

## Testimony Supporting a 400 Hour Minimum requirement for the SWTC Internship

Good morning. My name is Emily Hynek and I am a senior social work major from UW-Eau Claire. I am currently in the process of doing a 480-hour internship at the National Association of Social Workers-WI Chapter. After I satisfactorily complete this internship, I will graduate with a Bachelor of Social Work degree. I also need to take a state jurisprudence exam and a national social work exam. After passing both those tests and receiving my certification, I will then be able to call myself a social worker.

This is the route my fellow B.S.W. students and I think everybody should take to become a social worker. But, according to current law, it is not the only way.

I could be called a social worker right now. For a short time, I pursued a major in psychology. Had I stayed with that major instead of switching to social work, I would have already graduated, since there are fewer required classes. After graduation, I could have applied for a social work training certificate. This nifty little thing would let me call myself a social worker just because of a degree in psychology and a stated intent to take classes to learn how to be a “real” social worker. In the meantime, that title is all mine. Sure, I would be in a supervised internship or employment placement, but the reality is that I would be practicing my newly and barely learned skills on innocent, needy clients. I could be practicing them on your children, your parents, or even you. Better yet, in an employment situation, I’d be getting paid to try out these skills. Don’t you feel like you’re in good hands?

Social work is a profession that often gets a bad rap when it is not practiced correctly, and my classmates and I cannot understand how someone can practice it correctly without a thorough background rooted in a comprehensive education and a substantial school-monitored field placement. A love of people and a true desire to help are noble qualities and certainly desired in a social worker, but they are not enough to ensure proper practice. A breadth of knowledge and repeatedly practiced skills are necessary components of social work.

At UW-Eau Claire, social work is a comprehensive major. This means that the classes that the social work department feels are absolutely necessary for its students to take account for so many credit hours that it is not necessary to also complete a minor. Besides actual social work classes, B.S.W. students are

required to fulfill the general education requirements of the university by taking certain courses deemed the most beneficial to us as social work students.

To comply with the requirements of a training certificate, the holder must complete twelve credits of social work coursework: one social policy class, one human behavior and the social environment class, and two practice classes. Twelve credits equal one semester, and most college students would call it a “lazy” semester. You cannot graduate in four years only taking twelve credits at a time. Taking such a small number of credits in an area also eliminates chances to learn through repetition. I will admit that there were concepts I did not completely comprehend in, say, my history of social welfare class. But, when I had the same professor for my class on social policy, and the topic came up again, it clicked for me. The same has been true in unrelated classes. Things you learn about in one class are applied in another. Being part of a social work program is wonderful because the professors are aware of what everyone else is teaching and can integrate the concepts so we see how everything we are learning fits into the wider practice of social work. When a concept is repeatedly emphasized across a variety of courses, the chances that one of those times it will make sense for you and then stick in your head greatly increase. Cramming everything you need to know into one semester’s worth of coursework means it is much less likely to be repeated, understood, and retained.

The internship is like the ultimate class where you get to take everything you have learned in the classroom and apply it. The courses we take are necessary because you cannot apply what you have not learned, but what you have learned is useless if you cannot apply it. So, at the end of our undergraduate careers, UWEC students fulfill a department-approved 480-hour internship complete with weekly seminar and faculty liaison. It does matter what you have done up until now. You had to have the stuff to get to this point. You had to learn the fundamentals, perform well enough to be accepted into the B.S.W. program, and practice, practice, practice. But, all of that preliminary work is useless if you cannot take the theory and practice sessions and apply them in real-world, unscripted, answers-aren’t-in-the-back-of-the-book kind of situations. Our internship experience is extensive, although many students will tell you even 480 hours is not enough to get a grip on everything we need to know. An internship of that many hours allows for the slow starts some agencies prefer. It provides the chance to encounter as many different situations as possible so we learn how to deal with them. It gives us the opportunity to begin by wading in and learning the basics of practicing social work properly while still lasting long enough for us to get all the way into the deep end of practice as the semester closes.

When the World Series is tied at three games apiece, it is unlikely that a manager is going to head down to the local ballpark and pick up a Little Leaguer

to be that evening's pinch hitter. It wouldn't make sense. When something important is on the line, it isn't practical to depend on somebody with minimal background in an area. Obviously, a Little League player would know the basics of baseball, but it takes a lot more practice and exposure to the game before he's ready for the big time. In social work, the welfare of our clients is the "something important" on the line, and a social worker with just a few social work courses under the belt and a brief internship is nothing more than Little League. We cannot rely on a lucky bat in social work. Successfully helping clients depends on plenty of practice in the field.

The clients social workers see are often referred to as populations-at-risk. Whether they voluntarily seek services or not, there is something about clients that makes them vulnerable in some way to an extent that outside help is necessary. While I agree that more social workers are necessary to meet the needs of everyone who would benefit from social work services, those social workers need to be qualified. As much as I applaud the willingness and desire of graduates with psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and other human services degrees to join the social work field, it is not enough for them to simply take a crash course in social work and head out into the field where they represent themselves as members of our profession. While I'm sure that some of them prove to be quite competent and do help people, the training simply is not as thorough as a social work student's is, and the risk of harming clients is too great. Those who truly want to provide service by being a social worker should be dedicated enough to put in the effort for a Bachelors or Masters of Social Work degree. It is worth it to benefit practitioners, the profession as a whole, and most importantly, our clients, who trust us to know how to help them in the best way possible.

I wouldn't want a doctor with one semester of medical courses and such a brief internship under his belt to operate on my family because he had degree in chemistry and that was deemed enough background to let him claim to be a doctor. I wouldn't want my family to be the clients of a social worker with similar credentials. Social work is a rigorous helping profession and practitioners must have the proper type and amount of education and skills. When only a few social work classes are taken, a lengthy internship becomes even more critical.

I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a social work student or practitioner who thinks 400 hours is enough time to properly prepare someone to be a social worker, especially someone who hasn't gone through a B.S.W. program at an accredited university. Still, I believe I speak on behalf of all social work students when I insist that there must be a minimum requirement of at LEAST 400 hours for the internship of the social work training certificate. It is necessary to protect

not only the integrity of the profession in which we've chosen to invest ourselves but also to protect the clients to whom we are dedicated.

Ineffective social workers risk doing great harm to their clients and waste time and resources. It benefits everyone to require a 400-hour minimum field placement. Please, take this small step to safeguard the welfare of our state's children, elderly, and most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.