

Areas of Specialization within the MSW Program at CSUSB

The MSW program at CSUSB uses an “advanced generalist” model in its curriculum.

Your *foundation* classes (first year for full time students and first two years for part time students) are in human behavior in the social environment (HBSE), research, micro practice, and macro practice. As part of your foundation classes you learn about the *generalist* model of social work practice which your faculty thinks helps prepare you to work effectively with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

During the last quarter of your foundation year courses you are required to choose a special issue, client population, or field of practice within social work that will become your *specialization during your concentration year*. Choosing an area of specialization allows you to have an intensive learning experience in an area of interest to you. Areas of specialization include, but are not limited to, such topics as child welfare, mental health, substance abuse, school social work, gerontology, medical social work, etc.

During your *advanced* micro and macro courses (second year for full time students and third year for part time students) you add what you learned in your foundation classes about the generalist model, social work related theories, and practice models to what you are learning in the concentration year and apply that knowledge to the area of specialization you chose. In each of your concentration year courses in micro and macro practice you will write papers and/or present reports applying the material you are learning in class to various aspects of your area of specialization. In this way, you will be able to explore your specialization and important issues within it from a variety of perspectives.

All students in the program take advanced courses that cover the same broad content areas, but each individual student’s learning in those courses is unique because he or she is applying the course material to an area of special interest. During the advanced courses you will have the opportunity in class to hear from students who have other areas of specialization so you will be exposed repeatedly to social work practice areas outside of your specialization. As you reach the end of your advanced courses you will know one area of social work practice very well while also having an appreciation for the breadth of practice within the field.

If you are in the Title IVE program your specialization during your concentration year should be “child welfare” and if you are in the Mental Health Stipend your specialization should be “mental health.” For the purposes of completing assignments in your classes you may be asked to narrow your specialization to a more manageable topic for the purposes of discussion. For instance, your specialization might be “mental health” but you might narrow that topic to “people with post traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) for the purpose of completing assignments in your micro practice classes. You would be expected to have a broad understanding of social work issues related to mental health such as the “recovery model” and a sophisticated understanding of PTSD and how social workers assist clients who are dealing with it.

To the extent possible your second year field placement will be related to your area of specialization. Your research project will also focus on a particular issue within your specialization. Your research topic will, by design, be very narrow. It is important to understand that your “specialization” and your “research topic” are related, but not the same thing. If your specialization was “mental health” and you narrowed that broad area to “people with post traumatic stress disorder” for the purposes of writing your micro papers in your advanced year, you might further narrow that topic to “efficacy of outpatient treatment groups for Vietnam era veterans with PTSD” as a research question. The research question is derived from your area of specialization but they are not the same thing.

As your concentration year progresses and you are completing both macro and micro assignments in your area of specialization, completing an internship with related practice experiences, and conducting research in a related area you should become quite knowledgeable about and very conversant with your particular area of specialization.

After you graduate you may or may not find employment in the exact area that was your area of specialization in the MSW program at CSUSB. However, it is the intent of your faculty that during your foundation and concentration years you will have experienced a learning process that will allow you to build on the generalist model and use what you learned in the advanced year *about* developing an area of specialization to develop another area of specialization in whatever area you choose. Many social workers develop several areas of expertise and specialize in different areas of practice during their professional careers.