

Continuing Education

Questions and Answers for Licensed Master Social Workers and Licensed Clinical Social Workers

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Introduction

Effective January 1, 2015, New York State Education Law requires each licensed master social worker (LMSW) and licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) to complete 36 hours of acceptable formal continuing education during each three-year registration period. However, there is a phase-in period for this requirement for licensees whose next registration period starts during the first three years after January 1, 2015. These licensees will have to complete one hour of acceptable formal continuing education for each month in their registration period after January 1, 2015. Please refer to the [chart below](#) for the continuing education hours required during this initial phase-in period.

The statute and regulations that apply to these requirements are available on this site.

This document is designed to respond to frequently asked questions regarding the mandatory continuing education requirements. It is not a substitute for reading the relevant provisions of law, rule or regulation.

General Information

1. Is there a difference between "licensure" and "registration"?

Yes. In New York, upon satisfying the licensure eligibility requirements, a "license" is awarded. Licensure is for life unless suspended, revoked or annulled for reasons of misconduct.

In order to both practice as a LMSW or LCSW in New York and use either one of these restricted titles, a licensee must be currently "registered". Registration is for a three-year period, except for the first registration renewal after licensure, which is prorated to move licensees to month of birth renewal.

2. If I am licensed as an LMSW and become licensed as an LCSW, must I maintain both registrations?

No. The scope of practice for licensed clinical social work encompasses the practice of licensed master social work. Therefore, as an LCSW you may choose to make your LMSW "inactive" at the next registration period. However, you may not use the title "LMSW" unless that license is registered.

Continuing Education Requirements

3. Am I required to take continuing education?

Yes. Every LMSW and LCSW practicing with his or her New York license must complete the required acceptable formal continuing education in order to register. As a practicing LMSW or LCSW, you are required to complete 36 hours of acceptable formal continuing education during each three-year registration period. However, during the initial phase-in period, starting January 1, 2015, the number of hours necessary will be pro-rated at the rate of one hour per month for each month of the registration period.

If you are returning to practice as an LMSW or LCSW in New York, you may have to complete pro-rated hours of continuing education. This calculation will depend on whether or not you were practicing the social work profession in New York or another state before you apply to re-register in New York.

4. **I just received my license. Since I am in my first registration period, do I need to take continuing education courses immediately?**
You are not required to complete continuing education during your initial three-year registration period.
5. **I am licensed and registered to practice in New York as an LMSW. If I become an LCSW, do I have to complete any continuing education?**
No, an LCSW is exempt from continuing education during the first three-year period after licensure. If you wish to maintain your LMSW registration, you must complete acceptable continuing education during the three-year LMSW registration. Since the scope of practice for the LMSW is contained within the scope of the LCSW, you may choose to make your LMSW registration "inactive." If you allow your LMSW registration to lapse or become "inactive", you will not need to complete acceptable continuing education hours for that last LMSW registration period.
6. **If I am registered as an LMSW and LCSW at the same time, will I have to complete more than 36 hours of continuing education every three-year registration period?**
No. The law requires such an individual to complete no more than 36 hours for each three-year registration period. When you register each license, you must attest to whether or not you completed 36 hours of continuing education during the respective registration periods for each of them.
7. **I was practicing in another jurisdiction and just received my first New York license and registration. Do I need to begin taking continuing education immediately?**
No, the law provides an exemption from the continuing education requirement for the first three-year registration period in which one is licensed as an LMSW or LCSW.
8. **When will I be required to begin reporting completion of continuing education?**
Licensees whose first re-registration date following January 1, 2015, occurs less than three years from that date, but on or after January 1, 2015, will have to complete one hour of acceptable formal continuing education for each month in the period beginning January 1, 2015. Licensees must attest to whether or not they met the requirement as part of the registration application for the next three-year period.

If you are renewing the registration of your license on or after January 1, 2015, the number of continuing education hours you will be required to complete and report will vary depending on when your current registration expires. Please see the chart below in order to determine the required number of hours you need to complete prior to your registration renewal date.

If you are due to register for the period beginning:	You will be required to complete the following number of hours of continuing education:
January 1, 2015	0
February 1, 2015	1
March 1, 2015	2

April 1, 2015	3
May 1, 2015	4
June 1, 2015	5
July 1, 2015	6
August 1, 2015	7
September 1, 2015	8
October 1, 2015	9
November 1, 2015	10
December 1, 2015	11
January 1, 2016	12
February 1, 2016	13
March 1, 2016	14
April 1, 2016	15
May 1, 2016	16
June 1, 2016	17
July 1, 2016	18
August 1, 2016	19
September 1, 2016	20
October 1, 2016	21
November 1, 2016	22
December 1, 2016	23
January 1, 2017	24
February 1, 2017	25
March 1, 2017	26
April 1, 2017	27
May 1, 2017	28
June 1, 2017	29
July 1, 2017	30
August 1, 2017	31
September 1, 2017	32
October 1, 2017	33
November 1, 2017	34
December 1, 2017	35

January 1, 2018	36
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Licenses whose registrations are due to be renewed on or after January 1, 2018, must complete 1.0 hour of acceptable continuing education for each month of their registration periods (see [Question 9](#))

9. **I just received my registration certificate and notice that the registration period is less than three years. Am I required to complete a total of 36 hours of continuing education for this period?**

No. Registration periods may be adjusted so that subsequent renewals will occur during a licensee's month of birth. If your registration period is less than three years, count the number of months of the registration period to determine the number of continuing education hours required. You must complete one hour of continuing education for each month. For example, if your registration period is from January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2018, this is a 30-month registration period; therefore, you are required to complete 30 hours of acceptable continuing education during it.

If you are required to re-register after January 1, 2015, you will be required to complete the number of hours outlined in the chart above.

Continuing Education Hours

10. **What constitutes an hour of continuing education?**

A minimum of 50 minutes equals one continuing education hour of credit. However, some courses may be given in continuing education units. One continuing education unit (CEU) equals 10 continuing education hours. Therefore, 0.1 CEU equals one continuing education hour, 0.2 CEUs equals two continuing education hours, and so on.

11. **If I complete more than the 36 hours required for my current registration period may I "carryover" the excess hours to my next registration period?**

No. Under Education Law §7710(2), continuing education hours may not be carried over to subsequent registration periods.

12. **Must I complete one hour of continuing education in each month of my registration period?**

No. There is no requirement that a LMSW or LCSW must complete some portion of the required continuing education in each month of his or her registration period. Thus, LMSWs and LCSWs have the flexibility to select and schedule the continuing education activities that are most appropriate for their professional practice.

13. **Must I take a specific number of continuing education courses each year during my registration period?**

No. You may take all courses in one year, if you wish. However, you must complete the required number of hours prior to the expiration date of your registration.

Compliance

14. **What if there are circumstances which make it impossible for me to comply?**

There are three possible options that may be available to you, if there are circumstances that make it impossible for you to comply with the continuing education requirements in a timely

manner. However, you must submit the [Registration Remittance Addendum](#) with your Registration Renewal Document before your request for one of the options listed below can be considered.

Inactive Status

A registration may be placed on inactive status if the licensee will not be practicing in New York.

Adjustment

The Department may grant an adjustment to the continuing education requirements if the licensee documents or the Department determines that there is good cause that prevents compliance. The Department may grant an adjustment for the following reasons:

- poor health or a specific physical or mental disability certified by an appropriate health care professional(s);
- extended active duty with the Armed Forces of the United States; or
- other good cause beyond the licensee's control, which in the Department's judgment, makes it impossible for the licensee to comply with the continuing education requirements in a timely manner.

For more information regarding an adjustment to this requirement, please contact the Office of the State Board for Social Work by email at swbd@mail.nysed.gov.

Conditional Registration

A conditional registration will allow a licensee to continue working while making up the deficiencies in the continuing education requirement from the previous registration period. If granted, a conditional registration is valid for one year and cannot be renewed or extended. See [Question 38](#) for more information about this option.

If you are not practicing or if you are returning to practice

15. If I am licensed in New York but my registration is inactive, do I need to complete continuing education before I can reactivate my registration?

If you notify the Department that you are not practicing the profession, your registration will be placed on "inactive" status. You do not have to complete any continuing education hours during the period that you are on "inactive" status. Please see Question 14 for information on requesting an inactive status.

16. Will I have to make up the continuing education hours if and when I return to the practice of LMSW or LCSW in New York?

Yes. If you wish to return to practice after January 1, 2015, you will have to complete the number of continuing education hours that would have been due, if you were actively practicing at the time of your current registration. For example, since the law is effective on January 1, 2015, a licensee who was inactive prior to that date and who wishes to return to practice on June 1, 2018 would be required to complete 41 hours of acceptable continuing education hours, which would be the total number of months from January 1, 2015 to May 31, 2018, the period during which the licensee was inactive. In order to register to practice during the period starting June 1, 2018, the licensee would have to complete the 41 hours before the Department will register the licensee to practice.

17. What are the continuing education requirements if I was practicing in another state while my New York registration was on "inactive" status?

As of January 1, 2015, in order to reactivate your registration in New York when you have been practicing social work in another state, you will need to complete at least one hour of acceptable continuing education for each month your registration was inactive. The Department will not reactivate your registration until you make up the continuing education requirement deficiency that you accrued during the period your registration was on "inactive" status.

Please be aware that in addition to making up the deficiency that you accrued during the period that your registration was on "inactive" status, you will have to complete the continuing education hours that would be otherwise due for the new registration period.

For example, a licensee who practiced in another state from January 1, 2016 until December 31, 2017 and returns to practice in New York on January 1, 2018 would be required to complete 24 hours of acceptable continuing education for the period from January 1, 2016 until December 31, 2017, before the licensee could be registered to practice in New York. The licensee would also have to complete 36 hours of acceptable continuing education for the period that ends on December 31, 2020, which would be the end of the licensee's three-year registration period, after his or her registration is reactivated.

18. Can I use continuing education hours that I completed before I placed my New York registration on "inactive" status?

If you were not practicing in another jurisdiction during the period when your New York registration was on "inactive" status, you may count continuing education hours that you completed with a Department-approved provider within the 12 months prior to the beginning of your new registration period. In other words, you must satisfy the deficiency before you can re-register to practice in New York.

If you were practicing in another jurisdiction, you may use acceptable continuing education hours that were accrued from a Department-approved provider up to 36 months prior to the beginning of your new registration period.

19. Can I receive credit for continuing education activity that I engaged in while practicing in another jurisdiction?

If the continuing education activities completed in another jurisdiction were offered by a provider who was approved by the Department at the time you completed the continuing education hours in subject areas that are acceptable in New York, the Department will award you credit for such continuing education.

Courses and Providers of Continuing Education

20. What courses are acceptable for continuing education?

To be acceptable the courses must be administered:

- by a New York State Education Department-approved provider; and
- in an approved subject area (see [Question 25](#) for a listing of approved subject areas)

Also, continuing education hours may be earned by:

- preparing and teaching a course offered by a Department-approved provider of social work continuing education, provided that the course being taught has not been presented on more than one occasion without presenting new or revised material;
- preparing and teaching a course, acceptable to the Department, at a higher education institution or a psychotherapy institute, as defined in section 74.10(a)(2) and (3) of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, relating to the practice of licensed master social work or licensed clinical social work, provided that the course has not been taught by the licensee on more than one occasion without presenting new or revised material;
- making a technical presentation at a professional conference sponsored by an organization that is a Department-approved provider of social work continuing education, provided that the presentation has not been offered on more than one occasion without presenting new or revised material;
- completing a self-study program, offered by a Department-approved provider, provided that self-study hours do not comprise more than twelve hours in any three-year registration period or one-third of the hours for a registration period other than three years;
- authoring a first-time article published in a peer-reviewed journal or a chapter in a published book; and
- authoring a first-time book in the practice of LMSW or LCSW.

21. How many continuing education hours can I get for each activity?

Each Department-approved provider determines the length of the course to be offered and then will determine the hours according to the following: the awarding of continuing education hours is based on a contact hour which is equivalent to 50 minutes of an organized learning activity and a 10 minute break. Thus, a program of two clock hours would be awarded 2.0 continuing education hours.

Other activities such as those listed in the following chart may be approved for the amount of hours indicated.

Acceptable Activities	Continuing Education Hours
Successful completion of a credit- or non-credit bearing course at a higher education institution, that is related to the practice of social work and is offered by a provider approved by the Department to offer continuing education to LMSWs and LCSWs; and in a subject area that is acceptable to the Department	15 continuing education hours per each semester course credit hour, i.e., 3 credit course = 45 continuing education hours
Preparing and teaching a credit-bearing course in a higher education institution or psychotherapy institute approved by the Department to offer social work continuing education and is in a subject area that is acceptable to the Department; and meets the requirements of regulations, i.e., the licensee is teaching the course for the first time or is presenting new or revised material	Continuing education hours may include the actual instruction time plus up to two additional hours for preparation time for each hour of presentation. This means that a licensee could be credited with acceptable continuing education hours for developing and presenting a three-semester hour credit course, as follows: $45 + (45 \times 2) = 135$ hours for a three-semester hour course.

Preparing and teaching a continuing education course for an approved provider that is in an approved subject matter area; and meets the requirements of regulations, i.e., the licensee is teaching the course for the first time or is presenting new or revised material	For every in-class continuing education hour, one hour of continuing education credit may be awarded plus up to two additional hours for preparation time for each hour of presentation. A licensee could be credited with 6 hours of acceptable continuing education credit for a two-hour course, i.e., $2 + (2 \times 2) = 6$
Making a technical presentation at a professional conference sponsored by an organization that is an approved provider of social work continuing education that is in an approved subject matter area; and meets the requirements of regulations, i.e., the licensee is presenting the information for the first time or is presenting new or revised material	For every presentation contact hour, one hour of continuing education credit may be awarded plus up to two additional hours for preparation time for each hour of presentation.
Authoring a first-time article published in a peer-reviewed journal or a chapter in a published book on the practice of LMSW or LCSW	2 hours of continuing education
Authoring a first-time book on the practice of LMSW or LCSW	5 hours of continuing education
Completing a structured, self-study program offered by a provider approved by the Department that is based on audio, audio-visual, written, on-line or other media; and does not include live instruction that allows the licensee to interact with the instructor and/or other students	One hour of continuing education credit for each 50-minute hour of instruction, as determined by the approved provider. Self-study may comprise no more than 12 continuing education hours in any three-year registration period, or one-third of the hours for a registration period other than 36 months.

22. Who are approved providers?

In order to offer continuing education to LMSWs and LCSWs, an entity must be approved by the Department, based upon an application, along with the submission of the required fee. For information about how to become an approved provider, please see:

Requirements to become an approved provider

Department-Approved Providers for a listing of providers that have been approved by the Department to offer social work continuing education.

23. What if I take continuing education from a provider who is not approved by the Department?

Courses that are taken from a provider that has not been approved by the Department cannot be used to satisfy the continuing education requirement.

24. Are there any specific courses that I must complete during my registration period?

No. It is your responsibility to complete coursework in subjects that improve your knowledge, skills and abilities in the practice of licensed master social work and/or licensed clinical social

work. This provides you with the flexibility to meet your education needs in your current position or for a future position. For instance, a LMSW who engages in "macro" practice could take courses in his or her area of practice, such as community organizing, policy analysis, and access to services for culturally diverse clients.

25. Is there any limitation on the subject matter of the coursework?

Yes. The subject matter must contribute to the professional practice of social work and have as its focus:

- theories and concepts of human behavior in the social environment;
- social work practice, knowledge and skills;
- social work research, programs, or practice evaluations;
- social work management, administration or social policy;
- social work ethics;
- clinical interventions, evidence-based models, and principles of clinical social work practice, psychotherapy, and clinical social work diagnosis;
- client communications and recordkeeping;
- administrative supervision of licensed master social work and clinical supervision of licensed clinical social work practice;
- pedagogical methodologies or other topics which contribute to the professional practice of licensed master social work and licensed clinical social work; or
- cross-disciplinary offerings from medicine, law, administration, education and the behavioral sciences are acceptable if they are clearly related to the enhancement of social work practice, skills and knowledge, and the health, safety, and/or welfare of the public.

26. Are there subjects that are not acceptable for continuing education for LMSWs or LCSWs?

Yes. Any continuing education that is designed for the sole purpose of personal development, marketing, business practices, and maximizing profits for the practice of a LMSW or LCSW will not be considered by the Department as acceptable continuing education.

Similarly, a licensee who undergoes treatment through the use of self-hypnosis for smoking cessation could not count such treatment as continuing education. However, a licensee who takes coursework to develop skills in training clients to engage in self-hypnosis from a Department-approved provider could count such coursework as continuing education.

27. Can I study on my own rather than take a formal or self-study course?

No. Independent study or informal group "study clubs" will not be acceptable for satisfying the continuing education requirement for LMSWs or LCSWs. Only formal courses or self-study courses offered by Department-approved providers may be counted toward the continuing education requirement. Formal and self-study courses offered by Department-approved providers assure relevant course content, effective evaluation, and recordkeeping by the provider.

28. Are courses limited to a traditional "classroom setting" in which I am in the same room with the instructor?

Self-study courses are acceptable. They are structured study, offered by a Department-approved provider that are based on audio, audio-visual, written, on-line and other media. Self-study courses do not include live instruction (transmitted in person or otherwise) during which the

student may communicate and interact with the instructor and other students. Please note that there is a limitation of 12 continuing education hours in a 36-month registration period, or one-third of the hours for a registration period other than 36 months, for self-study courses as described above.

29. Can I complete more hours of on-line continuing education if the course includes live interaction with the instructor and other students?

Yes. There is no limit on the number of hours of acceptable continuing education you may take on-line through a Department-approved provider, when the course includes live interaction with the instructor and other students.

30. Would in-service and training programs provided by my employer be acceptable continuing education?

In order to receive credit for in-service and training programs provided by an employer, the employer must be a Department-approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers. Additionally, the in-service training must be clearly related to the enhancement of social work practice, skills, and knowledge and the health, safety, and/or welfare of the public.

To become an approved provider, the employer must meet all the requirements in the Education Law and Commissioner's Regulations, which, include, but are not limited to, submitting an application, with the required fee, to the Department. The application to become a Department-approved provider can be found at www.op.nysed.gov/prof/sw/swceproviders.htm.

31. Would professional development activities that school social workers complete be considered acceptable continuing education?

While professional development activities may be required by a school social worker's employer, such activities would only be considered acceptable for continuing education requirement purposes if they are offered by a Department-approved provider and clearly relate to the enhancement of social work practice, skills, and knowledge.

To become a Department-approved provider, a school district, board of cooperative education services (BOCES), or other qualified organization must meet all the requirements in the Education Law and Commissioner's Regulations, which, include, but are not limited to, submitting an application, with the required fee, to the Department. The application to become a Department-approved provider can be found at www.op.nysed.gov/prof/sw/swceproviders.htm.

32. Would courses/educational activities related to race, diversity, cultural and linguistic competency and the immigrant experience be acceptable subjects? Would the Department accept courses/educational activities in case management, nursing, medicine and bioethics that would be relevant for many social workers?

All courses/educational activities must be taken from a Department-approved provider. As part of the provider approval process, the State Board for Social Work will review proposed courses/educational activities in the areas listed above that may be offered by a prospective provider of continuing education for New York LMSWs and LCSWs. Please refer to [Question 25](#) for more information.

Additionally, the above-referenced topics and offerings in other disciplines may be acceptable continuing education for social workers, if the course or courses clearly relate to the enhancement of social work practice, skills, and knowledge and the health, safety and welfare of the public and are offered by a Department-approved provider.

Recordkeeping and Reporting

33. What records will I have to keep?

Providers must issue a Certificate of Completion to licensees who complete courses for continuing education hours. Licensees must retain, in their records, information regarding completed acceptable continuing education for six years from the date of completion of the coursework/educational activity.

A Certificate of Completion should include the following information:

- name of licensee and license number;
- title of the course or program, subject area, and any identification number assigned to it by the provider;
- number of hours completed;
- the provider's name and any identifying number;
- verification by the provider of the licensee's attendance or participation;
- the date and location of the course or activity; and
- a statement indicating that the organization is recognized by the New York State Education Department's State Board for Social Work as a Department-approved provider of LMSW and LCSW continuing education.

The provider must also retain records for at least six years from the date of completion of the coursework/educational activity, in case the licensee or the Department requests verification of a course or educational activity offering.

You are responsible for providing documentation of other educational activities that are defined as acceptable continuing education under the regulations. The following examples are a non-exhaustive list:

- course descriptions, handouts and brochures that may document the licensee's first-time preparation and teaching a course offered by an approved provider of continuing education to social workers;
- article published for the first-time in a peer-reviewed journal, or a chapter in a book; or
- syllabi, power point slides, and examinations that are part of a course that was prepared and taught for the first time in a higher education institution or psychotherapy institute, as defined in section 74.10(a)(2) and (3) of the Commissioner's Regulations.

34. What information must I provide the Department when I renew my registration?

You will be required to attest on your Registration Renewal Document that you completed the required continuing education hours. If you did not complete the required hours, you will have to apply for a conditional registration. Please refer to Question 38 for more information.

35. Do I have to send my continuing education records to the Department when I re-register?

No. However, you must retain your continuing education records for six years because you are required to make your continuing education records available for inspection by the Department

upon its request. Random samples of mandatory continuing education records are audited by the Department to ensure compliance with the continuing education requirement.

36. What documentation must I provide if my continuing education records are audited?

The Department randomly audits a percentage of licensees each month, as well as those licensees who applied for a conditional registration and those who previously failed an audit. You must provide the Department with your Certificates of Completion for each approved continuing education course or records for other educational activities, when requested. In no cases will self-reporting forms be acceptable.

37. What if the audit of my continuing education records reveals discrepancies?

You may be subject to disciplinary proceedings for professional misconduct. According to Section 29.1 of the Rules of the Board of Regents, willfully making or filing a false report constitutes unprofessional conduct. Penalties for such misconduct may include censure and reprimand, fine, and/or suspension or revocation of your license.

38. What if I fail to complete the required number of hours but wish to continue practicing in New York?

The Department, at its discretion, may issue you a conditional registration if you request one. The conditional registration is valid for one year only and is not renewable. To be granted a conditional registration you would have to:

- agree to complete the required hours of continuing education from the previous registration period during the period of conditional registration,
- complete the regular continuing education requirement at a rate of one hour per month for the one-year conditional registration period,
- complete any additional education which the Department may require,
- complete and submit the Registration Remittance Addendum, and
- pay the fee for the conditional registration, which is equal to the amount of the regular registration fee (\$179) and the continuing education fee (\$45) for a total fee of \$224.

At the end of the conditional registration period, you must submit your Certificates of Completion to the Department, certifying that you have completed the required continuing education and pay the regular registration fee (\$179) and the continuing education fee (\$45) for a total of \$224.

Conditional registrations are valid for no more than one year and are not renewable. This means you **MUST** meet the requirements by the end of the conditional period. You will not be issued a registration for the remaining two years until you meet the requirements. Remember - if you are not registered you may not practice your profession in New York.

39. Can a third-party maintain my continuing education records?

Yes. You may have a third-party, such as a professional association, maintain your continuing education records. In the event of a Department audit or at the end of a conditional registration period, you would have to request that the third-party provide you with Certificates of Completion for the courses or educational activities that were completed during the time period in question.

Please note: if the third-party cannot provide you with such documentation, you could face

charges of unprofessional conduct for failure to maintain and produce continuing education records.

Further Information

40. How can I obtain more information?

Please contact the Office of the State Board for Social Work, New York State Education Department, Office of the Professions, State Education Building - 2nd Floor East Wing, 89 Washington Ave., Albany, New York, 12234, by phone 518-474-3817 ext. 450, by fax 518-486-2981, or by e-mail swbd@mail.nysed.gov.

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