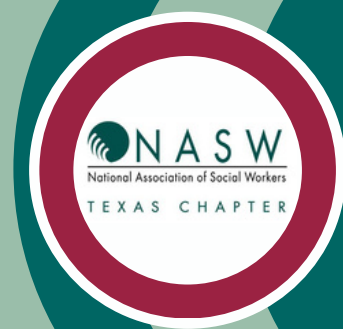


Compensating Social Work Student Practicums

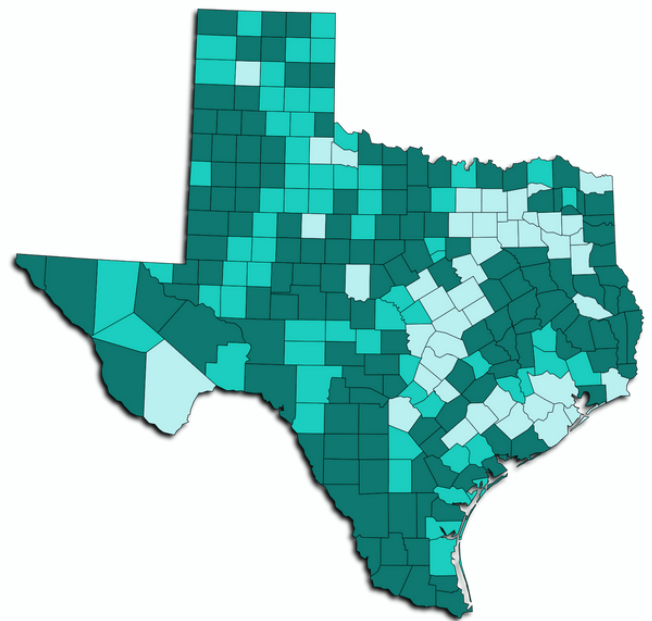


Background

Social work practicums/internships are uniquely intense 400–550-hour internships required for bachelor's and master's students. These students deliver necessary community services, including healthcare, education, criminal justice, immigration, and child welfare. The social service organizations hosting interns are often underfunded, and field sites are generally unable to provide compensation. Students are often obligated to take on additional debt, compromising their employment stability, academic achievement, family responsibilities, and mental and physical health.

This issue has resulted in stunted workforce development for social work in Texas and contributes to the measurable shortage of professional social workers and mental health providers nationwide. To address this issue, many states have created practicum compensation programs.

Federally Designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas⁴



Mental Health Area HPSAs (HPSA Score)

- Severe Shortage Area (14-25)
- Moderate Shortage Area (1-13)
- Non-Shortage Area

Key Statistics

83% of social work students are employed outside their practicum, with 45% employed for 30 or more hours per week¹

70% of bachelor's graduates and 73% of master's graduates have educational debt²

By 2030, Texas is anticipated to have a social worker deficit of 33,835 professionals, which is in the top five most severe social work shortages projected for 2030³

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Compensating Social Work Student Practicums



Increasing Need for Compensation

The rising cost of living has significantly impacted social work students, as evidenced by a 2023 survey conducted among students at UT Austin. The survey revealed that four out of five students expressed distress regarding their ability to meet monthly expenses⁵. This financial strain discourages prospective students from entering the field, exacerbating the existing shortage of social workers and mental health providers in Texas.



Legislative History

NASW-TX introduced HB 4678 during the 88th Legislature, which would have established the Social Work Intern Practicum Stipend Program (SWIPS).

SWIPS would have instituted a social work recruitment and retention program with stipend funds overseen by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to be distributed to eligible undergraduate and graduate-level social work students as compensation for their 400–550 hour practicum.

Under the proposed SWIPS Program, students would have been awarded:

- **\$6,000 for 400 hours of supervised Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to \$15 per hour.**
- **\$9,000 for 450 hours of supervised Master of Social Work (MSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to \$20 per hour.**

Priority consideration would be given to students who:

- Qualify for need-based aid based on FAFSA indicators.
- Complete practicums in Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA) designated by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

[1] Benner, K., & Curl, A.L. (2018). Exhausted, Stressed, and Disengaged: Does Employment Create Burnout for Social Work Students? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54.

[2] Council on Social Work Education. (2021). 2020 statistics on social work education in the United States. <https://www.cswe.org/Research-Statistics/Research-Briefs-and-Publications/2020-Annual-Statistics-on-Social-Work-Education>

[3] Lin, V. W., Lin, J., & Xiaoming Zhang. (2016). U.S. Social Worker Workforce Report Card: Forecasting Nationwide Shortages. *Social Work*, 61(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv047>

[4] Map generated from HRSA data: Health Resources & Services Administration (2022). HPSA Finder. <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

[5] Stark, Sam. "UT social work students to protest unpaid field placements." KXAN Austin. April 7, 2023. Accessed March 1, 2024. <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/ut-social-work-students-to-protest-unpaid-field-placements/>

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