

UK CERH Social Work Programs: History & Employment Outlook

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History

The University of Kentucky (UK) began to offer off-campus programs to the Commonwealth in 1975 under Ronda Connaway, the second dean of the College of Social Professions (COSP)—which became the College of Social Work (COSW) in 1980 (UK COSW, 2016). Dean Connaway's vision was to expand the program to provide advance-degreed social workers based on student, employer and community demand (College History, 2016).

Authorized by the General Assembly, UK operated 14 community colleges in Kentucky under the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) (Gilmore, 2003). This allowed the COSW all of the resources available to the university as it sought to extend its programs. In 1996, the Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children approached UK with data indicating a shortage and need for Master of Social Work (MSW) level social workers (UK COSW, 1998). Those central to the state's work with children and families, such as Viola Miller, Secretary of Families and Children, and Donna Harmon, Commissioner of the Cabinet for Families and Children, advocated for community health education staff in the area (UK COSW, 1998). At the time, only one MSW was employed by the Department of Social Services in the five-county area around Prestonsburg (UK COSW, 1998). Yet, the Department for Social Services had set a goal for all supervisors to possess a Master's degree in Social Work within five to ten years in order to increase the employment standard and education for their social services workers (UK COSW, 1998). In order to meet this goal, the need for accredited educational opportunities in a reasonable proximity to those with a desire to learn was critical.

In December 1997, UK's COSW, directed by Dean Edgar L. Sagan, submitted a proposal to the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) for an

off-campus MSW program at the PCC campus (UK COSW, 1998). This proposal was deferred on February 15, 1998 pending additional information; the COSW complied with a supplement submitted in April 1998 (UK COSW, 1998). Their proposal was approved by the accreditation council the same year that the former Chair of the Commission on Accreditation, Dr. Kay Hoffman, was appointed the next Dean of the COSW—effective July 1, 1998 (College History, 2016).

The Southeast Kentucky Master of Social Work (SEKY MSW) Program's major objective was to provide a graduate social work program to the Appalachian region of Prestonsburg and the five surrounding counties—Magoffin, Johnson, Martin, Pike, and Knott (UK CERH, 1998). The program would address workforce needs in a community located deep in the eastern Appalachian mountain area of Kentucky, one of the most economically depressed areas in the state with high levels of poverty, unemployment, a high percentage of persons on welfare and a high incidence of health and health-related problems, including spouse and child abuse (Mills, 2005). The program concentrated on family and children with students completing an initial three year, 60-hour group curriculum model that allowed for simultaneous teaching of students on UK's main campus in Lexington and Prestonsburg (UK COSW, 1998).

The SEKY MSW Program had sixteen students completed a thesis to finish the program in 1999; the second cohort graduated 28 MSWs. Having molded students into social workers who could advance quickly into positions such as administrators, supervisors, and advanced practitioners in the rural communities of Eastern Kentucky, Southeast Ohio and West Virginia (Robinson et al., 2002). By 2002, the COSW began to offer the MSW program at the UK Center for Rural Health located at old Appalachian Regional Hospital in Hazard, KY. The program was designed for working students to attend part-time.

In March 2004, the SEKY MSW Program moved to a new location in Hazard, the UK Center of Excellence in Rural Health (UK CERH), and upgraded their classrooms and educational abilities significantly. This provided students with access to exceptional resources aimed to encourage their academic excellence. Students had access to advanced technology, state of the art ITV classrooms, an on-site IT department, and contemporary student study areas (UK, 2016).

The UK CERH is legislatively mandated (KRS 164.937) to promote “the improvement of rural health care systems through education, research, and service”. Ensuring the adequacy of health professionals through workforce needs assessments and creating educational opportunities for needed health professionals are two ways that can help the Center meet this goal. After a workforce analysis in 2012 identified a significant need for greater access to social work undergraduate education in the Hazard area, the UK COSW Curriculum Committee approved the expansion of the SEKY MSW Program to include a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) degree (UK, 2016). The COSW Faculty and Dean of the College, Dr. James ‘Ike’ Adams, approved the proposal on November 19, 2012 (Off-campus Programs, 2016). The (BASW) program filled a gap made when Eastern Kentucky University discontinued their program in the area (Badger, 2013). The addition of undergraduate education opportunities provided a bridge to higher education in our Appalachian communities in rural Eastern Kentucky. Hazard students complete their general education and pre-major requirements with the KCTCS, which takes 61 credit hours (Badger, 2013). BASW students then transfer to UK to complete their full-major BASW classes (Badger, 2013). The curriculum and student learning outcomes for the Hazard campus are the same as those employed in the Lexington campus BASW program (Badger,

2013). The curriculum provides learning opportunities in areas of policy, ethics, theory, and research, as well as field experience.

The SEKY BASW Program offers the Public Child Welfare Certification Program (PCWCP) at their Hazard location to full-major BASW students. These students have a solid commitment to the work of public child welfare services (UK CERH, 2016). This program helps to prepare graduates for employment in Kentucky's public child welfare services. For those interested in a career with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, PCWCP is an invaluable option for students obtaining their undergraduate degree in social work.

Master level students are offered certificates in the following areas of concentration: gerontology, developmental disabilities, school social work, and military behavioral health (UK, 2016). The SEKY MSW program aids in community development in numerous ways, but over the years, research has become more central. Students in the program complete research programs aimed at evaluating program outcomes to better services for clients and effectivity of agencies in their missions.

Employment Outlook

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook reports, overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 16 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average for all occupations. Increased demand for healthcare and social services will drive demand for social workers, but growth will vary by specialization. From 2016 to 2016 employment of child, family, and school social workers is projected to grow 14 percent; employment of healthcare social workers is projected to grow 20 percent; and employment of mental health and substance abuse social workers is projected to grow 19 percent.

Occupational Title	Employment, 2016	Projected Employment, 2026	Change, 2016-26	
			Percent	Numeric
Social workers	682,100	791,800	16	109,700
Child, family, and school social workers	317,600	362,600	14	45,000
Healthcare social workers	176,500	212,000	20	35,400
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	123,900	147,900	19	23,900
Social workers, all other	64,000	69,300	8	5,300

The largest employers of social workers are as follows:

	Percent
Individual and family services	18
State government, excluding education and hospitals	14
Ambulatory healthcare services	13
Local government, excluding education and hospitals	13
Hospitals; state, local, and private	12

These increases are a result of demands on the various systems to provide services to a growing number of clients. Kentucky Labor Market Information reports that social work jobs are particularly favorable for those specializing in aging populations, substance abuse treatment or working in rural areas. Employment opportunities in rural areas are favorable as it is often difficult to attract and retain qualified staff.

Conclusion

As of May 6, 2018, UK's SEKY campus at UK CERH has graduated 29 undergraduate level social workers and 235 graduate level social workers. Four of the UK CERH BASW alumni have went on to graduate from the MSW program. The COSW is a leader in off-campus programming, aiding those students who may not have the option to move to Lexington and attend classes full-time. The off-campus programs are designed for those in the Commonwealth

who are employed full-time and need a student-friendly educational program. Educators at the program assist students in the work-life-educational balance, modeling students into social workers who can advance quickly in their chosen fields and add immeasurably to the Commonwealth.

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