
Q&A for the SUAS Program

Substance Use & Addictions Specialist (SUAS) Program

Q: What is the SUAS Program?

A: Problematic substance use, substance addiction, and process addiction pose a challenge to our communities as a significant public health issue linked to poverty, violence, family stress, and a host of psychiatric and physical health complications. UNC School of Social Work offers the Substance Use & Addictions Specialist (SUAS) track that meets all of the educational requirements and fifty percent of the clinical requirements toward the Licensed Clinical Addictions Specialist (LCAS) credential administered by the NC Substance Abuse Professional Practice Board (NCSAPPB). The LCAS credential is the qualification of choice for providing addiction prevention and treatment services in North Carolina.

Q: Does choosing SUAS mean I am committed to working only within the field of addiction?

A: Not at all. Here's the reality: You cannot NOT work with the issue of addictions, so why not improve your skill set and become more marketable? You will be preparing to work with mental health AND substance use issues.

Q: Will I forgo learning about mental health issues?

A: No. In fact, we need to be deliberate in moving away from thinking dichotomously about mental health and substance use. Knowledge and skills in both are essential to effective treatment services and SUAS helps prepare you for working with a wide range of client needs.

Q: How many courses are required for SUAS?

A: You are required to obtain 12 credit hours within the SUAS curriculum. There are nine required SUAS credits (3 courses) and a robust menu of other choices for the final three hours. These courses are NOT in addition to the 62 credit hours needed to obtain your MSW! Below are the SUAS-Approved courses.

Course Number and Title	Required & Hours	Menu: 1 of 2 is Required	Typically Offered	Format for 2024-25
700 – Foundations of Addiction	3.0	-	Fall, Summer	Online
760 - Clinical Practice with Addictive Disorders	3.0	-	Fall	In-Person
761 – Practice with Diverse Populations Affected by Addiction	3.0	-	Spring	In-Person
831 – Addiction and Public Policy: Implications for Practice (Note: also counts toward MSW Advanced Policy requirement)	1.5	-	Spring, Summer	Online
CHOOSE ONE OF THE TWO BELOW (Note: the courses below are in the process of being approved and are therefore subject to change)				
764 – Motivational Interviewing for the Treatment of Addictive and Mental Health Disorders	-	1.5	Spring, Summer	In-Person
NEW – Psychedelic Assisted Therapy for Substance Use and Mood Disorders	-	1.5	TBD	TBD
TOTAL CREDIT HOURS (Need min of 12)	10.5	1.5	-	-

Q: Are any of the required SUAS courses offered during the summer?

A: Yes! Many SUAS students choose to take SOWO 700 (online) during one of the summer sessions, although it is also offered during the fall. Additionally, SOWO 831 (Addiction and Public Policy) is typically offered during the summer.

Q: Do all my field placement clients have to have substance use or addictions concerns?

A: No. Our goal is to ensure your experience offers an opportunity to work with both Mental Health and Substance Use issues. To this end, our field office is continuously expanding and refining the list of partner agencies, from traditional SUD treatment facilities to traditionally mental health who have expanded to include SUD prevention, screening, treatment, and/or referral.

Q: How do I get supervision specific to substance use and addiction?

A: SUAS students require clinical supervision by a Certified Clinical Supervisor. Your field faculty will ensure you receive the required supervision either at your field site or from our SUAS clinical supervision group held on campus and/or virtually. Students consistently report high satisfaction with this group format which offers clinical direction, learning, and camaraderie.

Q: Can I be enrolled in SUAS and PrimeCare simultaneously?

A: Yes! We have many students who do both and it is a great way to immerse yourself into integrated care (i.e., the integration of mental health, substance use, and primary care).

Q: Can I be enrolled in SUAS and Child Welfare, or School Social Work?

A: Yes, and yes! We even have students simultaneously enrolled in SUAS, PrimeCare, *and* School Social Work. While the load certainly increases, students report this as being quite “doable”. Here are a few words from our School Social Work faculty:

“Students who are interested in working with high school students are able to pair the SSW certificate with SUAS. There are a few school placements that we reserve for students interested in SSW and SUAS.”

Q: How does SUAS help me professionally?

A: Besides giving you the necessary tools to work with a more diverse population, SUAS puts you on a fast track toward becoming a Licensed Clinical Addictions Specialist. This means that upon graduation you may obtain your LCASA (Associates) and in as little as one additional year become fully licensed! A year later you may be eligible for your LCSW, thereby becoming dually licensed. Keep in mind, there continues to be a growing need for a workforce capable of working with substance use issues. Your skills and licensure in this arena are in high demand and having both the LCSW and LCAS licenses is an exceptional professional advantage that consistently creates opportunities.

Q: What do SUAS alumni say about their experience?

A: Alumni overwhelmingly note being thankful they chose SUAS for their professional growth and development. Here are what a few recent alumni had to say:

“The SUAS program widened my clinical perspective while also highlighting the health disparities, in the context of problematic substance use and addictions, of marginalized communities. And, importantly, SUAS set me up to be highly marketable and it allowed me to have choice in what direction I wanted to take.”

- Benjamin Morton

“I am so grateful I did SUAS during my MSW program for a few different reasons. First, it provided a smaller group of folks in a large cohort to get to know better due to taking many of the same classes the second year. Second, it is SO valuable to be licensed as an LCAS-A/LCAS—something that SUAS makes way easier and quicker. This was one of the things that helped me get a job post-grad as a therapist at a private practice that needed clinicians with substance use expertise, and I get paid more because I am dually licensed. I was on the fence about doing SUAS, but am truly so glad I did. Can’t recommend it enough!”

- Annie Grant

“One of the greatest decisions I made while pursuing my MSW was completing the Substance Use and Addictions Specialist Program. The program provided me with the knowledge to better serve the population that I work with in Child Protective Services. Not only did I gain the knowledge, I also had a better understanding of the families I worked with and the challenges that they faced in life. The professors did not hold back when it came to exposing us to the field. They provided us with an interactive learning experience, and it was obvious that their goal was to make sure we left the school prepared to serve the community. Because of the program, I am confident in my profession and for that I will be forever grateful.”

- Erica Mayes-Gordon

“Stepping into the job market as a fresh MSW graduate at the same time as three Schools of Social Work worth of candidates was scary. Having my LCAS-A not only made me eligible for a lot more positions than folks without it, but it also helped set me apart from the other candidates. I essentially got my dream job just a couple months out of grad school, and I wouldn’t have been able to apply had it not been for my LCAS-A!”

- Jennifer Mossefin

“Hello UNC Chapel Hill Master of Social Work Candidates,

I hope this message finds you well. As a graduate of UNC Chapel Hill’s School of Social Work, I wanted to share an option that you might find valuable for your social work journey: the SUAS (Substance Use and Addiction Studies) program.

You may have heard that addiction specialization, like the SUAS program, primarily leads to careers as substance use counselors. However, it offers more than that. My own experience in the SUAS program has shown me that it’s about expanding your social work toolkit and increasing your marketability to employers.

For example, my background in addiction specialization has been instrumental when working with clients facing dual diagnoses, where addiction intersects with other mental health challenges. It’s about being well-prepared to meet clients where they are, regardless of whether addiction is their primary concern.

Addiction is a pervasive issue in our society, and having expertise in this area can be a significant asset to your social work career. It doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll become a substance use counselor; instead, it empowers you to make a meaningful impact in various roles while aligning with your social justice-focused values.

Thank you for taking the time to explore the possibilities that addiction specialization can offer within

the context of your social justice-oriented journey in social work.”

- *Matthew Reiland, LCSW, LCAS (Class of 2020)*

“I highly recommend the SUAS program. Upon graduation, I worked as the Addiction Specialist at a Residential Eating Disorders facility. In this role, I implemented screening and assessment tools, protocols and three group curriculums. I also helped my colleagues with no specialized training in SUDs with their assessment, interventions and delivery of services. I provided in-service training to all-staff and educated community providers. I'd even go into local addiction programs and educate about Eating Disorders and the overlap with the SUD population. During that time, I had several interns from different universities and completed my CCS. Now that I am in private practice, I do not see exclusively SUD or ED clients. I see a wide range of clients with all different presenting issues. Additionally, I provide dual supervision. I have several LCSW-A only supervisees and I end-up teaching all of them about working with SUDS... because if you did not have a specialized internship or complete a Criteria C grad program... you may not get this education during your schooling. My business is 50% direct patient care and 50% supervision/consultation (with the niche specialty of ED and SUD). The reason I have been able to diversify my business so much is because of the additional education and experience I received completing the SUAS program, then my LCAS and then my CCS. If you love this population or you have an interest in the population or even if you realize that you have a knowledge gap and you don't know what you don't know: Complete this program!”

- *Alison Rhyne Allen, MSW, LCSW, LCAS, CCS, CEDS-C (2013)*

Q: What if I have more questions about SUAS or just want to talk about the program?

A: Easy-peasy. Just contact Mike McGuire (SUAS Director) @ 336-405-9506 (mobile), or uncmike@unc.edu