

Michigan Holistic Defense Fellowship Program

Strengthening the Practice of Holistic Defense in Michigan

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Introduction

The 2025 Michigan Holistic Defense Social Work Fellowship application season has concluded, and the purpose of this report is to provide the Board with insight into the strategies and trends that defined the Fellowship's second year of recruitment for social work fellows. This report is organized into three sections that document the recruitment strategies for this set of applicants, a demographic analysis of the students who applied and were accepted into the 2025 Social Work Fellow cohort, and a brief reflection on the 2026 Social Work Fellow recruitment strategy.

This is the first report of its kind, and a similar report will follow all future application periods. All of the data presented in this report was sourced from the Google Form portion of the application that each applicant was required to submit; survey information from applicants who did not submit the additional required supplemental materials and/or who did not qualify for the Fellowship was omitted from this report. No statistical analysis was completed as part of this report.

2025 Social Work Fellowship Advertising and Applicant Recruitment Strategies

Direct Recruitment

Direct recruitment tactics require that an individual involved with the Fellowship (Director or site staff) reach out to a particular school or networking body to advertise the Fellowship to an intentional target population of potential applicants. During this recruitment season, the following direct recruitment methods were employed:

- The Director presented to Master of Social Work students at Wayne State University enrolled in Dr. Athena Kheibari's introductory Holistic Defense program class. The Director also presented to a Bachelor of Social Work senior seminar and a Master of Social Work class at Northern Michigan University.
- Site staff at the Allegan County Office of the Public Defender presented twice to Bachelor of Social Work students at Grand Valley State University. Additional staff reached out to a professor in Hope College's Bachelor of Social Work program with background information on the Fellowship and a request that this opportunity be shared with students. Both staff members were alumni of the schools they connected with.

- Site staff at the Allegan County Office of the Public Defender also provided staff at Cornerstone University with background information on the Fellowship; the Allegan County Placement Site has a working relationship with Cornerstone University and has accepted several non-Fellow social work interns in the past.

Indirect Recruitment

Indirect recruitment strategies are limited to passive advertising to a target population. This involves the posting of the Fellowship background and application instructions on college or university career webpages and is typically completed by the Director. This season, the Director advertised the Fellowship on the career webpage of every accredited social work program at the Bachelor and Master level in the state of Michigan.

Applicant Recruitment Trends

Applicants from this cycle primarily heard about the Fellowship through communications from their professor or department (28%), direct outreach from the Director (25%), and direct outreach from Allegan Site Staff (22%). Approximately 47% of applications derived from candidates who were exposed to direct recruitment strategies. A significant number of applicants who reported hearing about the Fellowship through a professor or department communication are enrolled at four of the five schools where direct outreach took place (Northern Michigan University, Grand Valley State University, Hope College, and Cornerstone University), and direct outreach likely played a role in promoting professor or departmental advertising of the Fellowship. Applicants who heard about this opportunity through their school’s career page, advisor, or career planning office (indirect recruitment) represent approximately 17% of applicants.

Of the accepted 2025 Social Work Fellowship cohort, students learned about the Fellowship through a Director presentation (two students, or 33%), professor or departmental communications (two students, or 33%), Allegan County site staff outreach (one student, or 16.5%), and from an advisor or career planning office (one student, or 16.5%).

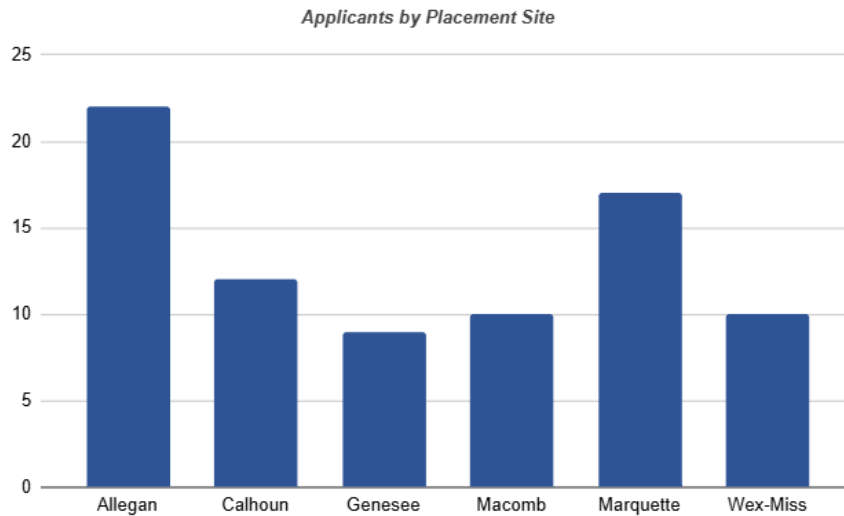
A Secondary Benefit of Direct Recruitment Presentations

Presenting the Fellowship to classrooms provides a unique opportunity to educate future social workers by framing the field of holistic defense and the role of social work within it. Fellowship presentations typically begin with an overview of the criminal legal system and the function of holistic public defender offices. Students to date have demonstrated remarkable engagement and curiosity during presentations; this year, students were particularly interested in learning about the impact of this work in regards to client outcomes, how cases are prosecuted, and how communities are policed. Fellowship presentations provide an enhanced understanding of the holistic defense model among Michigan’s next generation of social workers, regardless of whether they pursue a Fellowship experience.

2025 Social Work Fellowship Applicant Profile

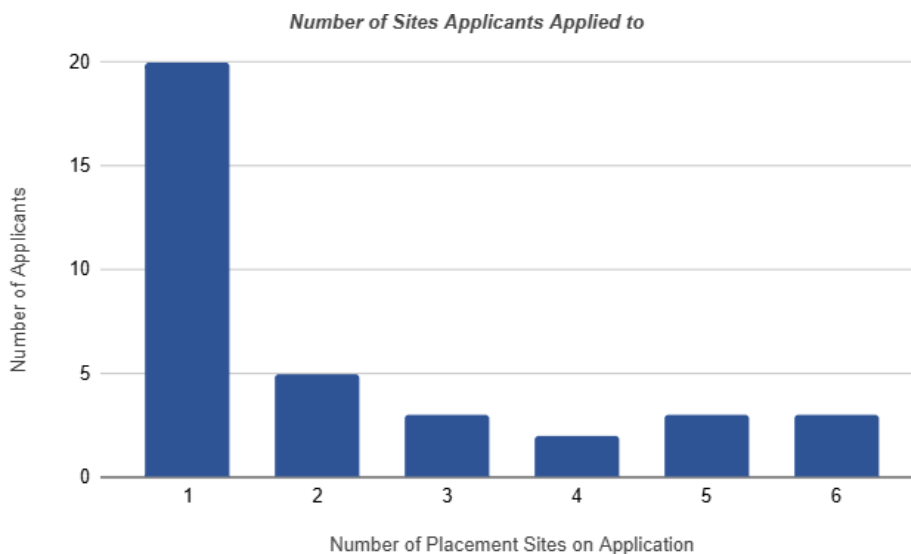
This section presents the standardized information submitted by social work applicants and demonstrates where applicants derived from relative to our targeted outreach locations. This section also reflections on trends that were specific to this application cycle.

Applicants by Placement Site



Applicants were most likely to apply to the participating Placement Sites in Allegan and Marquette Counties. This is likely attributable to the close geographic proximity that four of the five schools where direct recruitment occurred share with these with these two Placement Sites (Grand Valley State University, Hope College, Cornerstone University, and Northern Michigan University). Placement Sites in Calhoun, Genesee, Macomb, and Wexford-Missaukee Counties received similar quantities of applicants to each other despite variance in rural/urban site settings and the availability of a housing stipend.

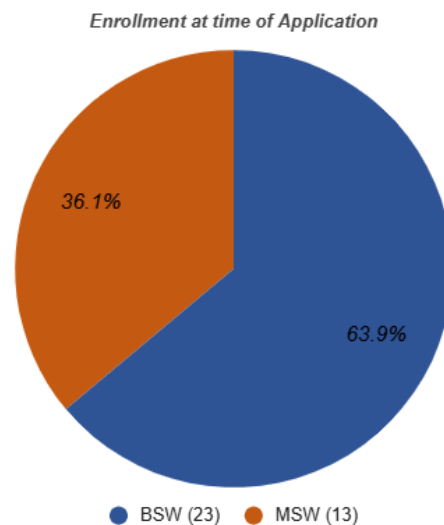
Number of Sites Applicants Applied to



One of the unprecedented trends in this applicant cohort was the preference for one Placement Site. Applicants are allowed and encouraged to apply for placement at each site that they are interested in and that they are prepared to relocate to for the summer. The Fellowship has had two previous application cycles (the 2025 Law Fellow application process and the 2024 combined Law and Social Work Fellow application process), and in both cycles, the average applicant applied to several sites. That previous trend may have been to the detriment of applicants who asked to be considered by all Placement Sites, as several sites have since expressed a predilection to filter applicants in part by their selectivity and preference for just one site.

The number of Placement Sites applicants applied to does not appear to have been a determining factor in Placement. Two accepted 2025 Social Work Fellows applied to every Placement Site, and the remaining Fellows applied to one, two, three, and four sites respectively.

Enrollment at time of Application



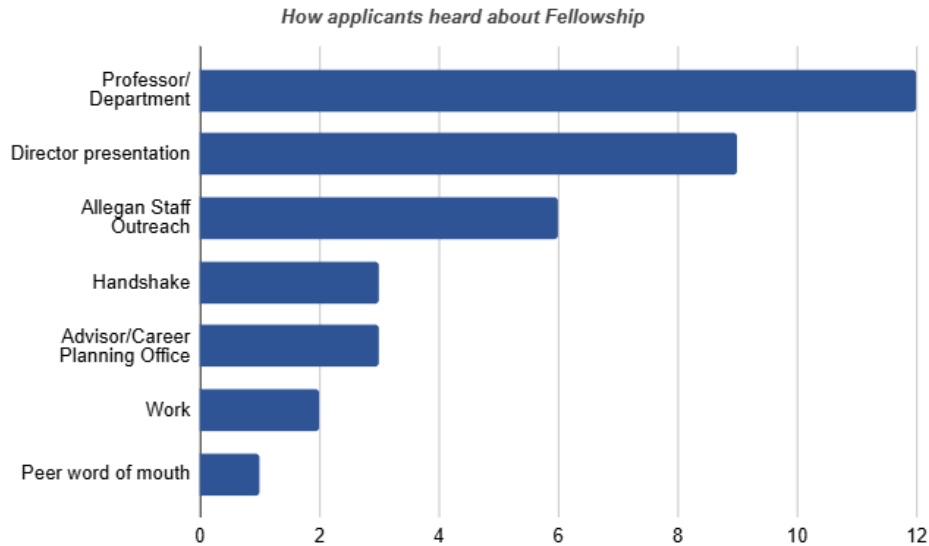
Unlike Law Fellow applicants, Social Work Fellow applicants are not required to be current students or to have graduated within a recent timeframe in order to qualify for the Fellowship. Students with at least one academic year of social work credits at the bachelor or master’s level OR graduates of a social work program may apply provided that applicants of either status complete their schoolwork at an accredited program. Despite the availability of the Fellowship to graduated non-students, 100% of 2025 Social Work Fellow applicants were students at the time of application. This is likely traceable to the fact that 2025 Social Work Fellow recruitment strategies selectively targeted student populations. While some of the Placement Sites may have advertised the program through their County job page, no applicants reported hearing about the Fellowship through a means unrelated to their school.

Michigan has 22 accredited Bachelor of Social Work programs and 13 accredited Master of Social Work programs. The numbers in parenthesis in the pie chart reflect the number of applicants who were enrolled in each program at the time of application. It is coincidental that the number of applicants by program are nearly identical to the divide of social work programs in the state.

Approximately 64% of all applicants were enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work program and 36% were enrolled in a Master of Social Work program at the time of application. The accepted 2025 Social Work

Fellow cohort mirrors this trend; 33% of accepted Fellows are enrolled in a Master of Social Work program while 66% are Bachelor of Social Work students. Notably, every bachelor degree-level fellow will graduate in 2025; no site accepted a junior-level social work student this season.

How applicants heard about the Fellowship



Applicants were required to provide a short-form answer about how they heard about the Fellowship, and the answers were identified by theme into the listed chart categories. The majority of applicants heard about the Fellowship through outreach from a professor, their social work department, or through a presentation or outreach conducted directly by the Fellowship Director or Allegan County site staff. The highest number of applications came from schools where direct outreach took place, and given the high rate of applications from schools where direct outreach occurred, the use of direct recruitment strategies likely supported the advertising of the Fellowship application by professors and social work departments to students.

The accepted 2025 Social Work Fellow cohort reported two primary means for hearing about the Fellowship; two fellows applied after sitting in a classroom presentation, and four fellows applied after hearing about the Fellowship from their professor or department. Direct outreach occurred at schools where five of the six accepted 2025 Social Work Fellows are enrolled.

Applicants by Enrollment Location

School	Applicants
Northern Michigan University*	12
Grand Valley State University*	7
Hope College*	6
Western Michigan University	3
Cornerstone University	2
Wayne State University*	2
Madonna University	1

Oakland University	1
Adrian College	1
Calvin University	1

**Denotes schools where direct outreach took place*

75% of all applicants in this cycle are enrolled at schools where direct outreach occurred. While the Fellowship is not limited to students who attend Michigan colleges or who are Michigan residents, this cycle of the Fellowship was only advertised in Michigan. This was largely due to the number of in-state social work programs relative to the number of in-state law schools.

In the 2025 Social Work Fellow cohort, three students are enrolled at Northern Michigan University, two students are enrolled at Hope College, and one student is enrolled at Western Michigan University.

Report Conclusion

The 2025 Social Work Fellowship application period is characterized by the highest number of Fellowship applicants during a given season and the most aggressive recruitment strategy to date. The data outlined in this report will support the recruitment strategy for future Social Work Fellow cohorts, particularly the finding that the geographic proximity of Placement Sites to schools where direct recruitment strategies were employed yielded a high number of applicants and of the final accepted cohort. Additional information gleaned through individual Placement Site conferences with the Director as well as lessons from current and future law student recruitment strategy reflections will be applied in the development of the 2026 Social Work Fellowship recruitment plan.