2022

EPAS

Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs

CSWE

COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Commission on Accreditation
Commission on Educational Policy

Contents

Introduction

Accreditation is a system for recognizing educational institutions and the professional programs affiliated with those institutions as having a level of performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to accredit baccalaureate and master's degree programs in social work education in the United States and its territories. The COA is responsible for formulating, promulgating, and implementing the accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's degree programs in social work, for ensuring that the standards define competent preparation, and for confirming that accredited social work programs meet the standards. To this end, the COA administers a multistep peer-review accreditation process that involves program self-studies and benchmarks, site visits, and COA reviews.

The accreditation review process provides professional judgments on the quality of social work education programs in institutions and encourages continuous improvement. These findings are based on the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) developed by the COA and the Commission on Educational Policy (COEP). Moreover, systematic examination of compliance with established standards supports public confidence in the quality of professional social work education and in the competence of social work practice.

CSWE's COA uses the EPAS to accredit baccalaureate and master's-level social work programs. The EPAS supports academic excellence by establishing thresholds for professional competence. It permits programs to use traditional and emerging models and methods of curriculum design by balancing requirements that promote comparable outcomes across programs with a level of flexibility that encourages programs to differentiate.

Social work education at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels shapes the profession's future through the education of competent professionals, the generation of knowledge, the promotion of evidence-informed practice through scientific inquiry, and the exercise of leadership. Social work educators serve the profession through their teaching, research, scholarship, and service. Social work educators are responsible for ensuring that students are prepared to practice safely, competently, and ethically with all clients, constituents, and the public. Additionally, social work education prepares competent practitioners to develop socially responsible policy, address the policy implications of their work, and implement strategies to address inequalities and inequities.

EPAS Revision Process

The COA and the COEP are responsible for revising the EPAS. The revision takes place in accordance with the CSWE bylaws, which mandate that the policy statement be reviewed by COEP "at periodic intervals not to exceed 7 years." CSWE's recognition by the CHEA also requires that accreditors have a process whereby standards are reviewed periodically by the COA. The EPAS review process has taken more than 5 years, and drafts have been issued for public review and comment. The intent of the COA and the COEP is to solicit feedback from as many constituents as possible in as many ways as possible. The COA and the COEP thank the programs, individuals, organizations, and communities of interest that provided feedback on the drafts.

About the 2022 EPAS Document

The 2022 EPAS adopts a competency-based education framework identifying the nine social work competencies accompanied by a set of behaviors for each competency. Following the nine social work competencies, the EPAS describes five elements of an integrated program design:

1. Program mission (EPAS 1.0)

2. Anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (EPAS 2.0)

3. Explicit curriculum (EPAS 3.0)

4. Implicit curriculum (EPAS 4.0)

5. Assessment (EPAS 5.0)

The five elements of the EPAS each include educational policies and accreditation standards, which are conceptually linked to one another. Educational policies describe each of the five program elements. Accreditation standards are informed by the educational policy and specify the requirements used to develop and maintain an accredited social work program at the baccalaureate or master's level.

Each accreditation standard is preceded by a number, followed by the text of the standard. Compliance statements used in accreditation reviews are located underneath each accreditation standard. Viewed together, the accreditation standard and compliance statements provide an indication of whether the standard has been met. The compliance statements are considered by the Commission on Accreditation (COA) in determining whether the social work program meets each accreditation standard.

Accreditation standards with numbers preceded by the letter "B" apply only to baccalaureate-level social work programs. Accreditation standards with numbers preceded by the letter "M" apply only to master's-level social work programs. Accreditation standards with numbers preceded by no letter are applicable to baccalaureate-level and master's-level social work programs.

Competency-Based Education

CSWE has adopted a competency-based education framework for its EPAS. A competency-based approach identifies and assesses what students demonstrate in practice. In social work, this approach involves assessing students' ability to demonstrate the competencies identified in the educational policy.

Competency-based education rests on a shared view of the nature of competence in professional practice. Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to practice situations in a culturally responsive, purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being. The EPAS recognizes a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations. Overall professional competence is multidimensional and composed of interrelated competencies. An individual social worker's competence is seen as developmental and dynamic, evolving over time in relation to continuous learning and changes in the social environment and professional knowledge base.

Competency-based education is an outcome-oriented approach to curriculum design. The goal of the outcome-oriented approach is to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice. In the EPAS, social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies and component behaviors that consist of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes.

Using a curriculum design that begins with the outcomes, expressed as the expected competencies, program developers produce the substantive content, pedagogical approaches, and educational activities that provide learning opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies.

Assessment of student learning outcomes is an essential component of competency-based education. Assessment provides evidence that students have demonstrated the level of competence necessary to enter professional practice, which in turn shows that programs are successful in achieving their goals. Assessment information is used to improve the educational program and the methods used to assess student learning outcomes.

Programs assess students' demonstration of competence. Programs use assessment methods to gather data that serve as evidence of student learning outcomes and the demonstration of competence. Because social work practice is complex and multidimensional, the assessment methods used by programs and the data collected may vary by context.

The Nine Social Work Competencies

The nine social work competencies are listed in this section. Programs may add competencies that are consistent with their mission to respond to their context. Each competency describes the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that make up the competency at the generalist level of practice, followed by a set of behaviors that integrate these components. These behaviors represent observable components of the competencies, and the descriptions that precede them represent the underlying content and processes that inform the behaviors.

Master's programs extend and enhance the nine social work competencies, and any additional competencies added by the program, for each area of specialized practice. By extending and enhancing the competencies, programs provide master's-level students with the four dimensions (i.e., knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes) relevant to each area of specialized practice. A specialized competency description is developed to incorporate the four dimensions and specialized behaviors for each competency and any additional competencies added by the program.

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant policies, laws, and regulations that may affect practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand that ethics are informed by principles of human rights and apply them toward realizing social, racial, economic, and environmental justice in their practice. Social workers understand frameworks of ethical decision making and apply principles of critical thinking to those frameworks in practice, research, and policy arenas. Social workers recognize and manage personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values. Social workers understand how their evolving worldview, personal experiences, and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social workers take measures to care for themselves professionally and personally, understanding that self-care is paramount for competent and ethical social work practice. Social workers use rights-based, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to understand and critique the profession's history, mission, roles, and responsibilities and recognize historical and current contexts of oppression in shaping institutions and social work. Social workers understand the role of other professionals when engaged in interprofessional practice. Social workers recognize the importance of lifelong learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure relevant and effective practice. Social workers understand digital technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice.

Social workers:

    a. make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics within the profession as appropriate to the context;

b. demonstrate professional behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;

c. use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and

d. use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights. Social workers are knowledgeable about the global intersecting and ongoing injustices throughout history that result in oppression and racism, including social work's role and response. Social workers critically evaluate the distribution of power and privilege in society in order to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice by reducing inequities and ensuring dignity and respect for all. Social workers advocate for and engage in strategies to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social resources, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected.

Social workers:

a. advocate for human rights at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community system levels; and

b. engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

Competency 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice

Social workers understand how racism and oppression shape human experiences and how these two constructs influence practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community levels and in policy and research. Social workers understand the pervasive impact of White supremacy and privilege and use their knowledge, awareness, and skills to engage in anti-racist practice. Social workers understand how diversity and intersectionality shape human experiences and identity development and affect equity and inclusion. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of factors including but not limited to age, caste, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, generational status, immigration status, legal status, marital status, political ideology, race, nationality, religion and spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that this intersectionality means that a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege and power. Social workers understand the societal and historical roots of social and racial injustices and the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. Social workers understand cultural humility and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and

values, including social, economic, political, racial, technological, and cultural exclusions, may create privilege and power resulting in systemic oppression.

Social workers:

a. demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, community, research, and policy levels; and

b. demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts of their own lived experiences.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Social workers use ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches in conducting research and building knowledge. Social workers use research to inform their practice decision making and articulate how their practice experience informs research and evaluation decisions. Social workers critically evaluate and critique current, empirically sound research to inform decisions pertaining to practice, policy, and programs. Social workers understand the inherent bias in research and evaluate design, analysis, and interpretation using an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective. Social workers know how to access, critique, and synthesize the current literature to develop appropriate research questions and hypotheses. Social workers demonstrate knowledge and skills regarding qualitative and quantitative research methods and analysis, and they interpret data derived from these methods. Social workers demonstrate knowledge about methods to assess reliability and validity in social work research. Social workers can articulate and share research findings in ways that are usable to a variety of clients and constituencies. Social workers understand the value of evidence derived from interprofessional and diverse research methods, approaches, and sources.

Social workers:

a. apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs; and

b. identify ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive strategies that address inherent biases for use in quantitative and qualitative research methods to advance the purposes of social work.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Social workers identify social policy at the local, state, federal, and global level that affects well-being, human rights and justice, service delivery, and access to social services. Social workers recognize the historical, social, racial, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy. Social workers understand and critique the history and current structures of social policies and services and the role of policy in service delivery through rights-based, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist lenses. Social workers influence policy formulation, analysis,

implementation, and evaluation within their practice settings with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers actively engage in and advocate for anti-racist and anti-oppressive policy practice to effect change in those settings.

Social workers:

a. use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services; and

b. apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with and on behalf of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Social workers value the importance of human relationships. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and person-in-environment and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are self-reflective and understand how bias, power, and privilege as well as their personal values and personal experiences may affect their ability to engage effectively with diverse clients and constituencies. Social workers use the principles of interprofessional collaboration to facilitate engagement with clients, constituencies, and other professionals as appropriate.

Social workers:

a. apply knowledge of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks, to engage with clients and constituencies; and

b. use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to engage in culturally responsive practice with clients and constituencies.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that assessment is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks, and they critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in culturally responsive assessment with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Assessment involves a collaborative process of defining presenting challenges and identifying

strengths with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to develop a mutually agreed-upon plan. Social workers recognize the implications of the larger practice context in the assessment process and use interprofessional collaboration in this process. Social workers are self-reflective and understand how bias, power, privilege, and their personal values and experiences may affect their assessment and decision making.

Social workers:

a. apply theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as other culturally responsive and interprofessional conceptual frameworks, when assessing clients and constituencies; and

b. demonstrate respect for client self-determination during the assessment process by collaborating with clients and constituencies in developing a mutually agreed-upon plan.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that intervention is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice. Social workers understand theories of human behavior, person-in-environment, and other interprofessional conceptual frameworks, and they critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in selecting culturally responsive interventions with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand methods of identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-informed interventions and participate in interprofessional collaboration to achieve client and constituency goals. Social workers facilitate effective transitions and endings.

Social workers:

a. engage with clients and constituencies to critically choose and implement culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals; and

b. incorporate culturally responsive methods to negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of clients and constituencies.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that evaluation is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with and on behalf of diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers evaluate processes and outcomes to increase practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness. Social workers apply anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspectives in evaluating outcomes. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks,

and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes. Social workers use qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness.

Social workers:

    a.   select and use culturally responsive methods for evaluation of outcomes; and

    b.   critically analyze outcomes and apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.