

## Individualized Learning Plan, 2014

### Overview, Purpose, and Timing

In the first year of the PhD program, students take a shared set of required classes, which insures that all students have strong basic understanding of the role and use of theory in research; qualitative and quantitative research methods; social welfare policy; and statistics. After the first year, students complete a program of additional courses areas relevant to their specific planned program of research. Students select areas of substantive, methodological, and interventive expertise on which to focus, plan their teaching experiences, and articulate the role of social justice in their work and career.

This Individualized Learning Plan (ILP), which the student and her/his advisor write together, helps to direct the student's learning in years 2 and 3, leading up to Candidacy (i.e., passing the General Exam). It describes the areas of substantive, interventive, and methodological specialization the student plans to undertake in the PhD program and how the student will master these areas; through coursework, teaching, and research experiences. This planned program of study should be sufficient to support the student's successful completion of the General Exam paper and the Dissertation. The ILP is not an iron-clad contract, but rather a thoughtful planning document to supports the development of the student's planned program of study.

Students and their advisors begin designing their programs of study throughout the first year, and initial thoughts about second and third year courses are part of the end-of-first-year advising meeting. In mid-fall of the second year, students will formally present their ILPs to a group of faculty that includes first year advisors, first year instructors, and members of the PhD program Steering Committee, in a group format (i.e., all of the students in the cohort will present to each other and the assembled group of faculty). This presentation is not evaluative, but rather an opportunity to present your ideas and get expert input on our plans – it may be most useful, in fact, in those are in in which you're feeling weak or a bit lost. After each student presents his or her plans, faculty will offer their thoughts and suggestions about useful courses, potential mentors, research opportunities, etc. The goal of this event is to foreground this aspect of our program, to solicit expert advice for you, in the context of a supportive and festive event.

A new element this year is a plan for mastery in teaching. Students take a teaching pedagogy course in the fall of their second year, and complete a teaching practicum. In addition, many students act as teaching assistants (primarily in the BASW program) and eventually teach their own classes in the MSW program. The ILP now includes a section in students explicitly consider their teaching trajectories from TA and teaching practicum to teacher in the SSW. Students will vary in their commitment to teaching, and this will be reflected in their plans, but all students should have at least the basics of a teaching preparation plan, and most will want to develop this area carefully as an essential element of their training, and of the portfolio they present to potential academic employers.

## Instructions

This document is intended to help students organize their written ILPs and presentations. **First**, write up a document, using the outline below, and then adapt it to a presentation (e.g., PowerPoint or other format that help you to communicate the content of the written document). The completed document should be 2 – 3 pages in length, so that's about a paragraph or bullet list on each point below. The presentation should be about 10 minutes, maybe a half-dozen slides (perhaps one on each point, which would be 7). The written version of the ILP should be posted to the student's Share Space, and sent to the PhD Program Assistant Director for inclusion in the student's file. If it is significantly revised during years 2 or 3, the revised version should be posted there, as well.

## Outline

### **I. Overview of the area of interest**

Orient the reader/listener to your interest by giving a brief overview of the research program you are preparing yourself for, and why it's an important topic to study. You may want to talk about how you got interested in this area, or how it relates to your practice experience.

### **II. Substantive or Problem Area**

**1. Description of area:** This is the particular problem or questions to be addressed in your program, situated within the field of social welfare. Frequently, the substantive area brings together an interest in a particular population (e.g., youth, older adults) and a social issue or problem (e.g., sexual identity development, poverty). Students may also have an interest in particular life or social service settings (e.g., neighborhood and community, public child welfare, faith-based services).

**2. Knowledge assessment and plan:** The student is expected to acquire a basic understanding of how the substantive area is defined; its historical, policy, and institutional contexts its theoretical underpinnings; and population(s) most salient to the area of interest. The program of study should enable the student to master and critically assess the state-of-the-art knowledge in the substantive area, including adequate attention to factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, and culture. Outline your current knowledge of the substantive area (earlier coursework, work or research experiences) and identify gaps in your knowledge.

**3. Planned coursework, practicums, other learning:** Suggest potential advanced social/behavioral science theory and substantive courses that will address gaps identified above and strengthen understanding in the substantive area. Describe, too, any other relevant training you expect to undertake, such as relevant research or teaching experiences that will aid your mastery of this area, or tutorial reading courses within your area of specialization.

### III. Interventive Area

**1. Description of area:** The term “interventive area” refers to strategies used to effect change in the target area of social welfare (e.g., education, community development, policy, treatment, prevention, etc.). Students should be clear what change strategies they are focusing on and why. Special emphasis should be placed on the theoretical and empirical foundations that underlie the strategy(ies) in question.

**2. Knowledge assessment and plan:** Students are expected to acquire a basic understanding of a change strategy relevant to their substantive area, and to select a specific focus (e.g., interventions to change cultural norms, to prevent problem behavior, to realign resources, etc.). The student will develop a thorough familiarity with the latest methods and procedures used in the interventive area, including the research and practice literatures on its application to various populations or systems, its effectiveness in different contexts, and the most recent technical developments. Outline your current knowledge of the interventive area (earlier coursework, work or research experiences) and identify gaps in your knowledge.

**3. Planned coursework and learning:** Suggest potential relevant courses that you plan to take to fill gaps in your knowledge and strengthen understanding in interventions in your area. Where there are not good course options (often in this area there are not) learning may involve hands-on experience in an intervention project, or a tutorial reading course. Describe, too, your proposed research practicum, if known and relevant to your interventive area, and any other proposed training or research experiences that will aid your mastery of this area.

### IV. Research Methodology Area

**1. Description of the area:** The research methodology area will include the necessary tools for rigorous study of the substantive and interventive areas. This includes choice of an approach to be used in the inquiry (e.g., exploratory, descriptive, experimental, quasi-experimental, ethnographic, interpretive) and procedures for selecting the population to be studied, collecting data, analyzing data, and the ethical conduct of research. Research methodology can be applied in a broad range of studies, including those of historical, policy, community, or organizational nature.

**2. Knowledge assessment and plan:** Students may vary considerably in their experience with research, based on undergraduate preparation and/or engagement in research projects. Consider and describe the research knowledge and skills you have acquired, and gaps that you need to fill.

**3. Planned coursework and learning:** research methods learning objectives should develop the student's general knowledge of research concepts and procedures, and include acquisition of a skill set sufficient to support research in the chosen substantive and interventive areas. This includes areas such as data collection, data management, and data analysis. Some of these skills may come from engagement in research projects, as well as from coursework. It may also include acquiring skills in a particular type of analysis strategy (e.g., multilevel modeling, critical

discourses analysis; econometric methods). If you are planning to complete the statistics track, include courses you are considering to gain this certificate in your plan (but note that you will also need to initiate formal plan with the statistics track faculty committee to get approval for your proposed program of courses).

## **V. Teaching**

All students are expected to gain competence in teaching at the MSW level, whether or not they are planning an academic career. PhD Social Welfare scholars need to be able to teach effectively, whether it is as a full-time professor, as an occasional teacher, or as part of other professional activities. Those who anticipate an academic career can deepen their preparation to teach through a planful set of learning experiences that includes a graduated set of courses in which the student serves as TA, does teaching practicum(s), and undertakes solo teaching in the School (e.g., a TAship in the undergraduate instructor research course, a teaching practicum with a master's level research course, followed by solo teaching of the master's research sequence). The School will, insofar as resources permit, assign students who delineate a teaching mastery trajectory to the classes they wish to specialize in. For the ILP, students should outline the area(s) in which they would like to focus teaching preparation and the courses they are interested in TAing, using as a practicum, and eventually teaching.

## **VI. Social Justice**

The ILP document should briefly highlight the ways in which the planned program of study incorporates the PhD program's [Social Justice Learning Objectives](#). This may be apparent in the material presented in the earlier sections, but a brief summary here will ensure that this is clearly considered.

## **VII. Supervisory Committee**

In this final section of the ILP, share your thoughts on the expertise you anticipate needing on your supervisory committee. This may include specific potential faculty members, especially where there has been a relationship established, or may be roles for which a specific person has not yet been identified (e.g., someone with expertise in particular topic).