



TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: I.F.

MEETING DATE: May 15, 2025

SUBJECT: New Academic Program
University of Tennessee, Martin
Social Work, Master of Science (MSSW)

ITEM TYPE: Action

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

| | |
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| Title and Designation | Social Work, Master of Science (MSSW) |
| Concentrations / Certifications | Clinical Social Work with Rural Emphasis |
| Accreditation | The University of Tennessee, Martin will seek The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation. |
| CIP Code and Description | 44.0701 (Social Work) A program that prepares individuals for the professional practice of social welfare administration and counseling, and that focus on the study of organized means of providing basic support services for vulnerable individuals and groups. Includes instruction in social welfare policy; case work planning; social counseling and intervention strategies; administrative procedures and regulations; and specific applications in areas such as child welfare and family services, probation, employment services, and disability counseling. |
| SOC Code and Title | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 11-9151 Social and Community Service Managers▪ 21-1013 Marriage and Family Therapists▪ 21-1019 Counselors, All Other▪ 21-1021 Child, Family, and School Social Workers▪ 21-1022 Healthcare Social Workers▪ 21-1023 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers▪ 21-1029 Social Workers, All Other▪ 21-1092 Probation Officers & Correctional Treatment Specialists▪ 25-1113 Social Work Teachers, Postsecondary |
| Credit Hours | 30-60 |
| Implementation Date | August 1, 2026 |
| Modality and Delivery Site | Fully Online (synchronous and asynchronous delivery) |
| Department/College | College of Education, Health and Behavioral Science, Department of Behavioral Science. |
| Governing Board Approval Date | February 27-28, 2025 |

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN

The University of Tennessee, Martin proposes a Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) to complement its existing Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW), which has existed since 1974 and is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The proposed MSSW will prepare master-level social workers for practice and will offer advanced education in issues specific to social work in rural areas, including rural mental health, substance abuse issues, accessibility to care, and rural administrative practice. The proposed MSSW program aligns with the THEC State Master Plan's acknowledgment of "the critical need for academic programs of distinction at the graduate and professional level to fully address Tennessee's economic development, workforce, and research needs." The proposed program addresses a regional need for qualified social workers, offers flexible pathways to completion for non-traditional and working students, and promotes family prosperity by offering potential career advancement to graduates.

The proposed MSSW aligns with three grand challenges identified in the University of Tennessee (UT) System's Strategic Plan for 2021-2025: Strengthening Rural Communities, Advancing K-12 Education, and Overcoming Addiction. The proposed program will strengthen rural communities by offering specialized training for rural social workers, will advance K-12 education by preparing school social workers, and will produce graduates capable of helping Tennesseans overcome addiction.

The proposed program also aligns with UTM's mission to advance "the regional and global community through scholarly activities, public service, and research" and to meet "lifelong education needs by providing graduate programs, distance learning opportunities, online course delivery, and other creative endeavors." The proposed program offers an online degree designed to accommodate all learners and to serve local, rural communities. Finally, the proposed MSSW program aligns with all five goals of UTM's strategic plan, by adding to the number of responsible citizens, improving employment opportunities for graduates, advancing UTM's reputation, and improving the vitality and prosperity of West Tennessee through service and advocacy.

PROGRAM DUPLICATION

Ten Master of Social Work (MSW) and Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) programs are offered in Tennessee, seven of which are at public institutions: Austin Peay State University; East Tennessee State University; Tennessee State University; University of Memphis; University of Tennessee, Chattanooga; and University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The proposed program is distinctive from existing programs because of the focus on clinical practice with a rural emphasis. Additionally, the program will prepare graduates to address pronounced challenges in rural West Tennessee, such as poverty, unemployment, abuse, addiction, isolation, limited or no public transportation, and inadequate health and mental health services.

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

According to the 2024 Tennessee's Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report, there is a substantial and growing demand for social workers in Northwest Tennessee and throughout the state, with some areas of social work experiencing significant increases in job advertisements. According to the Rural Health Information Hub, nearly all counties in Tennessee are Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), while research conducted by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Institute, Inc. (NRI) found that 38 of the 50 states—including Tennessee—have at least a moderate workforce shortage in their psychiatric hospital system. In addition, the

America's Health Rankings Annual Report ranks Tennessee 45th among the 50 states for access to mental health professionals with a rate of approximately 200 mental health providers per 100,000 residents of Tennessee compared to the national rate of 305 mental health providers per 100,000.

The 2024 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook notes that "employment in community and social occupations is projected to grow faster than the national average and experience 281,600 annual openings from 2022 to 2032. Social work job openings, specifically, are expected to grow by 13%—much faster than the average for all occupations (which is 3%). Certain types of social work, such as mental health, substance abuse, and behavioral disorders, anticipate an average growth rate of 18%. The proposed program is meant to prepare students to work in these areas, which are a significant need in rural areas of Tennessee. Jobs 4 Tennessee identified long-term growth from 2020-2024 for social workers, by about 19.7% or 80,000 jobs.

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Planning and Policy Council conducted a Needs Assessment Summary which noted that in all regions across the state of Tennessee there was demonstrated need for an increase in the number of mental health and substance abuse professionals. Region 6, where UTM is located, had six pressing needs identified, such as adolescent inpatient psychiatric care, transportation support, low barrier and affordable housing, transportation for substance abuse treatment, substance abuse treatment access for veterans and their families, and access for adolescent substance abuse treatment. Master's level trained social workers through the proposed program can address not only the mental health aspects of these needs, but also are equipped to tackle the broader concerns that accompany them, such as resource and community development.

CURRICULUM

The proposed Master of Science in Social Work will have two paths, one of which will be an accelerated 30 credit hour program for students that have already obtained an undergraduate degree in social work. Students that do not already have a social work background will be required to complete 60 credit hours to receive the MSSW. Students in both paths can enroll full-time or part-time, and time to completion is anticipated to be one calendar year to three years at most.

The proposed program will include an 18 credit hour core for students on the accelerated track and a 46 credit hour core for students without prior social work training. Students will be placed in a clinical placement during their advanced standing year of study, their field placement experience will also provide hands-on clinical experience under the supervision of a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) providing additional guidance and mentorship for the successful completion of the licensing exam. To accommodate the diverse needs of students, including working professionals and recent graduates, the Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) Program will be offered online, utilizing synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods.

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION

| | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Enrollment | 25 | 31 | 42 | 48 | 56 |
| Graduates | 17 | 21 | 21 | 22 | 29 |

STUDENT INTEREST AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Three interest surveys for a Master of Science in Social Work were administered between 2015 and 2024 to evaluate student interest among current University of Tennessee, Martin (UTM) students and UTM undergraduate social work alumni. The surveys resulted in 230 respondents in 2015, 199 respondents in 2020, and 67 respondents in 2024. Key findings from the most recent 2024 interest survey show that among current students, 84% (N=56) expressed they were “Very Likely” to participate in an accelerated undergraduate to master’s degree option (4 + 1 degree program) in Social Work at UTM. Forty-three respondents (64%) reported that they would be “Very Likely” to enroll in the proposed MSSW program at UTM in the next five years. Among current students, 45 respondents (67%) reported that they desire to earn a graduate degree in an online course format, and 41 current student respondents (67%) reported that the clinical track/specialization would be their top pick of specialization.

Locally, in 2020 and 2024, UT Martin administered an employer survey among all field agencies affiliated with their existing social work program. The response rate for the survey was 47% (38 responses) for 2024, and 3 % (15 responses) for 2020. Eighty-three percent (n=13) and 71% (n=27) of employer respondents in 2020 and 2024, respectively, indicated that their organization experienced difficulty finding master’s level social workers to hire. In addition, 54% of 2024 respondents (n=21) reported an increase in their organizational need for master-level social workers over the next five years, and 83% of 2024 respondents (n=32) cited an “insufficient number of master’s level applicants” when asked to identify common organizational hiring challenges.

The proposed MSSW Program will build upon existing partnerships established through the undergraduate social work program at UTM. Additional partnerships will be leveraged from local agencies, healthcare providers, community mental health centers, social and public service agencies, and schools in rural areas. The community and industry partnerships will serve to provide students with hands-on experience and to foster collaboration in addressing the social service needs of those communities. Seven letters of support were received from the following: Carey Counseling Center, Inc., Pathways Behavioral Health, Student Health & Counseling Services at UTM, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, Healthy Families Tennessee, and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

EXTERNAL JUDGMENT

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on November 21, 2024, by Dr. Deana Morrow, Director and Eberly Family Professor for Outstanding Public Service in the School of Social Work at West Virginia University. The site visit included meetings with campus administrators and faculty from UTM, as well as current UTM students and industry partners.

Dr. Morrow recommended approval of the proposed program, noting that “the specialization in clinical practice with a rural emphasis is unique and highly appropriate to northwestern Tennessee and the surrounding region.” She added that the curriculum is “well-developed and presents as an integrated whole consistent with Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation standards.” She noted the curriculum plan to be “impressive and relevant to the documented behavioral health and addictions treatment needs in the state and region,” and “contemporary for current and future practice implications in the social work discipline.”

PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed one-time and recurring expenditures as well as projected revenue for the Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program are listed in Table 1. The MSSW proposed program costs are exceptionally low due to funding of three faculty positions through existing budget lines. Funding for only one new position is budgeted for Year 2 (filling a fourth faculty position). The costs for the proposed MSSW also include a part-time administrative assistant, as well as one graduate assistant position, which will include a tuition waiver and salary.

Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program

| <i>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</i> | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| One-Time Expenditures | | | | | | | |
| Category | Planning Year 1 | Planning Year 2 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
| Faculty & Instructional Staff (Faculty Lead) | | | | | | | |
| Accreditation | | \$12,500 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | | |
| Consultants | \$1,200 | | | | | | |
| Equipment | | | | \$500 | | \$2,500 | \$3,000 |
| Information Tech | | | | | | | |
| Library | | | | | | | |
| Marketing | | | | | | | |
| Facilities | | | | | | | |
| Travel | | | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | | | |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i> | <i>\$1,200</i> | <i>\$12,500</i> | <i>\$10,000</i> | <i>\$10,500</i> | <i>\$10,000</i> | <i>\$2,500</i> | <i>\$3,000</i> |
| Recurring Expenditures | | | | | | | |
| Category | Planning Year 1 | Planning Year 2 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
| Faculty & Instructional Staff | | \$18,108 | \$18,108 | \$91,198 | \$80,750 | \$82,829 | \$85,155 |
| Non-instructional Staff | | | \$25,249 | \$26,006 | \$26,786 | \$27,589 | \$28,417 |
| Graduate Assistants | | | | \$17,526 | \$17,526 | \$17,526 | \$17,526 |
| Accreditation | | | | | \$7,750 | \$7,750 | \$7,750 |
| Consultants | | | | | | | |
| Equipment | | | | | | | |
| Information Tech | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Library | | | | | | | |
| Marketing | | | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 |
| Facilities | | | | | | | |
| Travel | \$2,500 | \$2,500 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | \$15,000 |
| Other | | | \$4,000 | \$5,000 | \$6,000 | \$7,000 | \$7,000 |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i> | \$2,500 | \$20,608 | \$57,357 | \$149,730 | \$153,812 | \$157,694 | \$165,848 |
| Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring) | \$3,700 | \$33,108 | \$67,357 | \$160,230 | \$163,812 | \$160,194 | \$168,848 |
| Projected Revenue | | | | | | | |
| Category | Planning Year | Planning Year 2 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
| Tuition | | | \$300,219 | \$371,964 | \$482,148 | \$522,264 | \$637,200 |
| Grants | | | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | | | |
| Total Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$300,219 | \$371,964 | \$482,148 | \$522,264 | \$637,200 |