



Comunidad and Umoja Scholars Program (CUSP), provided by the School of Social Work, is a leadership development and mentoring program designed to enhance the training of full-time, master-level social work students with a propensity for culturally responsive practice and leadership. CUSP focuses on, but is not limited to, students of color pursuing a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree at Salisbury University. Applicants must identify a commitment to working with communities of color as their focus and be dedicated to seeking employment in social work practice after graduation.

### **Comunidad means Community in Spanish &**

### **Umoja, the first principle of Kwanzaa, means Unity**

#### **Purpose**

- Increase the number of culturally responsive social work practitioners and leaders.
- Enhance individuals' sense of belonging through the development of relationships within the School of Social Work and the larger community.
- Increase leadership capabilities to make a difference in communities of color.

#### **Rationale**

People generally strongly prefer those similar to them, with race being the most significant factor. Given this, the racial/ethnic concordance or discordance between social workers and the individuals they work can affect the working relationship. African Americans and Latinxs tend to have a higher preference for social workers of the same race/ethnicity (Hsu, Hackett, & Hinkson, 2014). African Americans are more reluctant to self-disclose to white clinicians in clinical settings (Williamson, 2012). This preference for racial/ethnic concordance may stem from the perceived notion that they will receive fair treatment from someone similar to themselves. Older, less educated, lower-income, and less geographically mobile individuals also tend to prefer racial concordance (Hsu, Hackett, & Hinkson, 2014).

Although the social work profession has become more racially and ethnically diverse over the past two decades, the vast majority of clinical social workers (77%) are white. This indicates that social workers do not adequately reflect the diversity of the individuals and communities they serve, with most licensed social workers being white and serving in communities of color (Center for Health Workforce Studies & NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2006; Kim, 2025). Moreover, some white social work students and practitioners do not feel prepared to engage in culturally responsive practice (Greeno et al., 2017), hold negative racial attitudes (Loya, 2011; Loya, 2012), practice from a problematic color-blind approach (Priester, Pitner, & Lackey, 2019), and often do not identify their race as being important in practice (Hall & Jones, 2017). Given this context, the SU School of Social Work is committed to recruiting, mentoring, and developing culturally responsive social workers, practitioners, and leaders.

### Program Learning Objectives

The CUSP Scholars will:

- Be prepared to enter the social workforce with knowledge and skills for culturally responsive practice
- Build effective personal and professional relationships
- Set goals for professional growth and learning
- Develop leadership skills

### Eligibility & Selection Criteria

An applicant must meet the following requirements:

- Current or accepted MSW student in the Salisbury University School of Social Work with at least a 3.0 GPA. Students in the UMGC program are not eligible to apply.
- Must be in good academic standing, and if an incoming MSW student, they cannot be provisionally admitted to the MSW Program
- Enrolled in at least nine (9) credit hours per semester
- Must be in a field placement during the award period
- Focused on, but not limited to, students who are members of historically marginalized racial/ethnic backgrounds
- Evidence of past leadership, volunteer service, life or work experiences with racial/ethnic populations
- Complete a **personal statement** that expresses interest in developing a leadership project focused explicitly on supporting historically marginalized communities of color.

### Program Expectations & Requirements

Scholars are expected to participate in all program requirements to remain eligible for the award.

- Must maintain a 3.0 GPA during the award period
- Serve in a field placement setting that directly serves populations of color
- Participate in virtual leadership training seminars during the Winter Semester
- During Fall and Spring Semesters, meet bi-weekly with your social work mentor to review the leadership project
- Develop, deliver, and conduct a presentation reviewing their one-year leadership project
- Attend a national or regional conference such as the NASW – MD clinical conference, the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, or the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Conference
  - A portion of the expenses related to travel, food, and lodging will be covered by CUSP
  - Scholars will apply for a travel grant through the College of Health and Human Services.
  - If conference attendance is not feasible, the CUSP scholar may apply funds to a professional development opportunity relevant to social work with the approval of the CUSP Coordinator.

## Award

- \$6500.00 per year toward graduate tuition at the SU School of Social Work
- Specialized training, professional development support, and mentoring
- Duration of the award is a maximum of two years, awarded one year at a time.
- The award is contingent on funding availability and on the scholar meeting program requirements and maintaining satisfactory progress toward a social work degree.

## Deadline

**Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on April 17, 2026.**

To apply, complete the application via the Salisbury University Scholarship website: <https://salisbury.academicworks.com/opportunities/3364>

## Checklist

- CUSP Application
- Resume
- Two letters of recommendation
- Unofficial undergraduate and graduate transcripts
- **Personal statement (no more than 500 words).** The statement should be a narrative answering the following questions:
  - How has your personal and professional development over time demonstrated your strong commitment to providing culturally responsive services to underserved racial/ethnic individuals and communities?
  - Which area of engagement would most interest you when developing a leadership project? Why?
    - Community-based **interventions** focused on providing services and leadership within communities of color
    - Community-based **research** focused on exploring topics that impact communities of color
    - Social work **education to** support the workforce that provides services in communities of color

**Questions**, please contact Dr. Owens-King at [apowens@salisbury.edu](mailto:apowens@salisbury.edu)