

# AREA OF EMPHASIS IN AGING (AEA)

## Master of Social Work

### What is gero-social work?

Gero Social Work embraces the vital contributions of older adults including their historical perspectives, shared wisdom, and the mosaic of life experiences they bring. Incorporating an integrated whole person health perspective, social work practice with older adults focuses on maintaining and enhancing the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual quality of life of older adults. Social workers provide many vital services for older adults and their families, such as counseling services and interdisciplinary care coordination, education, and advocacy. Social workers working with this population provide holistic care taking into consideration important familial, cultural, community, economic, spiritual, and societal factors. Social workers need to be skilled at addressing the needs of adults at this phase of their lifespan to support their well-being and the well-being of their families and communities.

### Why is this area of social work practice important?

By 2030, all Baby Boomers will be older than 65, and one in five US residents will be of retirement age\*. The number of Minnesotans turning 65 in the current decade will be greater than the past four decades combined. For the first time in history, Minnesota's 65+ population is expected to eclipse the population of individuals age 5-17†. These demographic changes have created a need for social workers with interest, education, and experience working with older adults and their families.

The School of Social Work has developed opportunities for MSW students to explore their interest in working with older adults and their families. These include the Area of Emphasis in Aging (AEA) Scholars program and elective courses specific to practice with these populations.

### Components of the AEA Experience:

#### Networking and Collaboration:

AEA involves community members, alumni/ae, students, and faculty members in a dialogue about practice with older adults and their families.

#### Building Knowledge:

Scholars deepen their understanding of aging across populations and develop skills to work on interprofessional teams that address the unique bio-psycho-social-spiritual needs of older adults and their families. During their time in AEA, scholars will also complete a microcredential in Whole Person Healthy Aging.

#### Required Electives:

Students are required to take three electives that support clinical practice with older adults. All students must take Clinical Practice with Older Adults, as well as either Grief Counseling and Therapy or Clinical Social Work Practice in Integrative Health Care, and a third elective of their choosing.

#### Leadership:

AEA scholars assume leadership roles on the AEA advisory council, guide the development of group service and academic projects, and represent this unique area of social work practice in the School of Social Work, on campus, and in the professional community.

#### Research:

AEA scholars will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area of social work practice by focusing a variety of course assignments on topics related to older adults and their families. Additionally, students may build their professional portfolios by taking part in research opportunities within the university and/or at conferences.

#### Practice:

Scholars develop practice skills working with older adults and their families through on-campus simulation opportunities and during their internship field practicum(s) in settings such as hospital care-management, hospice, palliative care, homecare, long-term care, bereavement services, behavioral health, and caregiver supports.

#### Tuition Remission:

AEA scholars receive a tuition remission of \$1,000 in their last semester of the program.

#### Mentoring:

Students receive personalized mentoring in areas such as accessing scholarships, professional portfolio development, career exploration and guidance, continuing education post-graduation, and ongoing alumni engagement.

\*US Census Projections, 2017  
†MN State Demographic Center, 2018

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why consider an Area of Emphasis (AE) Scholars program?

The AE Scholars programs focus on emerging interprofessional practice areas and provide additional networking, collaboration, and leadership opportunities for those interested in these critical areas.

### Who can apply to AE Scholars programs?

AE Scholars programs are designed to be at least two-year experiences. All newly admitted Advanced Standing (AS) and Regular Standing (RS) MSW students are eligible to apply. Other students who have at least one year remaining in their MSW program and who meet the requirements of the program may also apply during the spring application period. Students apply to the AE program after acceptance to the MSW program.

### How competitive is it to be accepted to the AE Scholars programs?

Applicants need to articulate and demonstrate relevant qualifications and professional goals, and a limited number of students are accepted each year.

### Can I apply to more than one AE Scholars program?

You may apply to more than one AE Scholars program; however, you may only be selected for one.

## Learn more about social work practice with older adults:



[link.stthomas.edu/AEA](https://link.stthomas.edu/AEA)



Age-Friendly  
University  
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