



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

# **Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards**

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### **Preamble**

Social work practice promotes human well-being by strengthening opportunities, resources, and capacities of people in their environments and by creating policies and services to correct conditions that limit human rights and the quality of life. The social work profession works to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and oppression. Guided by a person-in-environment perspective and respect for human diversity, the profession works to effect social and economic justice worldwide. Social work education combines scientific inquiry with the teaching of professional skills to provide effective and ethical social work services. Social work educators reflect their identification with the profession through their teaching, scholarship, and service. Social work education, from baccalaureate to doctoral levels, employs educational, practice, scholarly, interprofessional, and service delivery models to orient and shape the profession's future in the context of expanding knowledge, changing technologies, and complex human and social concerns. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) promotes academic excellence in baccalaureate and master's social work education. The EPAS specifies the curricular content and educational context to prepare students for professional social work practice. The EPAS sets forth basic requirements for these purposes. Beyond these basic requirements of EPAS, individual programs focus on areas relevant to their institutional and program mission, goals, and objectives.

The EPAS permits programs to use time-tested and new models of program design, implementation, and evaluation. It does so by balancing requirements that promote comparability across programs with a level of flexibility that encourages programs to respond to changing human, professional, and institutional needs. The EPAS focuses on assessing the results of a program's development and its continuous improvement. While accreditation is ultimately evaluative, in social work education it is based on a consultative and collaborative process that determines whether a program meets the requirements of the EPAS.

## **Functions of Educational Policy and Accreditation**

### **1. Educational Policy**

The Educational Policy promotes excellence, creativity, and innovation in social work education and practice. It sets forth required content areas that relate to each other and to the purposes, knowledge, and values of the profession. Programs of social work education are offered at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. Baccalaureate and master's programs are accredited by CSWE. This document supersedes all prior statements of curriculum policy for baccalaureate and master's program levels.

### **2. Accreditation**

Accreditation ensures that the quality of professional programs merits public confidence. The Accreditation Standards establish basic requirements for baccalaureate and master's levels. Accreditation Standards pertain to the following program elements:

- Mission, goals, and objectives
- Curriculum
- Governance, structure, and resources
- Faculty
- Student professional development
- Nondiscrimination and human diversity
- Program renewal
- Program assessment and continuous improvement

### **3. Relationship of Educational Policy to Accreditation**

CSWE uses the EPAS for the accreditation of social work programs. The Educational Policy and the Accreditation Standards are conceptually integrated. Programs use Educational Policy, Section 1 as one important basis for developing program mission, goals, and objectives. Programs use Educational Policy, Section 3 to develop program objectives and Educational Policy, Sections 4 and 5 to develop content for demonstrating attainment of the objectives. The accreditation process reviews the program's self-study document, site team report, and program response to determine compliance with the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Accredited programs meet all standards.

## **Educational Policy**

### **1. Purposes**

#### **1.0 Purposes of the Social Work Profession**

The social work profession receives its sanction from public and private auspices and is the primary profession in the development, provision, and evaluation of social services. Professional social workers are leaders in a variety of organizational settings and service delivery systems within a global context.

The profession of social work is based on the values of service, social and economic justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, and integrity and competence in practice. With these values as defining principles, the purposes of social work are:

- To enhance human well-being and alleviate poverty, oppression, and other forms of social injustice.
- To enhance the social functioning and interactions of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities by involving them in accomplishing goals, developing resources, and preventing and alleviating distress.
- To formulate and implement social policies, services, and programs that meet basic human needs and support the development of human capacities.
- To pursue policies, services, and resources through advocacy and social or political actions that promote social and economic justice.
- To develop and use research, knowledge, and skills that advance social work practice.
- To develop and apply practice in the context of diverse cultures.

#### **1.1 Purposes of Social Work Education**

The purposes of social work education are to prepare competent and effective professionals, to develop social work knowledge, and to provide leadership in the development of service delivery systems. Social work education is grounded in the profession's history, purposes, and philosophy and is based on a body of knowledge, values, and skills. Social work education enables students to integrate the knowledge, values, and skills of the social work profession for competent practice.

## **1.2 Achievement of Purposes**

Among its programs, which vary in design, structure, and objectives, social work education achieves these purposes through such means as:

- Providing curricula and teaching practices at the forefront of the new and changing knowledge base of social work and related disciplines.
- Providing curricula that build on a liberal arts perspective to promote breadth of knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills.
- Developing knowledge.
- Developing and applying instructional and practice-relevant technology.
- Maintaining reciprocal relationships with social work practitioners, groups, organizations, and communities.
- Promoting continual professional development of students, faculty, and practitioners.
- Promoting interprofessional and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Preparing social workers to engage in prevention activities that promote well-being.
- Preparing social workers to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
- Preparing social workers to evaluate the processes and effectiveness of practice.
- Preparing social workers to practice without discrimination, with respect, and with knowledge and skills related to clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.
- Preparing social workers to alleviate poverty, oppression, and other forms of social injustice.
- Preparing social workers to recognize the global context of social work practice.
- Preparing social workers to formulate and influence social policies and social work services in diverse political contexts.

## **2. Structure of Social Work Education**

### **2.0 Structure**

Baccalaureate and graduate social work education programs operate under the auspices of accredited colleges and universities. These educational institutions vary by auspices, emphasis, and size. With diverse strengths, missions, and resources, social work education programs share a common commitment to educate competent, ethical social workers.

The baccalaureate and master's levels of social work education are anchored in the purposes of the social work profession and promote the knowledge, values, and skills of the profession. Baccalaureate social work education programs prepare graduates for generalist professional practice. Master's social work education programs prepare graduates for advanced professional practice in an area of concentration. The baccalaureate and master's levels of educational preparation are differentiated according to (a) conceptualization and design, (b) content, (c) program objectives, and (d) depth, breadth, and specificity of knowledge and skills. Frameworks and perspectives for concentration include fields of practice, problem areas, intervention methods, and practice contexts and perspectives.

Programs develop their mission and goals within the purposes of the profession, the purposes of social work education, and their institutional context. Programs also recognize academic content and professional experiences that students bring to the educational program. A conceptual framework, built upon relevant theories and knowledge, shapes the breadth and depth of knowledge and practice skills to be acquired.

### **2.1 Program Renewal**

Social work education remains vital, relevant, and progressive by pursuing exchanges with the practice community and program stakeholders and by developing and assessing new knowledge and technology.

### **3. Program Objectives**

Social work education is grounded in the liberal arts and contains a coherent, integrated professional foundation in social work. The graduate advanced curriculum is built from the professional foundation. Graduates of baccalaureate and master's social work programs demonstrate the capacity to meet the foundation objectives and objectives unique to the program. Graduates of master's social work programs also demonstrate the capacity to meet advanced program objectives.

#### **3.0 Foundation Program Objectives**

The professional foundation, which is essential to the practice of any social worker, includes, but is not limited to, the following program objectives.

Graduates demonstrate the ability to:

1. Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.
2. Understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles, and practice accordingly.
3. Practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills related to clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.
4. Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and apply strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social and economic justice.
5. Understand and interpret the history of the social work profession and its contemporary structures and issues.
- B6. Apply the knowledge and skills of generalist social work practice with systems of all sizes.<sup>1</sup>
- M6. Apply the knowledge and skills of a generalist social work perspective to practice with systems of all sizes.
7. Use theoretical frameworks supported by empirical evidence to understand individual development and behavior across the life span and the interactions among individuals and between individuals and families, groups, organizations, and communities.
8. Analyze, formulate, and influence social policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Items preceded by a B or M apply only to baccalaureate or master's programs, respectively.

9. Evaluate research studies, apply research findings to practice, and evaluate their own practice interventions.
10. Use communication skills differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities.
11. Use supervision and consultation appropriate to social work practice.
12. Function within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems and seek necessary organizational change.

### **3.1 Concentration Objectives**

Graduates of a master's social work program are advanced practitioners who apply the knowledge and skills of advanced social work practice in an area of concentration. They analyze, intervene, and evaluate in ways that are highly differentiated, discriminating, and self-critical. Graduates synthesize and apply a broad range of knowledge and skills with a high degree of autonomy and proficiency. They refine and advance the quality of their practice and that of the larger social work profession.

### **3.2 Additional Program Objectives**

A program may develop additional objectives to cover the required content in relation to its particular mission, goals, and educational level.

## **4. Foundation Curriculum Content**

All social work programs provide foundation content in the areas specified below. Content areas may be combined and delivered with a variety of instructional technologies. Content is relevant to the mission, goals, and objectives of the program and to the purposes, values, and ethics of the social work profession.

### **4.0 Values and Ethics**

Social work education programs integrate content about values and principles of ethical decision making as presented in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. The educational experience provides students with the opportunity to be aware of personal values; develop, demonstrate, and promote the values of the profession; and analyze ethical dilemmas and the ways in which these affect practice, services, and clients.



#### **4.1 Diversity**

Social work programs integrate content that promotes understanding, affirmation, and respect for people from diverse backgrounds. The content emphasizes the interlocking and complex nature of culture and personal identity. It ensures that social services meet the needs of groups served and are culturally relevant. Programs educate students to recognize diversity within and between groups that may influence assessment, planning, intervention, and research. Students learn how to define, design, and implement strategies for effective practice with persons from diverse backgrounds.

#### **4.2 Populations-at-Risk and Social and Economic Justice**

Social work education programs integrate content on populations-at-risk, examining the factors that contribute to and constitute being at risk. Programs educate students to identify how group membership influences access to resources, and present content on the dynamics of such risk factors and responsive and productive strategies to redress them.

Programs integrate social and economic justice content grounded in an understanding of distributive justice, human and civil rights, and the global interconnections of oppression. Programs provide content related to implementing strategies to combat discrimination, oppression, and economic deprivation and to promote social and economic justice. Programs prepare students to advocate for nondiscriminatory social and economic systems.

#### **4.3 Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

Social work education programs provide content on the reciprocal relationships between human behavior and social environments. Content includes empirically based theories and knowledge that focus on the interactions between and among individuals, groups, societies, and economic systems. It includes theories and knowledge of biological, sociological, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development across the life span; the range of social systems in which people live (individual, family, group, organizational, and community); and the ways social systems promote or deter people in maintaining or achieving health and well-being.

#### **4.4 Social Welfare Policy and Services**

Programs provide content about the history of social work, the history and current structures of social welfare services, and the role of policy in service delivery, social work practice, and attainment of individual and social well-being. Course

content provides students with knowledge and skills to understand major policies that form the foundation of social welfare; analyze organizational, local, state, national, and international issues in social welfare policy and social service delivery; analyze and apply the results of policy research relevant to social service delivery; understand and demonstrate policy practice skills in regard to economic, political, and organizational systems, and use them to influence, formulate, and advocate for policy consistent with social work values; and identify financial, organizational, administrative, and planning processes required to deliver social services.

#### **4.5 Social Work Practice**

Social work practice content is anchored in the purposes of the social work profession and focuses on strengths, capacities, and resources of client systems in relation to their broader environments. Students learn practice content that encompasses knowledge and skills to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. This content includes engaging clients in an appropriate working relationship, identifying issues, problems, needs, resources, and assets; collecting and assessing information; and planning for service delivery. It includes using communication skills, supervision, and consultation. Practice content also includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing empirically based interventions designed to achieve client goals; applying empirical knowledge and technological advances; evaluating program outcomes and practice effectiveness; developing, analyzing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice.

#### **4.6 Research**

Qualitative and quantitative research content provides understanding of a scientific, analytic, and ethical approach to building knowledge for practice. The content prepares students to develop, use, and effectively communicate empirically based knowledge, including evidence-based interventions. Research knowledge is used by students to provide high-quality services; to initiate change; to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery; and to evaluate their own practice.

#### **4.7 Field Education**

Field education is an integral component of social work education anchored in the mission, goals, and educational level of the program. It occurs in settings that reinforce students' identification with the purposes, values, and ethics of the profession; fosters the integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge;

and promotes the development of professional competence. Field education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated on the basis of criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program objectives.

## **5. Advanced Curriculum Content**

The master's curriculum prepares graduates for advanced social work practice in an area of concentration. Using a conceptual framework to identify advanced knowledge and skills, programs build an advanced curriculum from the foundation content. In the advanced curriculum, the foundation content areas (Section 4, 4.0–4.7) are addressed in greater depth, breadth, and specificity and support the program's conception of advanced practice.

## Accreditation Standards

### **1. Program Mission, Goals, and Objectives**

- 1.0 The social work program has a mission appropriate to professional social work education as defined in Educational Policy, Section 1.1. The program's mission is appropriate to the level or levels for which it is preparing students for practice and is consistent with the institution's mission.
- 1.1 The program has goals derived from its mission. These goals reflect the purposes of the Educational Policy, Section 1.1. Program goals are not limited to these purposes.
- 1.2 The program has objectives that are derived from the program goals. These objectives are consistent with Educational Policy, Section 3. Program objectives are reflected in program implementation and continuous assessment (see Accreditation Standard 8).
- 1.3 The program makes its constituencies aware of its mission, goals, and objectives and outcomes.

### **2. Curriculum**

- 2.0 The curriculum is developed and organized as a coherent and integrated whole consistent with program goals and objectives. Social work education is grounded in the liberal arts and contains a coherent, integrated professional foundation in social work practice from which an advanced practice curriculum is built at the graduate level.
  - B2.0.1 The program defines its conception of generalist social work practice, describes its coverage of the professional foundation curriculum identified in Educational Policy, Section 4, and demonstrates how its conception of generalist practice is implemented in all components of the professional curriculum.
  - M2.0.1 The program describes its coverage of the foundation and advanced curriculum content, identified in Educational Policy, Sections 4 and 5. The program defines its conception of advanced practice and explains how the advanced curriculum is built from the professional foundation. The master's program has a concentration curriculum that includes (a) concentration objectives, (b) a conceptual framework built on relevant theories, (c) curriculum design and content, and (d) field education that supports the advanced curriculum. The program demonstrates how the depth,

breadth, and specificity of the advanced curriculum are addressed in relation to the professional foundation.

- 2.1 The social work program administers field education (Educational Policy, Section 4.7 and Section 5) consistent with program goals and objectives that:
- 2.1.1 Provides for a minimum of 400 hours of field education for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for master's programs.
  - 2.1.2 Admits only those students who have met the program's specified criteria for field education.
  - 2.1.3 Specifies policies, criteria, and procedures for selecting agencies and field instructors; placing and monitoring students; maintaining field liaison contacts with agencies; and evaluating student learning and agency effectiveness in providing field instruction.
  - 2.1.4 Specifies that field instructors for baccalaureate students hold a CSWE-accredited baccalaureate or master's social work degree.<sup>2</sup> Field instructors for master's students hold a CSWE-accredited master's social work degree. In programs where a field instructor does not hold a CSWE-accredited baccalaureate or master's social work degree, the program assumes responsibility for reinforcing a social work perspective.
  - 2.1.5 Provides orientation, field instruction training, and continuing dialog with agencies and field instructors.
  - 2.1.6 Develops policies regarding field placements in an agency in which the student is also employed. Student assignments and field education supervision differ from those associated with the student's employment.

### **3. Program Governance, Administrative Structure, and Resources**

- 3.0 The social work program has the necessary autonomy and administrative structure to achieve its goals and objectives.
- 3.0.1 The social work faculty defines program curriculum consistent with the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards and the institution's policies.
  - 3.0.2 The administration and faculty of the social work program participate in formulating and implementing policies related to the

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<sup>2</sup> This and all future references to "CSWE-accredited baccalaureate or master's social work degree" include degrees from CSWE-accredited programs or programs approved by its Foreign Equivalency Determination Service.

- recruitment, hiring, retention, promotion, and tenure of program personnel.
- 3.0.3 The chief administrator has demonstrated leadership ability through teaching, scholarship, curriculum development, administrative experience, and other academic and professional activities in the field of social work.
    - B3.0.3 At the baccalaureate level, the social work program director who is the chief administrator, or his or her designee, has a master's of social work degree from a CSWE-accredited program with a doctoral degree preferred or a baccalaureate degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and a doctoral degree.
    - M3.0.3 At the master's level, the social work program director who is the chief administrator, or his or her designee, has a master's of social work degree from a CSWE-accredited program. In addition, it is preferred that the MSW program director have a doctoral degree.
  - 3.0.4 Social work program directors have a full-time appointment to the social work program and sufficient assigned time (at least 50% at the master's level and at least 25% at the baccalaureate level) to provide educational and administrative leadership. Combined programs designate a full-time social work faculty member to administer the baccalaureate social work program.
  - 3.0.5 The field education director has a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and at least two years post-baccalaureate or post-master's social work degree practice experience.
  - 3.0.6 The field education director has a full-time appointment to the program and sufficient assigned time (at least 25% for baccalaureate programs and 50% for master's programs) to provide educational and administrative leadership for field education.
  - 3.1 The social work program has sufficient resources to achieve program goals and objectives.
    - 3.1.1 The program has sufficient support staff, other personnel, and technological resources to support program functioning.
    - 3.1.2 The program has sufficient and stable financial supports that permit program planning and achievement of program goals and objectives. These include a budgetary allocation and procedures for budget development and administration.
    - 3.1.3 The program has comprehensive library holdings and electronic access, as well as other informational and educational resources necessary for achieving the program's goals and objectives.

- 3.1.4 The program has sufficient office and classroom space, computer-mediated access, or both to achieve the program's goals and objectives.
- 3.1.5 The program has access to assistive technology, including materials in alternative formats (such as Braille, large print, books on tape, assistive learning systems).

#### **4. Faculty**

- 4.0 The program has full-time faculty, which may be augmented by part-time faculty, with the qualifications, competence, and range of expertise in social work education and practice to achieve its goals and objectives. The program has a sufficient full-time equivalent faculty-to-student ratio (usually 1:25 for baccalaureate programs and 1:12 for master's programs) to carry out ongoing functions of the program.
- 4.1 The program demonstrates how the use of part-time faculty assists in the achievement of the program's goals and objectives.
- 4.2 Faculty size is commensurate with the number and type of curricular offerings in class and field; class size; number of students; and the faculty's teaching, scholarly, and service responsibilities.
  - B4.2.1 The baccalaureate social work program has a minimum of two full-time faculty with master's social work degrees from a CSWE-accredited program, with full-time appointment in social work, and whose principal assignment is to the baccalaureate program. It is preferred that faculty have a doctoral degree.
  - M4.2.1 The master's social work program has a minimum of six full-time faculty with master's social work degrees from a CSWE-accredited program and whose principal assignment is to the master's program. The majority of the full-time master's social work program faculty have a master's degree in social work and a doctoral degree.
- 4.3 Faculty who teach required practice courses have a master's social work degree from a CSWE-accredited program and at least two years post-baccalaureate or post-master's social work degree practice experience.
- 4.4 The program has a faculty workload policy that supports the achievement of institutional priorities and the program's goals and objectives.

## **5. Student Professional Development**

- 5.0 The program has admissions criteria and procedures that reflect the program's goals and objectives.
  - M5.1 Only candidates who have earned a bachelor's degree are admitted to the master's social work degree program.
- 5.2 The program has a written policy indicating that it does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.
- 5.3 In those foundation curriculum areas where students demonstrate required knowledge and skills, the program describes how it ensures that students do not repeat that content.
  - 5.3.1 The program has written policies and procedures concerning the transfer of credits.
    - M5.3.2 Advanced standing status is only awarded to graduates of baccalaureate social work programs accredited by CSWE.
- 5.4 The program has academic and professional advising policies and procedures that are consistent with the program's goals and objectives. Professional advising is provided by social work program faculty, staff, or both.
- 5.5 The program has policies and procedures specifying students' rights and responsibilities to participate in formulating and modifying policies affecting academic and student affairs. It provides opportunities and encourages students to organize in their interests.
- 5.6 The program informs students of its criteria for evaluating their academic and professional performance.
- 5.7 The program has policies and procedures for terminating a student's enrollment in the social work program for reasons of academic and professional performance.

## **6. Nondiscrimination and Human Diversity**

- 6.0 The program makes specific and continuous efforts to provide a learning context in which respect for all persons and understanding of diversity (including age, class, color, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation) are practiced. Social work education builds upon professional purposes and values; therefore, the program provides a learning context that is nondiscriminatory and reflects the profession's fundamental tenets. The program describes how its learning context and educational program (including faculty, staff, and student composition; selection of agencies and their clientele as field education settings; composition of program advisory or



field committees; resource allocation; program leadership; speakers series, seminars, and special programs; research and other initiatives) and its curriculum model understanding of and respect for diversity.

## **7. Program Renewal**

- 7.0 The program has ongoing exchanges with external constituencies that may include social work practitioners, social service recipients, advocacy groups, social service agencies, professional associations, regulatory agencies, the academic community, and the community at large.
- 7.1 The program's faculty engage in the development and dissemination of research, scholarship, or other creative activities relevant to the profession.
- 7.2 The program seeks opportunities for innovation and provides leadership within the profession and the academic community.

## **8. Program Assessment and Continuous Improvement**

- 8.0 The program has an assessment plan and procedures for evaluating the outcome of each program objective. The plan specifies the measurement procedures and methods used to evaluate the outcome of each program objective.
- 8.1 The program implements its plan to evaluate the outcome of each program objective and shows evidence that the analysis is used continuously to affirm and improve the educational program.

## **Program Changes**

The EPAS supports change necessary to improve the educational quality of a program in relation to its goals and objectives. The EPAS recognizes that such change is ongoing. When a program is granted initial accreditation or its accreditation is reaffirmed, the program is, by that action, accredited only at the level or levels and for the components that existed and were reviewed at the time of that action. Prior to the next scheduled accreditation review, changes may take place within the program. Although it is not necessary to report minor changes, programs notify the Commission on Accreditation (COA) of changes such as new leadership, governance, structure, and off-campus programs. Depending on the nature of the change, the COA may request additional information. Prior to the implementation of a substantive change the program submits a proposal and receives approval. Substantive changes are defined as those that require a waiver of one or more aspects of EPAS.