



MSW Student Handbook



Updated July 2026



Welcome to the University of Northern Iowa's Department of Social Work!

We are delighted that you have selected our program for your graduate studies. Our faculty represent an array of disciplines and specialties that will provide you with a high-quality professional education. Through your coursework and field experiences, you will have the opportunity to develop your knowledge and skills in the various fields that comprise the social work profession.

This MSW Handbook provides practical information about your MSW program. You will find useful information about courses and curricula, degree requirements, student advising, and procedures for handling complaints. The handbook also sets forth your obligations to the Department, to the faculty, and to your fellow MSW students in terms of academic and professional conduct and ethical standards.

We hope that your time at UNI is both rewarding and enjoyable. Please do not hesitate to call upon us should you have questions or concerns about the MSW Program.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Dickinson, PhD, LISW, RPT-S

MSW Program Director

Note: This Handbook was created by the Department of Social Work to help guide students through the MSW program and is not an official publication of the University. It is not a statement of all UNI policies. For official rules, regulations, and degree requirements, refer to the [Academic Catalog](#) and the [Graduate College](#). Language and policies in this Handbook should not be relied upon as legal terms or conditions of enrollment and are not intended to create a contract between the Department and its students. This Handbook is subject to change at any time at the Department's discretion. To the extent a policy is inconsistent with federal or state laws, the policy will be superseded by the applicable governing law.

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UNI MSW Program Mission

The mission of the University of Northern Iowa Masters of Social Work Program is to provide students with a trauma-informed foundation that prepares them to identify, evaluate, and address the personal, social, and systemic conditions that perpetuate individual, family, organizational and community-based trauma using evidence-informed interventions. Our curriculum is based on the perspective that effective change within this paradigm requires upholding the dignity and worth of the individual, advocating for human rights and social and economic justice, challenging oppression, promoting human relationships, practicing multi-cultural responsiveness, and identifying factors that mitigate the effects of trauma and enhance strengths, competencies, and resilience. Students obtain an in-depth understanding of these values and practices through in-person and online coursework and instruction that promotes critical thinking, self-reflection, and ethical decision making, along with intensive experiential learning through local, state, national, and international field placements.

MSW Program Goals

- *Provide a foundation curriculum rooted within a generalist perspective that addresses knowledge and skills necessary for effective and ethical practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;*
- *Provide a concentration curriculum built on a professional foundation that prepares students to practice autonomously as advanced level professionals in trauma-informed practice within a wide range of client systems and practice settings;*
- *Infuse social work values and ethics throughout students' educational experience to serve as guides for practice in field placements and future professional social work practice;*
- *Promote student understanding of diversity through curriculum that identifies the experiences and needs of vulnerable and oppressed groups while emphasizing resilience and strengths;*
- *Increase students' understanding of the types and processes of discrimination and oppression and enhance their ability to promote social and economic justice through advocacy and social reform;*
- *Prepare students to critically assess and apply empirically-based knowledge, evaluate their own practice effectiveness, and participate in the evaluation of programs and policies.*

Who's Who in the Department of Social Work

A full directory of Department of Social Work faculty and staff is available on the [department's website](#).

Department Head: Dr. Vaughn DeCoster, vaughn.decoaster@uni.edu, Sabin 235

The Department Head is primarily an administrative position. The Department Head is responsible for developing the department's course schedule, managing and evaluating personnel (including supporting students in concerns about instructors), hiring faculty and adjuncts, and managing the department's budget.

MSW Program Director: Dr. Rebecca Dickinson, rebecca.dickinson@uni.edu, Sabin 241

The MSW Program Director has administrative responsibilities for the development and maintenance of the MSW curriculum and programs. The MSW Program Director is also responsible for resolving student questions or concerns related to educational situations.

Field Education Director: Jenny Becker, jennifer.becker@uni.edu, Sabin 247

The Field Education Director oversees Field Education at UNI at both the BSW and MSW levels. All students in social work programs will interact with the Field Education Director when identifying and setting up their field placements. The Field Education Director vets new field placement options and maintains the department's partnership with local, state-wide, national, and international field placement partners. The Field Education Director regularly teaches field seminar courses that students take concurrently while in field placement.

Faculty Advisors

All students are assigned a faculty advisor. Faculty advisors are responsible for helping students through the course registration process as well as helping students explore career options and interests. Advisors help monitor students' progress through the program. All faculty have published office hours, during which they are available to students as well as by appointment. Your advisor assignment is available in your Student Center on MyUNiverse.

Departmental Communication

As an MSW student, you will receive communication, primarily email, from all the above people as well as other departmental sources. It is imperative that you regularly check your emails and read them thoroughly. Below is a list of other people that you can expect email communication from:

- Departmental Administrative Assistants
 - Wendy Christensen, wendy.christensen@uni.edu
 - Shelby Kubli, shelby.kubli@uni.edu
- Student Social Work Association (SSWA): SSWA is a student organization open to both graduate and undergraduate students in the department. Meetings are held bi-weekly with both in-person and Zoom attendance options.
- SW Diversity: The swdiversity@uni.edu email account distributes a range of information to students in the social work department, with a primary focus on regular listening posts for student feed and distribution of the annual implicit curriculum survey examining

students' learning environment experiences within the department.

- The Graduate College
- Office of Distance Education (online students only)
- Other University Offices (e.g. information regarding graduation and commencement procedures, safety notices, etc.)

Getting Started: Orientation and Other Basic Information

All students should complete the Graduate Student Orientation course on Blackboard. You can access the Orientation course under the Organization tab on the left side menu. The Graduate Student Orientation course provides essential basic information regarding campus services available to all UNI graduate students, including:

- describing the process to obtain UNI ID card
- explaining your CatID (necessary to access email, MyUNiverse, and other services),
- providing instructions for navigating MyUNiverse,
- information for on-campus and off-campus housing,
- accessing Student Accessibility Services, the Student Health Clinic, and Counseling Services,
- offers maps of both the campus and for directions to UNI,
- includes parking and public transportation information,
- information on graduate and commencement procedures.

Within the Blackboard course is an option to download a PDF version of the information.

Identification Card

If you just graduated from UNI, you already have your UNI ID. All other students must go to the Housing & Dining Office in the Redeker Center to get your UNI ID card. You will get your picture taken at no cost. If you lose your card, there will be a fee to replace it. More information can be found on the [UNI ID Card website](#).

Online students are no longer automatically provided a UNI ID card. If you would like a physical card, speak with the MSW Program Director, who can assist you.

Parking Permit

Students may purchase a parking pass at the UNI Department of Public Safety Office in 30 Gilchrist Hall. You must show your student ID to purchase your parking permit. Public Safety has a [map of parking lots](#) available on their [website](#).

Some students choose off-campus, street parking in nearby neighborhoods. Ensure that you check street signage for parking restrictions. You may also need to budget additional time in your commute to account for difficulties you may have finding parking or the need to walk a longer distance to campus than anticipated.

Important Timelines or Deadlines

All MSW programs follow the University's [Academic Calendar](#). Students are expected to attend scheduled classes per the academic calendar. The MSW program is a continuous program, with only short breaks built in between semesters.

Students wishing to add, drop, or withdrawal from a course should heed the academic calendar deadlines to avoid tuition charge issues. [Frequently used forms](#) (Add, Drop, Withdrawal, Academic Student Request) are all available on the Registrar's website.

The Academic Calendar guides expectations for students to be engaged in their field

practicums. Students may not start counting hours towards their field practicum prior to the start of the semester, without approval from the Field Education Director. Students frequently would like to wrap up their field hours as early as possible, but please note that students are expected to remain in their field placement through the duration of the semester.

Registration

On-campus Student Registration: Students should register as soon as possible through [MyUNiverse](#). Students accepted into the MSW program are guaranteed places in all required Department of Social Work MSW courses, but as electives may be taken in any department, often, it is important to register as soon as possible. If you encounter any difficulties registering for your courses, please contact the Department of Social Work administrative assistants.

Any student who has been awarded a Graduate Tuition Scholarship and/or Graduate Assistantship Stipend must be registered for fall classes in August; otherwise, the Graduate College will not process their paperwork.

The Office of the Registrar's website includes [instructions on how to register](#) for classes. This is the easiest registration path: MyUNiverse -> Student Center -> Search -> Choose: correct Term, Subject: Social Work, & Course Career: Graduate

Online Student Registration: The Office of Distance Education (ODE) will coordinate registration for students in the online MSW program. The MSW Program Assistant for ODE will email a registration form to all online students prior to the start of any given semester. Students complete the form based on their registration needs and ODE will enroll you in the classes you require.

Departmental MSW Program Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes and be on time. Departmentally, MSW students are allowed one absence per class without penalty per semester. Absences will be considered excused with documentation for required university related events, military or veteran requirements, medical necessity, other legally mandated reasons, and at the instructor's discretion. Instructors set their own consequences for multiple absences (which may include point or course grade deductions) and in determining if an absence counts as excused. Students who are habitually tardy or egregiously tardy may also be penalized for attendance.

Required Course Grades

Per [UNI Graduate College Policies](#), a graduate student must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.00 in all graduate courses. A student who falls below the required cumulative GPA requirement will be subject to the Graduate College's Academic

Students can earn no more than six (6) credit hours of C credit (C+, C, C-) to be applied towards graduation. If a student exceeds the six-credit hour limit of C-range grades, the student will be required to repeat a course (or courses) and earn a satisfactory grade to replace the C-range grade. Any course in which a student receives a D+, D, D-, F, or No Credit (NC), must be retaken. A student may only attempt a course twice. The original course grade will remain on the student's record, but the second grade will be used in the student's cumulative GPA calculation.

Accessibility & Accommodations

Students with disabilities are highly encouraged to utilize UNI's Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for accommodation supports. Faculty are unable to make accommodations for courses without appropriate documentation from SAS. If you think you might benefit from accommodations due to a disability, we recommend that you request accommodation process early. It is better to have accommodation options in place and not need to utilize them, than to be in a position where you would benefit from them and do not have them. As the process takes time to get accommodation approval, it could also be detrimental to your grade(s) in the meantime in courses where accommodations might be most helpful for you, as you work through the accommodations process.

SAS uses an online system, called [Accommodate](#), through which you apply for and access your accessibility requests. Students are responsible for renewing their accommodations each semester through Accommodate. Accommodations approvals that were in place for UNI undergraduate students should automatically follow the student into a graduate program, but students will need to go through the same renewal process each semester as in their undergraduate program.

Accommodate will notify instructors in courses that accommodations have been approved for. It is highly beneficial for a student to meet with their instructor in the first week or two of the course to discuss the accommodations for the course.

SAS staff is available in Gilchrist 118 on Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. for questions and can also be contacted at (319) 273-2332 (For Deaf or Hard of Hearing, use Relay 711) or at accessibility@uni.edu.

Social Work Licensure

In Iowa, MSW students may register to take the [Licensed Master Social Worker \(LMSW\) Licensing Exam](#) while in their final semester of the MSW Program. This application process must be initiated by the student and can begin ***no earlier than the first day of your final semester***. If you decide to sit for the exam (before you receive your degree), contact the Department of Social Work office and ask the Department to send a letter to the Board of Social Work Licensure verifying that you are a student in good standing for your anticipated graduation date.

Some states require more extensive documentation of curriculum, especially for independent or clinical licensure post-graduation. Direct any requirements to the MSW Program Director to complete that required verification paperwork.

Advising

You will be assigned a faculty advisor before the start of classes. The advisor is available during their office hours or by appointment to answer questions about the program or your course plan. You can find your advisor's name in your Student Center within MyUNiverse. Your advisor's name will be listed in the menu column on the right side of the screen.

The following policies and procedures provide faculty and students with understanding advising procedures in the Department of Social Work. These policies and procedures are in

addition to those in effect for the University. The scope of student advising includes academic performance, career counseling, course selection and field site selection in keeping with field instruction placement guidelines.

1. All full-time faculty members in the Department of Social Work advise students. Each is assigned a roster of advisees.
2. Students will be assigned a Social Work advisor early in their MSW program.
3. Faculty Advisors will post office hours and make themselves available on an appointment basis.
4. Advising in the Department of Social Work will include, but not be limited to, orienting students to the department and program, early and periodic evaluation of advisees' performance, referrals, guiding advisees in selecting courses, and working out schedules.
5. Students are responsible for seeking out their advisors if they have questions regarding the curriculum or other major-related questions.
6. Students may change their advisor by making the request through the Department Head, detailing the reason for the change request.
7. The Department expects students to be responsible for ensuring that all MSW program and other university requirements for graduation are fulfilled. This is the responsibility of the student, not the student's advisor.

Graduate Tuition & Fees

Current tuition and fees information can be found on the [Admissions website](#). Please note that tuition and fees for the online MSW program differ from the on-campus program.

Graduation and Commencement

A common confusion is the difference between graduation and commencement. Graduation refers to you completing all the requirements for your degree. Commencement is the event recognizing your graduation at the end of your program.

At UNI, graduation and commencement have different processes. It is imperative as you approach graduation that you read emails thoroughly to ensure you complete the required processes before the deadlines. Information about both [graduation and commencement](#) is available on the Registrar's website.

Ethics and Professional Behavior

As a profession, the standards for ethical and professional behavior come directly from the [National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics](#). Students within UNI's social work programs are expected to adhere to the NASW Code of Ethics.

Generally, graduate students of the Department of Social Work will be held to the highest standards of professional performance. All students at UNI are held to the standards set forth in UNI's Student Code of Conduct and the procedures outlined in [Section 3.02 of the University's Policies and Procedures](#). UNI's Student Code of Conduct applies to all settings within the university. Section 3.02 of the University's Policies and Procedures Manual addresses the rules, procedures, rights and responsibilities governing the university and includes the identification of offenses punishable by disciplinary action, the role and responsibilities of

university officials, recommended sanctions and the right and procedure of the student appeal. Violations to UNI's Student Code of Conduct will be addressed through the university processes outlined in the University Policies and Procedures Manual.

Departmental Policy on the Use of Generative AI

The Department of Social Work prohibits the use of generative AI (e.g. Copilot, ChatGPT, etc.) to create ideas, written content, or other material for coursework. This applies to all courses within the department, unless otherwise specified by the instructor as part of an assignment or activity. Use of generative AI may result in a reduced grade, zero credit, or a resubmission of the assignment, per the instructor's discretion. This policy does not apply to the use of predictive text or spelling/grammar checks.

Policies and Procedures Regarding Transfer of Courses

The following policies and procedures help avoid the necessity of students repeating already-taken courses and to preserve the integrity of the MSW program. UNI's Graduate College outlines its [policies regarding transfer credits](#) within the Academic Catalog.

1. Students may transfer in a maximum of 1/3 of the total credit hours for a program with approval from the MSW Program Director.
 - a. For the Foundation program (a 60-credit program), the maximum number of credits that can be transferred in is 20 credit hours.
 - b. For the Advanced Standing program (a 37-credit program), the maximum number of credits that can be transferred in is 12 credit hours.
2. Transfer credits must be for graduate level courses taken under graduate level status.
3. Transfer credits must be displayed on an official transcript with an earned grade of B or better.
4. Transfer credits must meet UNI's seven-year recency requirement.
5. Substitutions for practice courses will not be considered.
6. Academic credit for life experience and/or previous work experience will not be given as a substitute for courses or practicums. This is a CSWE accreditation requirement.
7. Proficiency exams will not substitute for required social work courses.

General Transfer Credit: Completed Courses

Occasionally, newly admitted MSW students have accumulated graduate level credit hours at UNI or at other institutions whether through a degree-program or other non-degree seeking graduate-level work. These students have completed the admissions process and have been admitted to UNI's MSW program, including meeting all deadlines and providing all required application components. The Department of Social Work follows the Graduate College's Policies regarding such a general transfer of credits.

The following procedures (following the Graduate College's process) apply to students admitted to the program who wish to count previously earned graduate credits towards their MSW degree completion:

1. As soon as possible after admittance, the student should discuss with their advisor their desire to count previously earned credits towards the MSW degree requirements.
2. The advisor will determine if the transfer course(s) meets the requirements for credit transfer. The advisor should seek clarification from the MSW Program Director if there are questions regarding a course meeting the MSW degree requirements.

3. After a completed course has been ruled eligible, the student will submit an online request: Graduate transfer course credit approval to transfer the course and use it on the graduate degree. Application of eligible transfer courses to the UNI degree program requires approval by the department/graduate program on the student request.

General Transfer Credit: Concurrent Enrollment in Another Institution

Current students considering taking a course at another institution to use towards their UNI degree should obtain approval from the MSW Program Director prior to enrolling in the course.

The student should submit the official transcript(s) from concurrent enrollment to the Office of Admissions upon completion of the course.

The student will then submit an online request: Graduate transfer course credit approval to transfer the course and use it on the graduate degree. Application of eligible transfer courses to the UNI degree program requires approval by the department/graduate program on the student request.

Transfer from another MSW Program

Occasionally, the Department of Social Work receives inquiries from students who have obtained graduate level credit hours from another CSWE-accredited MSW program and now wish to seek an MSW degree at UNI instead. In these instances, the Department of Social Work has additional policies regarding transferring into UNI's MSW program from a different accredited MSW program. The [full process](#) is outlined on the MSW Program website.

As part of the admissions process in these cases, the MSW Program Director will audit the student's previous transcripts and determine which previously completed courses will be accepted for transfer. The student will be provided a clear plan of study for completing their MSW degree at UNI upon admission.

Provisional Status

Some students are admitted to the MSW program under Provisional Status. This is documented in the offer of admission letter sent to students. Provisional Admission to the MSW program is granted for the following reasons:

- Academic concerns due to a low GPA
- Statistics requirement unmet

Per Graduate College policy, the provisional status requirement must be met before the end of your first semester. If the provisional status requirement is not met, the Graduate College may dismiss you from the program.

Low GPA: Provisional Admission status for a student who was admitted with less than an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 requires the student to complete six (6) or more graded credit hours of a degree program with at least a 3.0 grade point average. The responsibility for such reclassification rests with the department, who will remove the provisional status marker on the student's file once the requirements are satisfactorily met. The reclassification review takes place the semester after the student has completed six (6) credit hours in the graduate program.

Statistics Requirement: An introductory statistics course is required for admission to the MSW program, although students without this requirement may be admitted on provisional status. Per Graduate College policy, provisional status must be remedied within your first semester, or you may be dismissed from the program.

The statistics course can be completed at any institution. Although most introduction to statistics courses will count, students are encouraged to send a course description to the MSW Program Director for approval of a course, if in doubt. Once the statistics course is completed, the student should have their transcript sent to UNI and inform the MSW Program Director that the requirement is met. The MSW Program Director will then submit the reclassification paperwork to remove the student's provisional status.

No student may receive a UNI graduate degree while on provisional status.

Procedures for Withdrawing a Student from the MSW Program

In most cases students withdraw from the MSW program for academic and non-academic reasons through the normal institutional mechanisms, including consultation with their social work faculty advisor and the MSW Program Director. Accordingly, social work faculty should take concerns about a student to the student's social work faculty advisor.

Departmental Climate Concern Reporting Protocol

What to Report

Our department strives to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students. Despite our efforts and intentions, it is possible that situations will occur that are directly or indirectly hurtful and/or harmful. Harm can be intentional or not, but the impact is what is important. The Department of Social Work does not tolerate discriminatory, biased, and/or harassing behavior.

As social workers, we would like to model how to have difficult conversations around harmful behavior and to support you in finding a resolution. We believe this is even more important when it is one of our faculty/staff who enact the harm. We also believe that this applies to the classroom environment and any harm that a fellow student may cause.

Examples of behavior that may need to be reported include but are not limited to: intimidation, use of slurs or derogatory terms towards minoritized groups, perpetuating stereotypes/bias against minoritized groups, singling out a member of a group to espouse on the overall group's experiences, engaging in demeaning and/or degrading behavior towards an individual or group, etc.

When to Report

We are aware that some harmful comments and behaviors are one-off incidents, but we are also aware that they can quickly become habits or patterns of harassment if left addressed. Even a one-off incident can create an atmosphere that is emotionally and academically damaging to both the target and any bystanders.

We all carry our own blind spots and implicit bias. As a department, we believe that all of us (including faculty and staff) need to continue learning and growing. We suggest addressing harmful behavior as soon as possible or as soon as you can do it from a place of emotional and physical safety.

We recognize that there frequently are implicit cultural rules around “making waves” as well as explicit power imbalances between students and university faculty/staff. Many of us were socialized to keep things to ourselves or to not seem like a burden. Some students may fear retaliation or that reporting harmful behavior will lead to a negative reputation amongst peers, staff, and/or faculty.

In an effort to achieve the inclusive atmosphere we strive for, we ask that you report concerns, even if you feel inclined or others pressure you to minimize the concern. Please know that the University of Northern Iowa Department of Social Work will not tolerate any retaliatory actions by faculty or staff towards students who report harmful behavior occurring within our classrooms and spaces.

Department of Social Work Reporting Protocol

As a department, we have created the following internal reporting protocols. Separate protocols are outlined below for issues that occur during field placements.

We encourage you to document all conversations/interactions related to a concern as soon as possible following the incident, including dates, who was present (participants and bystanders), and what transpired. This can be as simple as writing yourself notes as soon as possible after the event. If a conversation is had (with the person of concern or with a person in the flowchart guidance outlined below), a follow-up email can be useful as a “Just to recap our conversation...” Documentation can become important later if issues continue or escalate.

Step 1: Try to resolve the issues directly with the person of concern.

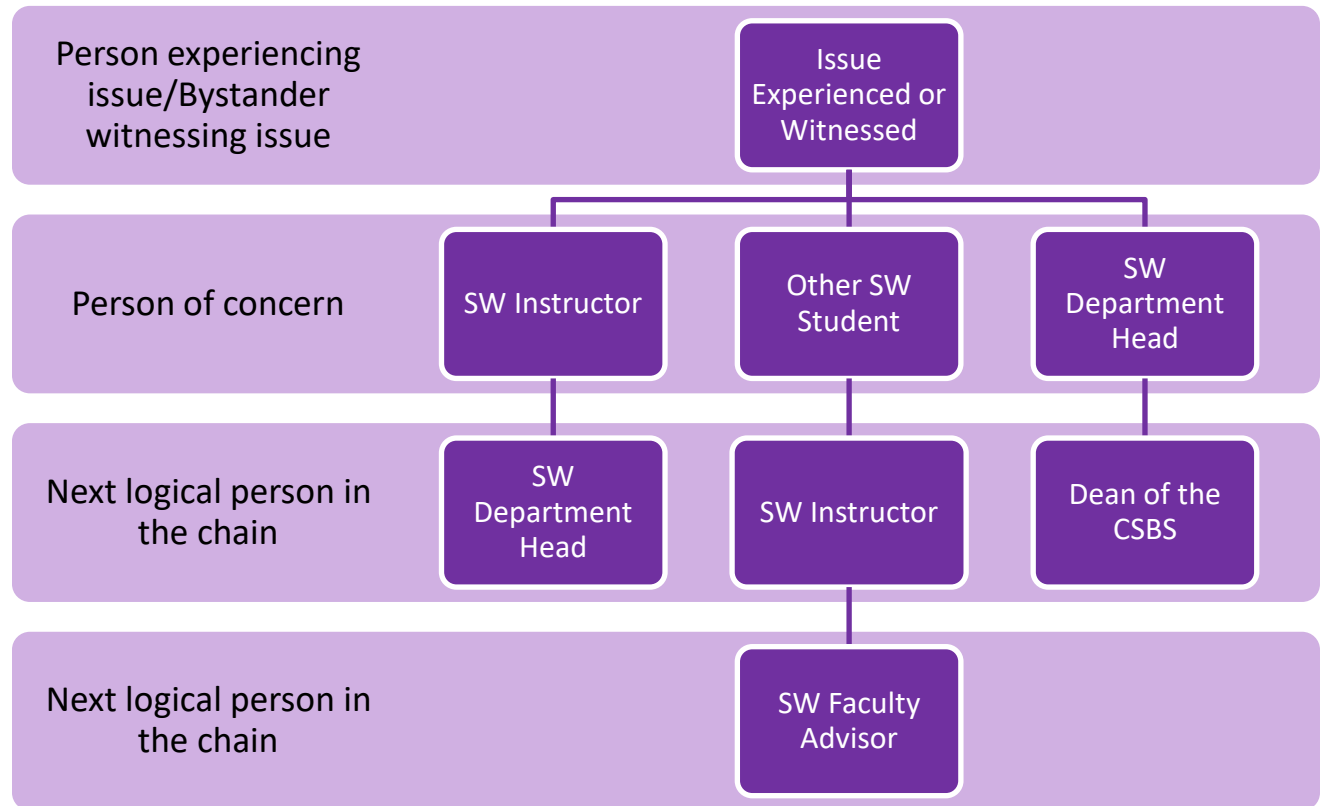
Step 2: If Step 1 fails (or you are not safe), report the issue to the next logical person in the flowchart chain below.

Step 3: The person in Step 2 will help you decide the proper action. This person can help escalate the concern up the chain as needed.

Department of Social Work Reporting Guidance Flowchart

The Department has developed the flowchart outlined in Figure 1 to help provide guidance on the process for resolving issues of concern within the department.

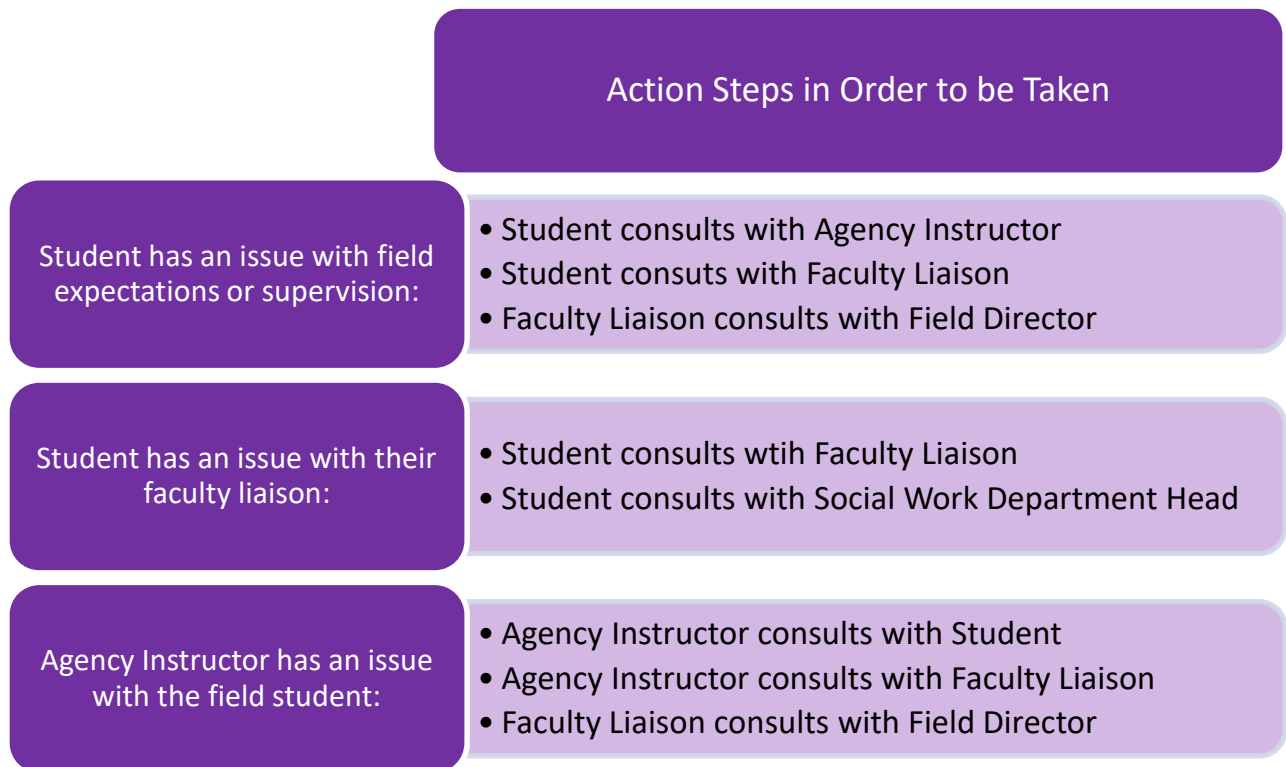
Figure 1: Department of Social Work Climate Reporting Guidance



Department of Social Work Reporting Guidance Flowchart for Field Placements

All social work students complete at least one field placement as part of their degree requirements. In addition to the benefits that field provides our students, it also can result in challenges that are unique compared to other departmental settings. The following guidance in Figure 2 outlines the specific processes related to issues within a field placement.

Figure 2: Department of Social Work Field Placement Reporting Guidance



University Level Reporting Options

In addition to our own Departmental reporting options, the University of Northern Iowa offers another option for students to report bias, discrimination, and/or harassment through the Office of Civil Rights Compliance (OCRC). The OCRC assists individuals who have experienced discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. The OCRC is only able to assist with concerns related to a protected-class status (a full list of protected classes is available on the OCRC's website). The OCRC offers both informal and formal resolution options. More information about their services and processes is available on their [website](#)

If a student has an academic grievance related to a grade received, UNI offers a specific set of policies and procedures. These policies and procedures are outlined in the University Policies under section [12.01 Student Academic Grievance](#).

MSW Program Curriculum

The University of Northern Iowa MSW program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and prepares students for advanced professional social work practice. Students who graduate from the MSW program will receive the Master of Social Work (MSW) degree.

The MSW program has two program options, Foundation and Advanced Standing, depending on the person's prior undergraduate degree. The Advanced Standing program is only for students who hold a bachelor's degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). All other degrees require a student to complete the Foundation program option.

Foundation Program (60 Credit Hours)

Classes at the Foundation level introduce students to the history of the profession, fundamental theories of human behavior, and basic values and skills underlying generalist social work practice. Students learn to read and understand social work research, begin to incorporate a framework of professional ethics, and are introduced to the concepts of oppression and social justice that are fundamental to becoming agents of change. This coursework is equivalent in knowledge and basic skills to coursework provided in undergraduate social work programs.

Once the foundational coursework is completed, Foundation students move into the specialization coursework in trauma-informed care.

The UNI MSW Foundation program is currently only available online as a part-time program. Students complete the Foundation program in 10 consecutive semesters (spring, summer, and fall).

Advanced Standing Program (37 Credit Hours)

Classes at the Advanced Standing level include just the specialization coursework in trauma-informed care.

The UNI Advanced Standing program is available both fully on campus and fully online. Students are not able to switch back and forth between the two delivery options. Both program delivery options are full-time and consist of an intensive three semester program plan (summer, fall, & spring). Classes are held one day per week on campus. Field seminar (monthly during fall and spring semesters) may be scheduled outside of that class day but are completed via Zoom and do not require students to attend campus for field seminar.

Students in either MSW Advanced Standing delivery option are able to complete the program part-time, if desired. Students interested in a part-time study should contact the MSW Program Director for a meeting to determine an individualized plan of study.

Structure & Sequence of the Program

UNI's MSW program has a highly structured sequence of coursework. For many students, this provides peace of mind because the structure is laid out for you. MSW students are guaranteed

a seat in all departmental required courses, easing registration anxiety. As long as a student continues to successfully complete courses with the required grade, a student will be on track to graduate in the expected time frame.

Foundation vs. Specialization Coursework

Like our undergraduate BSW program, UNI's MSW Foundation program prepares students in generalist social work skills, knowledge, values, and cognitive and affective processes outlined in the Council on Social Work Education's accreditation standards for social work programs. Generalist social work courses prepare students to work at all levels of social work practice (micro, mezzo, and macro) using a range of prevention and intervention methods. MSW Foundation students complete the Foundation coursework sequence before moving on to Specialization coursework. Advanced Standing students received equivalent generalist coursework as part of their BSW program and do not complete Foundation coursework in the MSW program.

All MSW students complete the Specialization coursework. Specialization coursework encompasses the entire curriculum sequence for Advanced Standing students. Specialization coursework expands on the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes established in generalist coursework. UNI's MSW Specialization coursework has a focus on trauma-informed care at all levels of social work practice.

Extended Enrollment (Part-Time) Option

An option for Extended Enrollment is available to both Advanced Standing and Foundation students, who for a variety of reasons may need to take a reduced course load. Extended enrollment students must be able to attend classes at times offered (3-hour blocks) and be available for the field practicum seminars. Extended-enrollment students must complete all requirements within seven years, per Graduate College requirements. If you are interested in the Extended Enrollment option, please contact the MSW Program Director to develop a plan of study that meets both your needs and complies with university policies.

Electives

All MSW students complete two elective courses (6 credit hours) as part of the MSW program.

MSW students are able to access a wide range of elective options both within the department and across other university department's. The MSW Director will email a list of approved elective options prior to registration. Additional electives not on the approved list may be available. MSW Program Director approval is required for any additional course options and must meet the requirements of being a 5000+ level course as well as applicable to social work practice. Email the MSW Program Director for approval of any such courses.

An [Academic Student Request](#) form (available under the Students drop down menu) is required to be completed for an elective taken outside of the department to load properly (show the requirement was met) within the university advisement plan system. The form is available through the Registrar's Office.

Graduate Research Paper

UNI's MSW Program is a non-thesis degree program, but the Graduate Research Paper serves as the culminating project for UNI's MSW program. MSW students complete the Graduate Research Paper as part of the research two-course sequence. Successful completion of the Graduate Research Paper with a grade of "B" or better is required for graduation.

A grade of B- or below will require revisions of the paper until the satisfactory grade is achieved. Students should be aware that an unsatisfactory grade on the Graduate Research Paper could result in a delay to their expected graduation timeline.

The Graduate Research Paper grade requirement is separate from the course grade for Advanced Social Work Research.

Independent Studies

Independent Studies are rarely approved as curricular options within UNI's Department of Social Work, due to faculty constraints and the lack of remuneration for faculty providing independent studies to students. Independent study opportunities will only be granted in extreme circumstances and must be approved by the Department Head.

Explicit Curriculum

All programs within UNI's Department of Social Work are credentialed through the Council on Social Work Education. CSWE provides competency-based requirements for programs' explicit curriculum through their [Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards](#). The explicit curriculum refers to how social work-specific educational information is designed and delivered, including curriculum design, courses, course content, and field education curriculum. CSWE's EPAS standards include requirements for social work programs to integrate content and principles around anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion through all social work courses.

The CSWE Social Work Competencies incorporated into UNI's MSW curriculum, per accreditation requirements include:

- Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
- Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice
- Competency 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice
- Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice
- Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice
- Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
- Competency 7: Assess with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
- Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
- Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

The Department of Social Work collects outcome data from all required social work classes through standardized signature assignments to help regularly evaluate our curriculum and our student outcomes, based on CSWE's competency requirements.

The Department has a standing MSW Curriculum Committee whose responsibility is to oversee the MSW curriculum and ensure it meets the needs of students and prepares students for contemporary social work practice across all levels of social work practice (micro, mezzo, and macro). Current MSW students are invited to participate as student representative members of the MSW Curriculum Committee. As a department, we are committed to continually working to improve our curriculum to meet the changing needs of the field.

Course Descriptions

All courses offered by the Department of Social Work or cross-listed with other departments are available through [UNI's Academic Catalog](#).

Course Sequence by Program

Full-Time Adv. Standing (On-Campus or Distance Education)

Summer:

- SW6234 Primary & Secondary Trauma (3 hrs)
- SW6249 DSM: Balancing Strengths & Differential Diagnosis (3 hrs)
- Elective (3 hrs)

Fall:

- SW6218 Intro to Social Work Research (3 hrs)
- SW6246 Trauma Informed Practice I (3 hrs)
- SW6236 Diversity & Human Rights (3 hrs)
- SW6268 Advanced Practicum I (3 hrs)
- SW6269 Advanced Practicum Seminar I (2 hrs)

Spring:

- SW6248 Advocacy & Social Justice (3 hrs)
- SW6265 Advanced Social Work Research (3 hrs)
- SW6270 Advanced Practicum II (3 hrs)
- SW 6271 Advanced Practicum Seminar II (2 hrs)
- Elective (3 hrs)

Distance Education Foundation
(The cohort that began in Spring 2025 will be the final cohort on this course sequence)

Spring:

- SW6212 Human Behavior and the Social Environment (3 hrs)
- SW6214 Social Work Practice I (3 hrs)

Summer:

- SW6215 Social Work Practice II (3 hrs)
- SW6278 Social Intervention: Policies & Services (3 hrs)

Fall:

- SW6216 SW practice with Organizations & Communities (3 hrs)
- SW6222 Foundation Practicum I (2 hrs)
- SW6223 Foundation Practicum Seminar I (2 hrs)

Spring:

- SW6224 Foundation Practicum II (2 hrs)
- SW6225 Foundation Practicum Seminar II (2 hrs)
- Elective determined by Department (3 hrs)

Summer:

- SW6234 Primary & Secondary Trauma (3 hrs)
- SW6249 DSM: Balancing Strengths & Differential Diagnosis (3 hrs)

Fall:

- SW6218 Intro to Social Work Research (3 hrs)
- SW6246 Trauma Informed Practice I (3 hrs)

Spring:

- SW6248 Advocacy & Social Justice (3 hrs)
- SW6265 Advanced Social Work Research (3 hrs)

Summer:

- SW6236 Diversity & Human Rights (3 hrs)
- Elective determined by Department (3 hrs)

Fall:

- SW6268 Advanced Practicum I (3 hrs) (sub SW 6266 Advanced Practicum for block placement option; 6 hrs)
- SW6269 Advanced Practicum Seminar I (2 hrs) (sub and SW6267 Advanced Practicum Seminar for block placement option; 4 hrs)

Spring:

- SW6270 Advanced Practicum II (3 hrs)
- SW 6271 Advanced Practicum Seminar II (2 hrs)

Graduate Field Instruction

All full-time and extended enrollment students are required to complete a specified number of hours in the field.

Field instruction is an integral and essential component of Social Work education. It provides a learning experience in a setting where the student has the opportunity to integrate curriculum content, to question the relationship of theory and practice, to develop skills in interpersonal relationships and intervention techniques, to participate in the role of social worker, and to evaluate oneself in that role.

There have been many changes in the profession as the trend in social work is toward greater diversity in roles, settings, methods, and clientele. Field instruction provides learning experiences which will prepare students for a profession that is developing and emerging toward the future. The student is provided with a variety of experiences which foster the development of skills through which they can begin to be a self-directed learner who can work with confidence, exercise independent judgment, and respond to a diversity of roles and responsibilities.

Field Objectives

1. To offer learning experiences which provide the opportunity for students to use and test the trauma informed knowledge and skills derived from the curriculum in learning the professional competencies of generalist and advanced generalist social workers.
2. To provide settings where students can develop the interpersonal and communication skills essential for professional Social Work.
3. To help students test themselves and their commitment to social work values and attitudes, and to evaluate their own preparation for the profession.
4. To prepare students to identify the policies, practices, services, and procedures that interfere with effective delivery of human services and to develop strategies for change.
5. To prepare students to develop the skills and attitudes of a self-directed learner.

Credit and Time Requirement

Foundation Practicum: Foundation students complete a 400-hour generalist field experience. Field requirements and expectations are covered during student orientation. Distance Education students complete their 400-hour placement over the course of two semesters.

Advanced Practicum: Specialization students complete an advanced 500-hour field experience over two semesters. Field requirements and expectations are covered during student orientation. This field placement is completed across both the fall and spring semesters.

Placement Process

Prior to starting the field experience, MSW students must be cleared by the Field Director. Being cleared to participate in the field experience for the program, students must:

- attend a field orientation meeting.
- have their resume reviewed by the UNI Graduate College,

- be in good academic standing (B average; No more than 6 credits with a C; No incompletes in prior courses) and
- communicate with the Director of Field Instruction regarding securing an approved field site.

Additional information about the field experience can be found on the [UNI Department of Social Work's Field Education website](#).

Student-Choice Model of Placement

Some social work programs utilize a placement assignment or matching procedure. This involves the faculty assigning students to placement agencies based on student interests, agency needs, and agency availability. Other programs utilize a student-choice model in which students are responsible for identifying and securing placement options that suit the student's interests and/or needs.

The UNI Department of Social Work utilizes the student-choice model of placement. Established, approved placement sites and agencies are available in the Cedar Valley region, across the state of Iowa, as well as outside of Iowa and possibly internationally.

If a student identifies a site not already partnered with the Department of Social Work, the student should contact the Field Education Director for steps to approve the placement site and assure that the opportunities the site can offer the student align with our program requirements.

The student-choice model can be a rigorous process, and students are highly encouraged to start the search process as soon as possible in order to meet program deadlines.

Additional University Policies & Resources

Student Academic Grievance

The University provides a process for a student to redress an academic grievance. This process is available in [Section 12.01 Student Academic Grievance](#) of the University Policies.

UNI Rob Library

[Rod Library](#) faculty and staff can help you be successful with assignments involving any sort of research, so take advantage of their services.

Each department has a designated librarian to support your needs. Anne Marie Gruber is our liaison librarian for this course. You are encouraged to [schedule an appointment with her](#). She can be reached at anne.gruber@uni.edu or (319) 273-3711. She holds weekly, in-person office hours in McCollum and Sabin Halls, for which you do not need an appointment.

Librarians can help you with:

- Getting started by finding and narrowing a topic/research question.
- Searching for a book, article, or data to support your paper, poster, or other project
- Tips and tricks for finding resources and using library databases and Google efficiently.
- Evaluating search results and sources for the most relevant and reliable sources
- Citing sources and creating your bibliography

You can also [stop by, chat, email, text, or call the library](#) all hours the library is open.

The Learning Center Services

The Learning Center at Rod Library provides free tutoring for a variety of different areas (i.e., writing, math, science, business, Spanish, college reading and learning strategies). The Learning Center at Rod Library is open for walk-in assistance Monday-Thursday 10am-10pm and is free of charge for all UNI students. If you are unavailable during normal tutoring hours, online tutoring is also available through TutorMe. Request access [here](#). For more information, visit [The Learning Center's website](#), email TheLearningCenter@uni.edu, call 319-273-6023, or visit the TLC desk located on the main floor of Rod Library.

In addition, The Office of International Engagement offers free coaching sessions with experienced staff, in-person and online, for international and multilingual students. Students can schedule time with an advisor for in-person assistance or simply walk-in for services during established coaching times at The Learning Center in Rod Library. More information can be found on the [OIE Academic Coaching Website](#).

Student Accessibility Services-Accessibility Statement

The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Fair Housing Act, and other applicable federal and state laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.

Students with disabilities experiencing a barrier to access should connect with [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to request accommodations. SAS views disabilities as an integral part of the rich diversity at UNI and works collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to

create an accessible educational environment for students. UNI faculty are not obligated to provide accommodations for students with disabilities without proper notification from SAS and the student. Students may initiate the accommodation process at any time. However, accommodations are not retroactive, and the process for getting connected takes time. Therefore, SAS staff always recommend that students initiate the process as soon as possible rather than wait for academic and social-emotional responsibilities to become overly stressful and/or overwhelming. For more information about the accommodation process, please contact SAS at (319) 273-2677 Relay 711, accessibilityservices@uni.edu, or GIL 118. Additional information is also available on the [SAS website](#).

UNI Academic Ethics/Discipline Policy

Students at the University of Northern Iowa are required to observe the commonly accepted [standards of academic honesty and integrity](#).

UNI Student Code of Conduct Policy

The university's [student conduct code](#) maintains the principles of respect, honesty, and responsibility to create a safe, healthy environment for members of the campus community while preserving an educational process that is consistent with the mission of the University.

Office of Civil Rights Compliance

Non-discrimination in Employment or Education: Content in this class has the potential to be disturbing to some individuals based on life experiences. If you ever feel the need to step out of the classroom or decline participation in an activity, please request an alternative learning experience.

UNI Policy 13.02 Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct states: "The University is committed to providing a workplace and educational environment, as well as other benefits, programs, and activities, that are free from discrimination and harassment based on a protected class, as well as retaliation."

Policy 13.02 outlines prohibited conduct and reporting processes. All University employees who are aware of or witness discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, or retaliation are required to promptly report to the Title IX Officer or Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

- Title IX Officer Leah Gutknecht, Assistant to the President for Civil Rights Compliance, 117 Gilchrist, 319.273.2846, leah.gutknecht@uni.edu

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources at civilrights.uni.edu. Resources that provide free, confidential counseling are also detailed at civilrights.uni.edu.

For additional information, contact the Office of Civil Rights Compliance, 117 Gilchrist Hall, 273-2846, civilrights@uni.edu.

UNI Student Health Clinic

016 Student Health Center
(319) 273-2009

General Medical Care, Routine Health Exams, Injury Evaluations, Immunizations, Coordination of Care for Chronic Medical Issues, Resource Nurse, Psychiatric Services, Travel Consultations, Allergy Injections, Lab Testing, Sexual Transmitted Disease (STD) Testing, Eating Disorders Management, Women's Health Services, Pharmacy

Counseling Center

103 Student Health Center

(319) 273-2676

Mental health counseling, assessment, referral, groups, workshops, consultations.

Student Wellness Service

(319)273-2311

Student Wellness Services provides outcome-based health education programming, services and resources to meet the health and wellness needs of our unique student population based on the UNI National College Health Assessment. The office offers wellness coaching, wellness workshops, as well as health education and screenings.

Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence Support

There is free, confidential help on campus available to students who have been sexually assaulted or have been or are victims of physical/emotional abuse, stalking or harassment. For help and assistance due to sexual assault, contact the Riverview Center at (563) 231-1285. Additionally, 24-hour Sexual Assault Support is available at (888) 557-0310. 24-hr Relationship Violence Support is available at (800) 208-0388. Additional resources may be found at safety.uni.edu.

Panther Pantry

The Panther Pantry strives to ensure that every UNI student is able to get their basic food and necessity needs met. They offer both perishable and nonperishable items for any currently enrolled UNI student facing food insecurity. More information can be found on their website: www.pantherpantry.uni.edu. Lower Level Maucker Union, Open Monday-Wednesday 12:30-4:00 and Thursday 2:30-6:00