



THE GUIDE TO LAUNCHING YOUR CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK:

How an MSW Makes it Possible



Table of Contents

- 4** **What's the Difference Between an MSW and a BSW?**
- 6** **What's the Value of an MSW?**
- 8** **Career Outlook: A Comprehensive Look at Jobs in Social Work**
- 13** **How to Land a Job As a Social Work Professional**
- 15** **Baylor's Master of Social Work Program**
- 16** **How One Baylor Alumnus Began His Career in Social Work:
An Interview with Zeke Morgan**
- 19** **Connect with Us**

About this Resource

Starting a career is full of different thoughts and emotions: *Will I like the work? Will I find it fulfilling? Challenging? Will it live up to my expectations? Am I prepared for this career?*

Chances are, you have chosen a career in social work because of your deep-seated passion for helping people. As you probably know from your time in undergraduate studies, your field placement experiences, your volunteer work, and your other encounters with the social work profession, social work requires dedication, empathy, and an unwavering desire to make a difference in the lives of others.

To ensure a successful career in social work these professionals need each of these traits, as well as a strong educational background and extensive hands-on experience both in and outside of the classroom. A Master of Social Work (MSW) degree is the best possible training for future social work professionals.

In this digital resource, we explore the difference between a graduate and undergraduate social work degree and the value and return-on-investment an MSW offers. We will also explore the career outlook for this profession and take a look at both a short-term and long-term career plan for those who want to launch a career as a social work professional. If your goal is to begin a career in social work, this guide offers you everything you need to get started!



What's the Difference Between an MSW and a BSW?

Your Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree is an excellent foundation for social work practice, client relationships, and professional success. However, to truly stand out in the field and gain the skills and experience necessary to become a leader and make a significant impact in the field — a master's degree is needed.

Although the subject matter is the same, there are several differences between a bachelor's and master's degree program. Here are four areas in which a master's degree offers you a competitive edge.

- 1. More advanced specialized coursework** — A bachelor's degree in social work is designed to cover generalized introductory principles of social work. In an undergraduate program, students must fulfill the university's core coursework requirements, in addition to several introductory social work courses and electives. At the master's level students take specialized practice courses, which challenge them to dive deeper into their discipline.
- 2. Specialize in one area** — Undergraduate students receive one, maybe two classes within specialized areas, but because of the breadth of information that must be conveyed there is not an opportunity to go into depth. During a master's degree program students are able to focus on their specialization and concentration of choice. Graduate students work with faculty and professors to become experts in their particular field of social work and develop highly specialized skills that will serve them in their professional practice.



[Watch Now to learn more about Clinical Practice Specialization](#)

3. Additional time in a field placement — Social work students receive some hands-on training in a field placement or field education program, but these experiences are at the core of social work practice and expertise. Students in an MSW program double the number of field hours they participate in over the course of their education and are exposed to more advanced specialized settings. This additional training is invaluable in professional practice.



Watch Now: View our recorded session to hear from our Field Team about our unique internship process and how you can secure a high-quality placement

4. Smaller classes — (aka more personalized attention and guidance from professors) Some of the classes during your undergraduate degree were probably full lecture halls, packed with 100 plus students. Other courses had 30-40 students in them. In a master's program, class sizes are generally much smaller with between 10-20 students. This means that you have more face-time with professors and are more likely to receive individualized guidance during your degree.



What's the Value of an MSW?

The field of social work is about relationships. It is about making a concrete difference in the lives of those you help. If you want the greatest success rates and the best possible chance of saving the life of the individual you are working with — you can't just wing it.

You need training, experience, and tools. An MSW provides you with the expertise you need to confidently face hard problems every day and resolve them using scientifically developed and tested methods, along with your innate empathy for others.

A bachelor's degree is the minimum needed to begin a career in social work practice. Beyond the increase in pay, job opportunities, and career promotion potential, those who have earned their graduate degree in social work are also better equipped to meet the needs of those they serve and experience greater job satisfaction because of it.

It is hard to put a value on this type of training, but experienced social workers recognize it every day when it helps them to do their job well. Read on to learn what returns you can expect to see from investing in your graduate education.

Read Now: Pursuing your MSW is a significant investment, so is it worth it?



The ROI of an MSW

Returning to school for a graduate degree is like any other investment, you should evaluate if the return you will get is worth your time, energy, and money. While this is a personal decision and affects everyone differently depending on your career goals, it is well documented that a bachelor's degree is becoming akin to a [high school diploma](#). This means employers are increasingly seeking out those with graduate degrees.

With a Master of Social Work degree, here are a few of the many returns you will receive on your degree investment:

1. In-depth training — With additional advanced coursework and extra field placement hours, a graduate degree provides you with the training you need to successfully manage your caseload and help your clients.

2. Advanced levels of licensure — You can become licensed to practice with only your BSW, but [three levels of advanced licensure*](#) are available to those who earn a master's degree. This additional training and demonstration of expertise add value to your degree.

**Depending on the state*

3. More and better job opportunities — An advanced degree opens you up to numerous additional job opportunities and will also set you apart from your competition when you apply for those jobs.

4. Higher salary — On average, those who hold an MSW earn [\\$13,000 more per year](#) than those who hold a BSW.

5. Greater job security — With additional education, training, field experience, and subject-matter expertise, when budget cuts come, your value stands out and you are less likely to be let go.

Career Outlook: A Comprehensive Look at Jobs in Social Work

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the social work profession is projected to grow much faster than average (12 percent increase) between 2020-2030. Over 100,000 new jobs are expected to be added to the already large number of social workers in the United States.

Within specific social work sectors, there are even higher projected increases in the number of jobs. The BLS projects that the following areas of practice will experience the greatest growth in the coming years:



DISCOVER WHAT DO

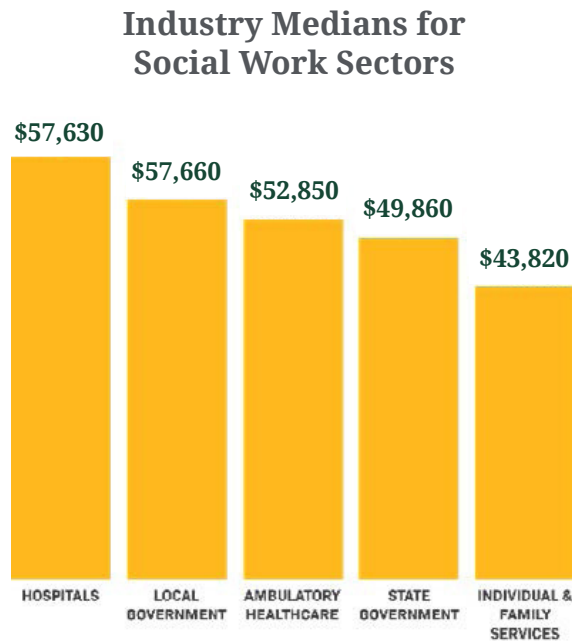
— social workers —

DO?

Social workers fill many different roles and responsibilities. Explore this unique and multifaceted discipline with endless career opportunities.

[ACCESS THE GUIDE →](#)

In 2020, the median pay for social workers was \$51,760, however, the salary ranges for social work professionals vary depending on the industry. Here are the industry medians for five different social work sectors:



Graduates of an MSW program, especially those holding licenses, are eligible for the top-earning positions within various social work areas. Aside from the most common areas of social work practice (child, family and school, healthcare, mental health, and substance abuse) the following other sectors offer competitive wages to those with graduate experience:

- Federal Government — \$75,820
- Agencies, Brokerages, and Other Insurance Activities — \$72,450
- Insurance Carriers — \$67,800
- Offices of Other Health Practitioners (private practice) — \$67,520
- General Medical and Surgical Hospitals — \$64,900

3 Reasons Why Now Is a Great Time to Choose the Social Work Profession

There are many reasons to choose the social work profession. Often, their personal stories and motivations for entering the field are what make social workers the best at their jobs. It is their passion for justice, equality, dignity, and health for all that moves them to face hard situations with courage and push through difficult circumstances to find a resolution.

Society is in need of competent, passionate social workers. Social workers are instrumental in solving problems such as the growing number of adults in prison and the large volume of cases being handled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services relating to child abuse and neglect.

Here are three reasons NOW is a great time to be a social worker.

A growing number of jobs means job security.

With 715,600 jobs reported in 2020 by the BLS and more than 100,000 jobs projected to be added in the coming decade, the job market for social work professionals is growing to meet the needs of society. The social work profession already has a low unemployment rate, at 2.3 percent, but earning an MSW will contribute to your job security by making you an experienced and sought after candidate.



100K JOBS
in the next decade

The intersection of technology and social work practice offers a fascinating future.

Like all other industries, the prevalence of cutting-edge technology is forcing each discipline to respond. Not only is it important to look at the impact of technology in the life of the client, but an exciting emerging discipline is the convergence of social work practice and evidence-based methods affected by technology. Leaders in this area are asking — how can technology be used to help solve problems within systems and the problems of specific clients?

People need help, now.

As of 2018, 38.1 percent of Americans lived below the poverty line. The wealth gap in the US has become so egregious that the richest 5 percent of Americans own two-thirds of the wealth. In any given year, approximately 20 percent of the US population is affected by mental illness. 11.4 million individuals misused prescription opioids and 2.1 had a use disorder. People need help and they need it now. Trained social work professionals are in the best position to help these vulnerable populations.

11.4M INDIVIDUALS
misused prescription opioids - people need help
and they need it now



Your Short-term and Long-term Career Plan

*What kind of careers can you expect with a graduate degree in social work?
What are the most common jobs for social workers right out of grad school?
What jobs can I work toward throughout my professional career?*

These are three of the most common questions graduate students ask about their career trajectory. Here is a quick look at the types of first, mid-level, and late-career social work jobs you could hold.

First Job

Right out of graduate school, first-time social workers are eager to jump into practice and begin working with clients. Professionals are able to dive into their specializations and put into practice the skills they have been honing throughout their studies.

Common Careers Include — Group Home Worker, Substance Abuse Counselor, Mental Health Worker, Program Coordinators or Directors

Average Entry-Level Salary — \$47,721 (September 2021)

Mid-Level Career

Mid-way into your social work career, professionals can expect to be juggling large caseloads and often found in management positions within their organization. They are frequently engaged in furthering education for their specialization to maintain their qualifications and advance their career.

Common Careers Include — Clinical Social Worker, Medical Social Worker, Social Work Supervisor, Adolescent Case Manager

Average Mid-Level Salary — \$54,805 (September 2021)

Late Career

At this stage in their career, professionals with decades of social work experience earn managerial or senior case-officer status. These jobs remove them from day-to-day interactions with clients and require them to make high-level decisions, assigning subordinates to cases and overseeing entire operations.

Common Careers Include — Case Load Manager, Director of Community Outreach, Chair - Department of Social Work, Regional Coordinator of Social Services

Average Late-Career Salary — \$61,949 (September 2021)

How to Land a Job As a Social Work Professional

Finding a job is usually as much about who you know as it is what you know. Throughout your graduate degree program, it is important to build and maintain professional relationships with professors, instructors, faculty, and anyone else you connect with in the industry. When you graduate and it comes time to search for a job, these professional relationships and connections will offer you a launching point for your search.

Networking is the practice of connecting with other individuals over common or shared interests and passions. Frequently, professional networking is how students find their first, or subsequent, job out of college. A great place to network is at events such as lectures, seminars, symposiums, continuing education opportunities, and conferences put on by social work organizations. Organizations like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) frequently host both national and regional events.

For more information on networking events specifically in Texas, check out NASW's Texas chapter.

Networking is not the only way to find a job. In addition to searching through online listings and setting up informational interviews, you can join professional associations. Popular associations include the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA). These associations offer you resources, events, and furthering education opportunities that will help you in your job search. You can also look for a professional association that is dedicated to your specific area of work.

Resources to Help You Stay Up-to-Date

In addition to joining a professional organization and networking, you should also stay up-to-date on the latest trends and developments in the industry. Continuing your education, in both formal and informal ways, will help you in your professional practice. Here are a few online publications and resources for social work professionals:

Blogs

- [Advocacy in Action](#)
- [Stuck on Social Work](#)
- [Social Work Career](#)
- [Social Work Helper](#)
- [Social Justice Solutions](#)

Newsletters

- [Social Work Today](#)
- [School Social Work](#)



Baylor's Master of Social Work Program

At the [Diana R. Garland School of Social Work](#) at Baylor University, we believe that social work is about service and justice, healing and restoration, and the dignity of each individual. We strive to train and equip social work professionals to evaluate, diagnose, treat, and support the needs of their clients through the ethical integration of faith and practice. We have built an evidence-based, research-centered program that encourages students to dive into social work practice, through field placement experiences and classes led by expert faculty with years of experience in the field.

EXPLORE Baylor's MSW PROGRAM

For more information on Baylor's residential MSW program in Waco, TX explore our resource, Master of Social Work — The MBA of the Helping Professions.

[ACCESS THE GUIDE →](#)

Field Placements Available Through Baylor University

Field placements are arguably one of the most important pieces of your social work degree program and professional preparation. At the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, we have a [department](#) specifically dedicated to helping our students with their field internships.

Our team has a process for placing students in internships, which takes into consideration the students interests and the best possible fit. Our team is dedicated to making this process a unique and valuable experience for each student. Every student enrolled in the MSW program will work directly with a dedicated field supervisor and liaison throughout their field experience.

[Watch Now: View our recorded session to hear from our Field Team about our unique internship process and how you can secure a high-quality placement.](#)

When compared to other schools, Baylor offers the best options for field placements. Our field placement opportunities are with the most sought after organizations in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Central Texas. To ensure this, Baylor provides continuous training for all of our field placement sites and maintains close connections to ensure a quality placement for every student.

Check out this [list of field placement opportunities](#). It is not an all-inclusive list, but it does provide a small sample size of the agencies we currently work with or have worked with in the past. If you would like more information about additional field placement opportunities or a specific opportunity within Baylor's surrounding community — please reach out and ask us!

How One Baylor Alumnus Began His Career in Social Work: An Interview with Zeke Morgan

Where are you from? Where and what did you study during your undergraduate years?

I am originally from Keller, TX. I got my B.S. in Psychology at Abilene Christian University. I originally chose psychology because I wanted to be a behavioral analyst for the FBI. I realized that wasn't what I wanted to do the summer before my senior year, so I went scrambling for post-grad plans.



What initially sparked your interest in social work?

I took Introduction to Social Work the fall of my senior year as an easy elective, but very quickly fell in love with the variety of professional possibilities available with a single degree. Since I was looking for post-grad plans, I began looking at what I could do with an MSW and really became passionate about the idea of bridging community development with real estate development, especially in the realm of downtown development. When I found out Baylor had a joint MSW/MBA program it seemed like a great way to be able to “speak the language” of both the non-profit organizations and the businesses trying to make it in the downtowns of America.

Did you encounter any challenges or fears when deciding to launch your career in social work?

A big fear of mine was that what I wanted to do was not something many agencies or organizations are doing. In the words of one of my fellow MBA candidates, it is “a pretty niche market.” What I had to overcome and realize is that just because it isn’t a job title, doesn’t mean the work is not there. I quickly learned that having the understanding provided by my post-grad education touches most agencies and provides depth in understanding how to best implement programs.

How did you hear about the MSW program at Baylor and what specific features attracted you to this program when you were looking at graduate schools?

My cousin graduated from Baylor’s MSW program in ‘09, and whenever I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, she was able to ask good questions and frame my passions in academic areas that might be of interest to me. The fact that the Garland School of Social Work (GSSW) is located downtown and is plugged into the community ended up being one of the major factors in my decision and highlighted that the school practices what it teaches.

What did you enjoy most about the program at Baylor?

One of the best parts of my time in the program is the lifelong friendships that I have developed. In addition to the friends I made during the program, I have also been connected with so many alumni in the Waco area after graduation. There is an immediate understanding and camaraderie that is rooted in common experiences, projects, and conversations that the MSW program offers.

Describe your experience searching for, applying for, and pursuing a job in social work. What aspects of your education specifically assisted you in this process?

I spent most of my time looking for jobs in the private sector because I thought I wanted to make a lot of money. While I would still love to make a lot of money, I realized that many of the jobs that I was applying to were not going to make me happy and did not hold purpose for me. It was through a conversation with an MSW alum, that I started to look at local non-profit jobs. I actually found my current job through the GSSW’s job board. I was looking for the “perfect” job, instead of looking for the job that I was perfect for. Finding a job is hard, but it is worth the time and effort to find the right one.

Tell us about your first job as a social worker. How did it compare to your expectations?

The thing that is sometimes hard to understand about grad school, is that it teaches you transferable skills. That means that the first few months of any job involves a lot of on-the-job training — which took me by surprise. It was only after feeling slightly overwhelmed that I looked back and saw that a lot of the skills that I was being taught, were the very same skills that I had learned, just dressed a little differently. Even though I grew tired of the self-reflection and logs in grad school, it was only when I took the time to do that in my job that I found my strengths and understood what I had actually learned. Once I came to that realization, my job became a lot easier and I began to see the places where I could immediately contribute.

What are your career dreams or plans? How has the MSW program at Baylor helped prepare you for your future?

As someone who is a big-time planner, it feels weird to say that right now I don't have any concrete career dreams or plans. I've recognized that I want to create and build solid, healthy communities, but that can look like several different things. Mainly, I want to continue to put myself in new experiences to learn and grow, and what I do for work is only a small part of that. The MSW program helped me realize that no matter what is on your plate, the deadlines you have, or how slow/fast your to-do list is growing, there are people and community to be built outside of that. Your job can contribute to this sense of community and personal growth, but it doesn't have to. Don't let your job define you or what you can contribute to those that you love.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Grad school is the most fun that you never want to have again. It's challenging, frustrating, rewarding, and confusing all at the same time. In between the papers, presentations, projects, and pots of coffee, remember to take time to be thankful. It's easy to grow impatient and frustrated with your experience, but in reality, you are getting to experience something incredibly unique and powerful. Remember to be thankful when times are tough, and the times won't feel as tough anymore.

Connect with us

When starting a new career, it is important to make a plan and identify all the resources you need to realize your goal. Launching a career can often leave us with lots of questions, but we hope this guide will answer some of those and assist you as you begin your career as a social worker. If you have any other questions, we invite you to contact us and let us help you jump start your career in this noble profession. We are excited to hear from you!



**Connect
with Us**



**Book
a Meeting**



**Watch a Recorded
Webinar**



**Explore Baylor's
MSW Program**



**Discover What Social
Workers Do**

GET APPLICATION ADVICE

APPLY NOW