.

Types of Positions

- Advocacy/Intervention
- Counseling
- Case Management
- Programming
- Public Policy
- Administration

Employers

- Hospitals
- Nursing homes
- Senior centers
- Assisted living
- Hospice
- Home healthcare agencies

How Can I Prepare?

- Volunteer at daycares, child shelters, camps, YMCA, Scouts, or other agencies that aid youth.

- Gain licensure as a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) after graduating from a master's program in Social Work.

Developmental Disabilities

Social workers in this area help people with disabilities to adjust and to lead productive lives.

Types of Positions

- Case Management
- Program Planning and Evaluation
- Research
- Policy Development

Employers

- Community residential homes
- State and local agencies
- Medical facilities
- Schools
- Colleges and universities

How Can I Prepare?

- Volunteer at camps for people with disabilities, daycares, schools, or hospitals to gain experience.

International Social Work

Social workers in the international arena identify social problems, make recommendations for social programs, and implement change. They work on solutions to problems including education, environmental, health, human rights injustices, business, and agricultural issues.

Types of Positions

- Humanitarian Services
- Advocacy
- Education
- Wellness Promotion
- Development: Economic and Community
- Disaster and Disease Relief
- Volunteer Coordination
- Program Administration
- Clinical Practice
- Policy Development
- Research

Employers

- International Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) such as United National Economic and Social Council and the World Health Organization
- International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Country-based service agencies
- International aid and relief organizations

- Foundation programs
- Nonprofit and not-for-profit organizations
- Private voluntary organizations
- Humanitarian organization
- Religious organizations
- Multi-national corporations

How Can I Prepare?

- Learn one or more foreign languages.
- Plan to study, volunteer, or intern abroad more than one time if possible.
- Seek cultural experiences on campus and get involved with the International student population.
- Join relevant student organizations such as Amnesty International and gain leadership roles.
- Participate in an international service learning experience or go on a mission trip.
- Learn about federal job hiring procedures, and apply for a government internship to increase chances of finding a full-time position.
- Research the international organization's structure and function.
- Develop good working knowledge of international humanitarian law.
- Demonstrate your depth of dedication, willingness to adapt, and coping mechanisms to combat stress and difficult situations.
- Develop skills in the areas of organizing groups, efficiency, and the ability to calm people.
- Consider earning a graduate degree in Social Work or related area to open more advanced job opportunities.

General Information

- Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) prepares individuals for entry-level practice.
- Master of Social Work (MSW) is necessary to provide therapy and for advancement to supervisory or administrative positions.
- Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) or Ph.D. usually required for positions in teaching, research, and administration. Advanced degrees are desirable for some clinical positions and private practice.
- Complete a degree from a college or university program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Programs include practice field experience.
- Most states require licensure, certification, or registration.
- The National Association of Social Workers offers many specialized credentials that Social Workers can earn. Research these options after choosing a specialty area.
- The field practicum is used to determine suitability for this profession and to provide exposure to various practice settings and clients.
- Candidates should possess empathy for others, an appreciation for diversity, and an interest in social change.
- Social workers serve a range of client systems (individuals, families, groups, communities) as they attempt to enhance social functioning.
- Social work is unique given its dual focus on the person and the environment.
- Join a social work organization while in school and seek leadership positions.
- Look for ways to impact your community and get involved with local organizations and issues.

- Update your resume as you acquire new accomplishments, skills, knowledge, and interests.
- Learning a second language to better communicate with immigrant or migrant populations (particularly helpful in certain areas of the United States).

Note: Much of this information was adapted from Choices: Careers in Social Work by the National Association of Social Workers.