MSW Community Project Handbook

For Students, Community Partners, and Faculty

Master of Social Work Program

Humboldt State University

2021-2022

Contents

I. Introduction and Overview

The vision and origin of the MSW Community Projects is a direct result from on-going engagement and feedback between the HSU Social Work Department and our valued community partners in how to best serve our rural and Indigenous communities. From the expressed unmet needs by our community partners, and the HSU Social Work Department's responsibility to be responsive and accountable, came the evolution of the MSW Community Projects. The MSW Community Projects provide an opportunity for agencies and communities to partner with graduate students to build capacity in ways that they may not otherwise have the financial or human resources to do. Simultaneously, the projects are a way for graduate students to engage in reciprocal professional relationships that give back to the agencies and communities that nurture, mentor, and support their professional development and building of leadership practice. As learners in any community, we have a responsibility to give back to the community and leave our spaces of learning better than how we came into them. This means that in our project work we must have an understanding and pay respect to the efforts and vision of those who came before us (historical context), while also honoring the efforts and vision of those who will be coming after us (sustainability). This also means that in our project work we must always be respectful of place and engage in our practice from a place of humility. This is being a good guest, and part of our responsibility as helpers and humans.

What is the MSW Community Project?

The MSW Project is a sustainable, practice-based, service-learning opportunity for student leadership, creativity, self-direction, professional mentorship and community engagement. Through their project, each student has the opportunity to achieve a level of deepened knowledge and engaged skills around a specific need identified by a community partner. Projects provide a learning experience that supports student capacity for leadership, innovation, evaluation and creative problem-solving. Projects are a comprehensive demonstration of each student's competency as advanced generalist practitioners in rural and indigenous communities, consistent with the mission and goals of the MSW program.

Note: Even if your project isn't working directly in and with rural and/or Indigenous communities, as the project leader, you should be approaching and reflecting on your work from a foundation rooted in rural and Indigenous practice, paradigms, theory, research approaches, etc. consistent with program coursework and curriculum. As a critical graduate level thinker, you will be expected and evaluated on your ability to make these connections.

The MSW Project requires a clear vision for implementation and sustainability. This is supported by two project courses, SW 682 and SW 683, which focus on project development and project implementation, respectively. Course activities will include research and documentation of relevant literature to support your project proposal and design, a clear use of framework for project structure, mapping of relevant community resources and factors influencing the context of your project and completion of planning tools such as logic models. After implementation of your project activities you must be able to summarize the activities and the outcomes, and synthesize and reflect on this information into a coherent summary, this will include creating recommendations for future practice, and policy, as well as presenting your project info to both peers and community.

Students undertaking their MSW Community Project are guided and mentored in this process by both a community partner and their faculty for SW 682/683. Projects are driven by an identified community partner's vision, needs and resources. Each community partner is actively involved in the project process, which the student co-develops and implements. In some cases, the community partner serves more as guide and advisor, based on their knowledge and insight into particular topic area, population or model of project. Students are encouraged to make use of

consultation for additional guidance and mentorship from faculty or community members.

Note: While it is not uncommon for a student's project be derived from and with their advanced year interning agency; the MSW project and MSW internship are two distinct program requirements.   While we acknowledge that internship-based activities and relationships may (and should) help inform project activities and goals, it will need to be made clear how the project is recognizably different from the internship and how project work will be completed outside of internship hours. This distinction will need to be made clear by the student and could require approval and oversight by the following but not limited to: Project Faculty, Field Faculty, Community Partner, Field Supervisor, Employment Supervisor, MSW Director, Project Coordinator, Field Director.

Project Requirements

There is no requirement that the project consist of formal research, though it may be difficult to accomplish the above without some element of gathering new data. Your project can serve not only as a culminating representation of your knowledge gained, but also as a key component in your future career portfolio. Projects that seek to facilitate greater community collaboration and cohesion reflect well desired skills and abilities in today's job market. Such projects also reflect the overall goals of the department to better serve the needs of the larger community. Project proposals could include:

- ❖ Research that seeks to establish community needs or assets
- ❖ Evaluations of existing programs
- ❖ Development of new programs or protocols for program implementation
- ❖ Service projects which create positive community change
- ❖ Facilitating broader service collaboration in a given area
- ❖ The development of grants or the identification of other funding streams
- ❖ The development of a curriculum

It is the vision of the Department, and of our community partners, that projects are of lasting and sustainable utility to the community.   This depends in large part on the enthusiasm you bring to this task, but it also depends on the integration of community member input and engagement. The expectation is that the community partner will provide guidance regarding how

project outcomes may be most beneficial, as well as potentially facilitating access to specific resources, including potential data. The role of the community partner may vary based on your project structure but could include an expert in a particular practice setting, an advocate or spokesperson for a community of interest, or a designated organizational representative. These community contacts can be drawn from your developing professional network, your internship experience, or from the database of potential projects submitted by community partners to the Social Work Department.

Note: When identifying a project topic, choose an area of focus that is of significant personal interest. It is important to keep in mind that much of two semesters will be spent working on this project. By selecting a topic of interest and relevance to your future career or professional plans, it will be more likely that one will remain highly motivated and possess the stamina necessary for successful completion of your MSW Community Project. For some, the motivation to complete the project may come even more clearly from your awareness of a community need or opportunity.

Entering into the MSW Community Project process, students must begin by making a few clear determinations. It is helpful if students have a goal regarding what area of social work practice they are seeking to develop their skills within, for that will shape aspects of the project as well. All projects require documentation regarding the community context and available literature relevant to the topic. Many students find that it is most appropriate to have the community partner define the major goals of the project, following a community-based model. Projects which follow a community-based model are developed based on strong input and guidance from community partners based on an identified need and desired partnership with a graduate student to assist in meeting that need. Students may select a pre-existing project idea that has been provided to the social work department by organizations. Students may also wish to build on the work of prior Community Projects. Suggested projects are collected and maintained by the Masters Project Coordinator. Students may also seek out a relationship with an organization or coalition in order to solicit and develop project ideas. While it is required that you have a community partner in your Project work, it is not required that you undertake a community-based model.

Some students come to this work with a clear vision to engage in relevant research, and

this is also feasible, and may follow a wide range of research practices, including participatory action research, grounded theory, appreciative inquiry and approaches drawing from indigenous research perspectives. These students must then seek out and identify a community partner who is willing to serve as a mentor or guide in the refining of the proposal and implementation of this project. The partner is not required to be connected with a particular organization, but there must be a clear rationale for their serving as a noted-expert in the role of community partner and a clear plan on how the student will be accountable to that partnership. Community elders could potentially serve in this capacity.

Students who are engaging in a specific research framework will find that they may wish to seek out support and partnership from faculty who share a research skill set. This can be of benefit in exploring question development, qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches, preparation for IRB review application, access to data, and tools for data analysis. For all students, it is important to constrain the projects to discrete activities that can be reasonably completed within the time-line. Students will serve as project leaders in this regard, creating clear maps of goals, outcomes and activities, and navigating challenges inherent to this type of work. It is important for students to remember that their project is the entirety of the learning process, not simply the central activity involved. This learning experience will be documented in course activities and further demonstrated and measured in their comprehensive examination as the culminating experience, a requirement to receive their MSW degree.

Project Support

Your SW 682 Instructor will serve as your Project Support. They will guide your progress on the project and may assist in identifying mentors and community consultants. Your SW 682 course will provide the framework for presenting your prospective project topic and methodologies, as well as providing information regarding university deadlines. Your SW 682 Instructor is your active resource and sounding board for the initial development of your project. Your SW 683 course will provide support for your implementation and evaluation/reflection processes, as well as presentation of project to the community.

Community Partners

In the visioning for the development of Community Projects for the Social Work

Program, the primary goal has been for communities and organizations to be actively consulted and engaged regarding their priorities, needs and resources that may be addressed via partnering with graduate students in the form of Community Projects. Each student must seek out a Community Partner to engage in feedback regarding their project. Ideally, students will bring forward project proposals that have originated from within communities and organizations. This may occur via existing relationships that students bring to their studies, or from consulting the project directory maintained by the Community Project Coordinator. Strategies for reaching out to and engaging with potential community partners will be explored in your SW 583 and SW 682 courses at a minimum.

Community partners should be chosen on the basis of a given skills set that can be used to help shape the best community project possible, while providing opportunities for encouraging student growth. Community partners should play an active and contributing role to the development and visioning of the project, as well as providing critical feedback as you implement and review the outcomes of your project. If you do not already have a potential community partner in mind, you may wish to consult with your SW 682 Instructor, your advisor, other faculty in the department who share common interest/practice areas, other professional mentors, etc.

Connection to Culminating Experience

The culminating experience for the granting of a graduate degree in Social Work from Humboldt State University is a Comprehensive Examination. This examination measures how you well you are able to integrate and connect your MSW Community Project activities to the nine competencies and thirty-one behaviors from our MSW Program Competencies. These are based on the Council on Social Work Education Core Competencies of Social Work Practice.

All culminating experiences for the Master's degree, regardless of specific form or discipline, must document the student's achievement of their graduate program learning outcomes. In your MSW Program Comprehensive Examination, you are expected to demonstrate your ability to integrate knowledge, show critical and independent thinking, and how you have achieved mastery of the MSW Program Competencies and Behaviors in relation to your community project. You are expected to evidence independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis, and accuracy of documentation.

It is important to note that while your project courses (SW 682/683) in many ways prepare you for the Comprehensive Exam, it is an expectation that you will integrate elements from your entire MSW Program experiences into your exam (i.e. texts, literature, practice experience, etc.)

II. MSW Community Project Timeline

MSW Community Project Timeline

You will be required to complete various assignments related to your SW 682/683 course which will help prepare you for the development and implementation of your project. These assignments may vary from year to year and as such, are not included in this general timeline. Please note that this is a recommended timeline, however, each project and its process is unique and may fall outside of these timelines.

- ★ **September:** create MOU with community partner, develop prospectus, Prepare for IRB.
- ★ **October:** IRB Suggested Submission. *Can submit earlier with faculty approval.*
- ★ **November - Mid-March:** Project implementation &/or data collection and analysis
- ★ **April:** Project implementation wrap-up/data analysis completion/evaluation
- ★ **Mid-April:** Poster presentation at Idea Fest on campus or to peers/faculty online
- ★ **April-May:** Deliverable presented to community partner/Accountability Plan implementation

Project Preparation and Development

During the initial development stage of your project, you will be expected to submit a prospectus which will be shared with potential committee members who will round out the committee structure. You will also need to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will serve as a formal agreement between you and your community partner in order to establish an official partnership and working relationship. Both of these assignments will need to be approved and signed by your community partner and your instructor.

The prospectus will include: a community need statement, theoretical issue(s), method, anticipated difficulties and benefits, draft timeline, potential deliverable, credibility statement, and signatures from student, community partner, and instructor. Both of these assignments will

assist you developing your IRB application, as well as defining and shaping your project overall.

Note: If you are completing activities within an organization, IRB will require that you secure a letter of commitment from the organization leadership. The person designated to serve in the capacity of your community partner should be cleared by the organization to represent them in your project work.

Project Implementation

Community Partners should be kept informed and consulted during the project implementation process. As the project unfolds, community partner input may be vital for success and sustainability. As you move from implementation to evaluation and reflection, hopefully early in the Spring semester, this is another great opportunity to communicate with your community partner in sharing preliminary outcomes. Documentation of community partner feedback and input should be provided to your Project Faculty, so that they can assist you in developing a plan for effective use of this information and to support your accountability process in actively responding to this feedback.

Project Evaluation and Sustainability

Evaluation of our work is an essential piece of our practice and a necessary component of our MSW Community Project work. This can look a number of different ways, dependent upon the project. Further, part of evaluation as well as the vision of the MSW Community Projects, is that students identify how their project work is sustainable, and that it will live on and have lasting meaning. You will work with your community partner and your Project Faculty on how you will evaluate your work at various stages of your project, inclusive of a plan or recommendations for sustainability.

III. Making Use of Campus Support

Peer Support Accountability Partners

Within your SW 682 Course, your faculty may create a structure to encourage peer support and feedback. A model to consider is the concept of accountability partnerships where two or more individuals with similar goals (such as developing a personal business, or increasing wellness) create a regular process of communicating those goals, setting weekly tasks and

commitments and then sharing with each other what they have accomplished on those tasks. The partners can then share strategies for addressing challenges, and also provide feedback.

Writing Coaches

The Social Work Department employees several students specifically to serve as Writing Coaches. These coaches are available to any social work student at no cost to the student. They are hired based on their writing skills and are trained to provide in-depth feedback and support throughout any writing process. At minimum you must schedule your appointment with a writing coach a week prior to any course-related deadlines. You are strongly encouraged to plan earlier. Writing coaches can be particularly helpful in working through any writer's blocks, exploring different ways to express a concept and identifying poor writing habits that each of us is likely to have.

Library Resources

Humboldt State Librarians are available by appointment for individual consultation on your information research needs. The HSU Library has many resources to assist students in the research process, including a [Social Work Research Guide](). During your SW 682 course in the fall, you will likely meet your Social Work Librarian who will point you toward a whole host of possible resources and who would be a great support to you during the active research process. A critical part of your process is keeping track of references (citations)—journal papers, books, web pages, images, quotations, etc.—that support your project so that you can properly cite them in your work. As you begin your project process it may be of interest to you to review some of the past Theses and Projects that have been completed by other students. Most theses from Fall 2005 and forward are available as full text documents in [Humboldt Digital Scholar]().

Faculty Support

Working on your Community Project provides you an opportunity to expand your professional network and experience academic and professional mentorship within a specific field of practice or knowledge area. Within the SW 682 course there will be structured times for you to meet individually with your instructor. These professional relationships may not only serve to improve the quality of your Project, but may also become a source for professional references and potential career resources. Be thoughtful in how you make use of these

opportunities.

IV. Institutional Review Board Requirements

Any questions regarding the IRB process should be brought to your SW 682 course, as the answers and resources may be of benefit to many of your peers. This is also an area where conversations with an accountability partner may be of value as you navigate the university systems.

Humboldt State Policy

Humboldt State University Institutional Review Board policy:

> "If you have a research project that includes humans or data on humans in any way, you must submit a proposal to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, also known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This will ensure that your project will not only comply with Federal regulations, it will also protect the rights and well beings of your subjects."   From: http://humboldt.edu/hsuf/irb.php

If your project involves obtaining and citing information from or about people (human subjects) that is not publicly available, IRB review and approval reflects your actions to protecting the rights of your participants. If your project involves gathering this information from members of an organization or on tribal lands, you will also need documentation of permission from those entities. It is possible that IRB may determine that your project is exempt from consideration, for example if you are basing all of your major activities on publicly available information and are not collecting new data. However, your project proposal must be submitted in order for IRB to make this determination. For example, if you are asking non-vulnerable adults to complete a short confidential demographic survey, you still need to create a process for informed consent and describe how you would secure the information, to complete the IRB form, but it most likely could be reviewed and approved without the full IRB committee convening.

CITI Training

Completion of CITI Training is required before an IRB application may be submitted. This training can be completed at any time during your graduate education and may be required

as part of research course activities as well. This training activity confirms that you are aware of the requirements regarding protection of human subjects, vulnerable populations, informed consent and other basic aspects of conducting ethical research practice.

Log on to CITI and follow these steps:

1. Selecting this link will allow faculty and students to take any responsible research training course at no charge to your department.
2. Once you have selected the link you will need to select new registration.
3. **Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher, Basic Course** is the course required for submitting an IRB proposal.
4. Please print an electronic version (pdf) of the Completion Report and submit with your proposal.

IRB Process

If your project involves vulnerable populations, untested direct interventions, or other potential risk activities that may cause harm to your subjects (asking people to recall past traumatic events could fall in this category), you should plan for the time needed for your proposal to be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board. The formal board only meets once a month. If revisions are required additional time may be necessary. **IRB approval must be received prior to beginning any project activities.**

The process as outlined on the IRB web page goes as stated: Review a PowerPoint presentation about the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Complete CITI Training, save an electronic version (pdf) of the Completion Report and submit with your proposal. Review the Federal Regulations and HSU's Policy**.** Submit your proposal.
http://www.humboldt.edu/hsuf/irbsubmit.php

From IRB Website:

Proposals submitted during the Academic Year

- The IRB's goal is to contact researchers regarding the status of their application within approximately 10 working days.
- Unfortunately, due to the work load at certain times, the IRB cannot guarantee any time

frame.

- Please allow ample time for review, possible modifications and final determination for your proposal prior to your projected start date.

For careful planning it is good to expect that the review process may take one month or longer to complete. The IRB may request additional information or require changes to be made in order to address ethical concerns that arise from the proposal.

IRB Proposal Guidelines

Your IRB Proposal is outlined via an electronic form. The application form for the IRB Review is a fillable PDF, which can be downloaded at: https://humboldt.edu/forms/node/530 The key content areas are outlined below. All definitions provided here are drawn from the IRB Application for Review.

Project Title:

Lay Abstract: The abstract should be written in a manner that can be easily understood by someone who has no training in science, medicine or research. Avoid or define technical terminology. (2000 maximum characters)

Type of Data: (see form)

Subject Information: (see form)

Description of Proposed Project: (no more than one page): - Provide the rationale and significance for conducting the project - Provide the Research Question, Purpose or Hypothesis. For projects not directly correlating to a research approach, you would focus on the Purpose of the project.

Subject Recruitment and Selection: Clearly describe your process for engaging participants.

Vulnerable Subjects: Includes pregnant women, human fetuses, prisoners and children. If vulnerable subjects are involved, describe safeguards for each population.

Documentation of Consent: What form of documentation of consent will you be using?

Consent Process: Explain the process to obtain a legally effective informed consent of potential participants.

Methods: Explain all procedures to be performed on human participants. (no more than one

page). The terminology of "procedure" here may throw you off, however bear in mind that holding focus groups, conducting a survey, or engaging in appreciative inquiry and reflective dialog with community members are all potential methods. The key concept here is clearly describing what it is you will be doing (and framing it within typical and accepted approaches from the social work field).

Benefits: Describe any benefits to the PARTICIPANTS which may reasonably be expected from the project.

Potential Risks: Describe any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participants.

Risk Management Procedures: Describe procedures for minimizing potential risks.

- Ensure that each potential risk listed above is addressed in this section.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Explain how anonymity or confidentiality will be maintained.

Data Storage, Security and Destruction: Describe the data security and storage process.

- Indicate length of time data will be maintained, and how data will be disposed of.

Informed Consent Storage: Explain where Documentation of Consent will be stored.

Modifying Your Proposal

NOTE: changes to personnel or procedures must be approved by IRB before they are implemented. New personnel may be added to approved projects by emailing CITI completion certificates and the following information to irb@humboldt.edu: IRB project number and title; name, email address, qualifications and responsibilities of personnel; and type of personnel (e.g., staff, student or faculty). Modifications to research procedures should be described in a brief paragraph and submitted to irb@humboldt.edu. Include the IRB project number and title in the email, and attach any necessary supporting documents, such as a new survey question.

V. Community Projects and the Comprehensive Exam (CE)

Your community project will be the basis to complete your Comprehensive Exam (CE). It is a graduation requirement adopted by the Social Work Department in 2018. The CE exam evaluates your ability to integrate and analyze what you have learned in the Masters of Social Work Program.

It is an academic exercise that requires the application of your graduate level knowledge and skills. These skills include: critical thinking, writing, and information synthesis. This exam fulfills the graduation requirement from the HSU Office of Graduate Studies.

Community Project and Comprehensive Exam
You will be tested on your description of how you implemented MSW courses content, the nine (9) MSW Program Competencies, and their thirty-one (31) practice behaviors, into your Community Project. The competencies tested are based on the Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE) Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAs) (see link below).

The CP is developed through the course sequence SW 682 (Fall) -683 (Spring) during your last year in our program. Also, the comprehensive exam documents your ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply our MSW courses content, readings, and discussions on your Community Project. Additionally, you will be expected to demonstrate how your CP integrates applicable competencies and practice behaviors and your ability to critically examine it for the exam.

Format of Comprehensive Exam
The comprehensive exam will be administered in an electronic format and is to be completed independently and individually within a week. You are not to consult with other students in your cohort, during the week allotted for the completion of the exam.

The exam is composed of three parts:
> **Part 1. Abstract** (250 words maximum) This is where you provide the reader a detailed description of your community project so that they could learn about your project.
> **Part 2. Responses for each of the nine (9) competencies** (300 words maximum for each response; two (2) examples, each with 75 words maximum; Total maximum words per response: 450 words). ***You are required to provide at least two (2) academic references per each response.***
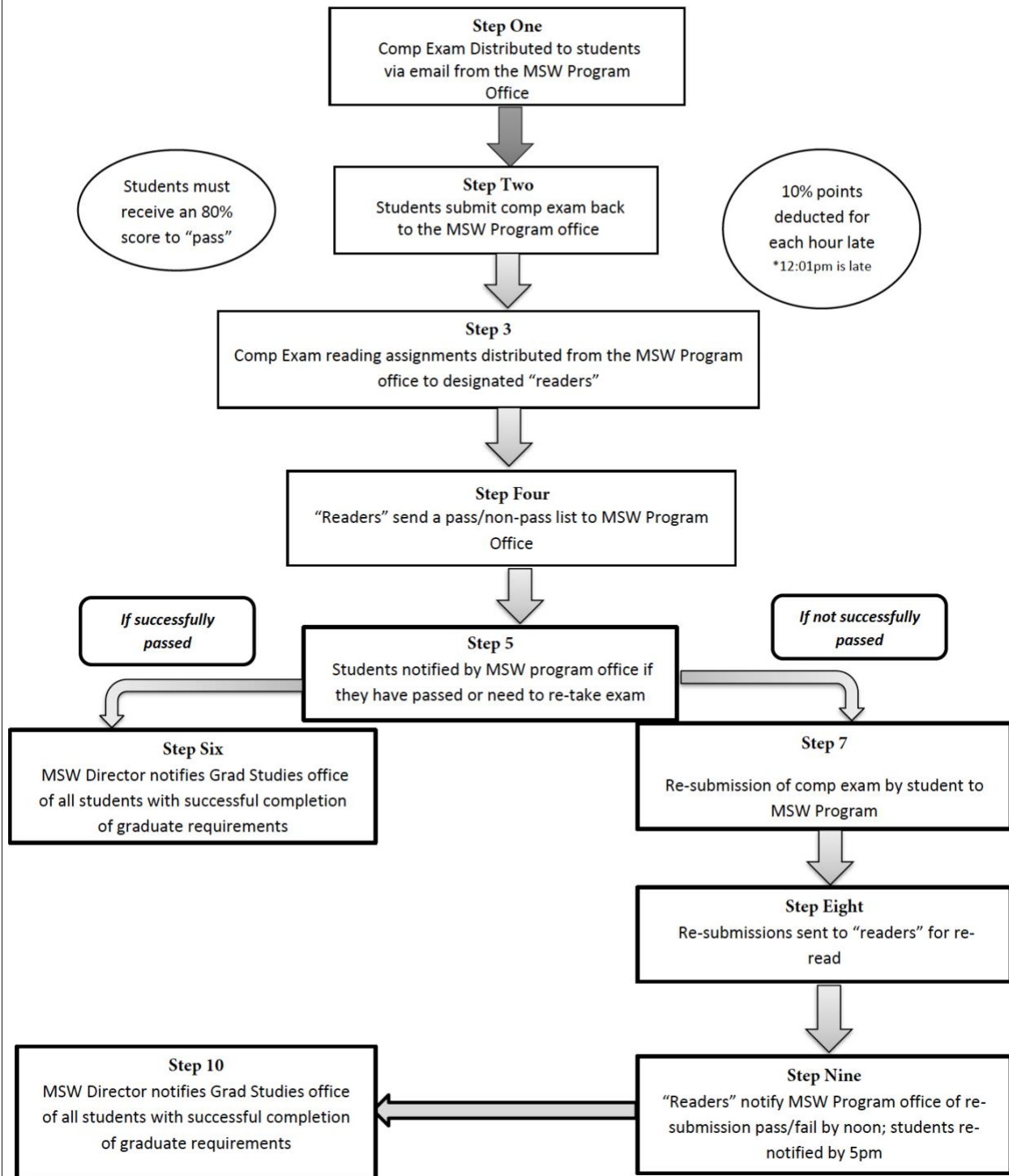> **Part 3. Subjective Score**- A portion of your score based on the evaluation of your overall exam by the faculty reader.

Grading

- Comprehensive Exams are graded by at least two Social Work Department Faculty members. (In some instances, three).
- Each exam is assigned at random to a faculty member and each reviewer cannot read each other's feedback.
- Points will be giving based on your ability to integrate knowledge, show critical and independent thinking, and how you demonstrate that you have achieved mastery of the MSW Program Competencies and practice behaviors in relation to your community project
- Each competency is worth 10 points (9 competencies x 10 points = 90 points total)
- 10 points are subjective points
- **<u>The exam is worth 100 points in total</u>**
- The exam is pass or no pass
- **You need to earn 80 points or more to pass**
  - <u>A no pass grade means that you will be allowed to revise and resubmit your comprehensive exam for a second review and grade</u>.
- Grading Criteria for each competency:
  - Great Extent: 10 - 9
  - Considerable Extent: 8.5 -7
  - Some Extent: 6.5 - 4
  - Little Extent: 3.5-1

MSW Program Comp Exam Sample Flow Chart

Step One
Comp Exam Distributed to students via email from the MSW Program Office

Step Two
Students submit comp exam back to the MSW Program office

Students must receive an 80% score to "pass"

10% points deducted for each hour late
*12:01pm is late

Step 3
Comp Exam reading assignments distributed from the MSW Program office to designated "readers"

Step Four
"Readers" send a pass/non-pass list to MSW Program Office

If successfully passed

If not successfully passed

Step 5
Students notified by MSW program office if they have passed or need to re-take exam

Step Six
MSW Director notifies Grad Studies office of all students with successful completion of graduate requirements

Step 7
Re-submission of comp exam by student to MSW Program

Step Eight
Re-submissions sent to "readers" for re-read

Step 10
MSW Director notifies Grad Studies office of all students with successful completion of graduate requirements

Step Nine
"Readers" notify MSW Program office of re-submission pass/fail by noon; students re-notified by 5pm

MSW Advanced Year Competencies which are the basis of the CE exam

<u>Competency 1:</u> Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 2:</u> Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 3</u>: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 4:</u>Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 5</u>:Engage in Policy Practice, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 6</u>: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 7:</u> Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.

<u>Competency 8:</u> Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous Communities.

<u>Competency 9</u>: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities, particularly with respect to work with Indigenous and rural Communities.