

Cohort Breakout Groups

MSW Program – New Student Orientation Top FAQ's¹

1. What is it like being in the program? (academics, student life, advising, classes, assignments, campus activities, etc.)

Answers will vary. In general, graduate school can be a demanding but rewarding experience. Continue to talk with classmates, professors, alums, and others familiar with the program to gain a better perspective. It is also good to not only investigate for yourself, but also to confirm from reliable sources answers and information useful for your success.

2. Can we work while going to school?

There is no policy prohibiting students from working while in the program. Those receiving financial aid or government stipends should check for policies specific to their financial awards. If you do work while in the program, please be mindful of the time needed to study, complete assignments, rest, and attend to personal matters. Although our School will try to be understanding towards your situation, we cannot compromise our standards and expectations. Graduate school is a serious undertaking that requires due focus and priority.

3. What are some key differences between undergraduate studies at graduate studies? (Example: In undergraduate program, term papers range from 5-10 pages. In the MSW program at SJSU, term papers are 20 pages. OR In undergrad, classes were mostly lectures. In graduate school, classes are lecture and group activity in a seminar setting, etc.)

This will depend upon what your undergraduate program was like, but in this program, papers vary anywhere from two pages to about 25, depending on the assignment and goal of the paper. There are generally three to four papers due in each class each semester, with occasional exams (either in-class or take-home) scattered throughout.

Classes are generally a combination of lecture and group activity. The amount of group activity depends upon both the class and the professor.

Please read the course syllabi and check with each professor regarding specific course objectives, expectations, and assignments.

4. What are Cohorts and why do we have them?

Cohorts are assigned groupings designating which students take classes together for all foundation level courses. Cohorts facilitate students' ability to network with classmates for studying and support purposes, and assist the program in balancing enrollment and class sizes. After the foundation level courses, students will no longer be in cohorts as they will attend classes according to their field of practice (i.e., their specialization or specific populations-at-risk). Students may request a switch in cohort assignment through the MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Advisor, but must have compelling reasons.

5. Is it possible to take a class outside of the assigned cohort (if there is an extenuating circumstance)?

Students may make requests (also see #4 above). However, depending on available resources and class enrollment, requests cannot always be granted.

6. Does being in the 3-year program prevent you from adding other program courses during the first two years?

Students may make requests to take additional courses. However, in addition to assessing available resources and class enrollment, students must also fulfill prerequisites (i.e., one cannot take certain advanced-year courses or electives without first completing foundation-level classes).

In general any requests to modify course plans, or extend your education in the MSW Program (i.e., to extend beyond 2 or 3 years) may be made through the MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Advisor.

7. Can I take a break from school? Is there a time limit to return to the program?

You may place a request to take a leave of absence, modify course plans, or extend your education in the MSW Program (i.e., to extend beyond 2 or 3 years). Specifically for field, these requests, including changing your field of practice (i.e., your area of specialization) must also go through the Field Education Director in addition to the MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Advisor.

In regards to all leaves of absence or delays in completing the MSW, there is a university 7-year course validation limit policy meaning that no courses can be older than 7 years at the time you plan to graduate.

8. What are the best parking options for night and Saturday students?

Parking and transportation information can be found at <http://www.sjsu.edu/parking/>. There are fees for the SJSU parking lots.

In general, on weekdays, SJSU parking between 8:00am and 6:00pm can be difficult. There is satellite parking at Spartan Stadium (about a mile away) with a shuttle running to and from campus. Weekend and evening parking is more available in the lots, and sometime neighborhood parking and meter spaces at the perimeter of campus are open. As always, take safety precautions when walking to and from your car or public transportation.

9. When matched with a Field Placement, are we given any choices? What type of places/agencies are considered acceptable?

For students entering the first year of field, your Faculty Field Liaison (FFL) or a representative from the Field Education program will contact you to discuss your internship location. All internship sites have to be screened and accepted by the School of Social Work prior to the placement of students. During this first year of internship, the School is responsible for assigning your internship location. Students will have much more involvement and choice when planning for the second year of internship.

The Field Education Director and field faculty will be able to answer more of these questions regarding internship.

10. What helped you succeed and overcome challenges? (i.e. resources utilized)

Answers will vary. In general, faculty and staff, and especially your classmates can be a great source for support. Maintain your own support system and self-care strategies as well.

When a problem arises (i.e., with a class, professor, or school-related issue), start with some self-reflection and consider what information and experiences are pertinent. Approach the appropriate people in a reasonable and professional manner to try and solve this situation.

11. What do you do on your downtime?

Answers will vary. We highly recommend scheduling in down-time, rest, and self-care activities as school can be stressful.

12. What are some tips to help deal with school? (i.e., having an attitude of a grad student, maintaining a positive attitude, and being resourceful)

Answers will vary. Maintaining a positive attitude and a solution-oriented/strengths-based perspective can be helpful.

13. How do you manage time? (i.e., internship, classes, studying, and life) and deal with multiple responsibilities? (i.e., family and friends, self-care, other life interests)

Answers will vary. Also, seek tips for time management.

14. How much time, outside of class and internship hours, do you spend per week doing school work (i.e., writing papers, preparing for tests, homework)?

Answers will vary. Some will estimate about 1-2 hours of study time and coursework per hour of in-class time. However, this will depend on the assignments due per week and study/work habits.

15. How can we navigate the SJSU and School bureaucracy effectively?

Get to know your professors and others in the School of Social Work. Professionalism is important. Ask questions and advocate for yourself. In all situations, please communicate in a professional, polite, and respectful manner, whether on the telephone, via email, or in person.

Join SWGSA to extend your social network and support base. Other students may have had similar experiences. See more below.

16. How can we maintain a positive relationship with others, including staff and faculty?

Maintain a professional attitude. Also, all students should visit this website resource to learn more about how to best comport themselves via email and other internet interactions:
www.albion.com/netiquette.

Some other tips include:

- ◆ Sending email and messages that are clear, concise, and professional, and not as if a casual conversation.
- ◆ Creating an email address that reflects a professional identity (e.g., my_name@yahoo.com vs. sexybody999@reallyhotmail.com)
- ◆ Recording a voice mail greeting on your phone that is professional (e.g., “this is ____, sorry I missed your call...” vs. “hello?! Hello?! HELLO?! Hah hah gotcha...”)

17. Where can I find help?

Please refer first to your MSW Handbook and course materials. Then consult with the appropriate professor or faculty/staff member. Next consult your academic and professional advisor. Finally, consult the administrator or coordinator (i.e., the MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Advisor, or the Field Education Director. We will do our best to assist you.

SJSU resources can also be found on the website (www.sjsu.edu) and SWGSA is also a resource for you. Seek assistance and support from your SWGSA representatives and peer advisors.

¹ This handout was developed by the SWGSA MSW Student Orientation planning committees, in cooperation with the School of Social Work. We thank them for their contribution.