



The University of Texas at Austin

# GRACE Program

*Steve Hicks School of Social Work*

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What is the GRACE Program?** The Gerontology Resources and the Aging Community in Education (GRACE) Program is a field-based learning program designed to increase students' knowledge of and experience with older adults. The GRACE program is co-directed by Sarah Swords, Assistant Dean for Master's Programs, and Joan Asseff, Clinical Assistant Professor. The co-directors work closely with field instructors employed at community agencies in aging services in the Austin area to create impactful field internships for students. The students' field experience is complemented by GRACE program educational enrichment events, held approximately six times each academic year. These events provide specialized knowledge in areas relevant to social work practice in gerontology.

**What is a GRACE Placement?** A field agency earns the designation as a GRACE placement if the agency serves primarily older adults, and the field instructor serves on the GRACE Committee and/or supports the educational goals of the GRACE Program through working with Steve Hicks School of Social Work students.

**How does a student become a GRACE Candidate?** The first step to becoming a GRACE Candidate is expressing an interest in and commitment to working with older adults. GRACE placements are available for both first field and final field students. First field students who indicate interest in this area will likely be matched in a GRACE placement. Final field students may be selected to interview at GRACE internship sites. If a student is currently in a GRACE placement, or has completed a GRACE placement, then they are considered a GRACE Candidate. No additional application is necessary.

**How does a student become a GRACE Scholar?** A student earns a GRACE Scholar designation at commencement by:

- Successfully completing at least one internship at a GRACE placement and
- Attending at least five scheduled GRACE educational events during their graduate studies.

A GRACE Scholar designation identifies the graduate to potential employers as an emerging social work professional who received additional training and preparation for practice with older adults.

**What are GRACE Program Educational Events?** Approximately six learning events are scheduled during the academic year, covering topics relevant to social work practice with older adults and their families. Recent topics have included substance use and aging, working with people with dementia, Medicaid/Medicare 101, the LGBTQ community and aging, group work with older adults, and decreasing social isolation for older adults. A full day event, the Gerontology Resources Symposium, is offered each year to provide in-depth learning for students and community practitioners. Attendance at events is required for GRACE Candidates and events are open to other students and members of the community; CEUs are frequently offered at these events.

**Is fellowship funding available to GRACE Candidates?** The GRACE Program receives generous support from the St. David's Foundation. GRACE Candidates are offered the opportunity to apply for fellowships to help defray the cost of their education. The number of fellowships awarded is contingent upon funding; the selection process is competitive.

**What else does the GRACE Program offer?** Each spring, the Program Co-Directors, a GRACE field instructor, and a select group of students attend the annual meeting of the American Society on Aging, the country's largest gathering of professionals in the aging field. The St. David's Foundation provides funding for this unparalleled professional development experience; attendees are chosen through a competitive application process. Finally, the program provides an ongoing peer group, the GRACE Graduates Network, offering peer support, networking, and professional development to program alums.

**How can my agency or I get involved?** Host a student intern at your agency. Offer to present on a topic of your interest at a GRACE Program Educational Event. Work with the program co-directors to have a student co-facilitate a group for clients at your agency.

*For more information, contact either of the GRACE Program Co-Directors: Dean Sarah Swords ([saswords@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:saswords@mail.utexas.edu)) or Prof. Joan Asseff ([jasseff@utexas.edu](mailto:jasseff@utexas.edu))*