

2026 CSWE Election: Candidate Statement

J. Dena Ned, PhD, MSW, (Chickasaw/Choctaw)

Undergraduate Faculty Representative – CSWE National Nominating Committee

As a BSW educator for almost 20 years, I believe deeply that the strength of our profession is measured by who gets to shape it. For me, teaching undergraduate social work students how to navigate a world that doesn't always make things easy allows me to help them define paths into social work by exploring how to show up with courage, think critically, stay grounded in community, and carry the values of social work into every space they enter. I am a nominee for the National Nominating Committee (NNC) because I want to help identify and support leaders who reflect those same commitments.

I come to this role with nearly three decades of social work practice and two decades in social work education. Since 2007, I've taught the core courses that introduce and socialize BSW students into the profession—Policy, Practice, Research, and Introduction to the Profession. I've also taught MSW courses, which ensures I have a wide-angle view of how students learn, what programs need, and where thoughtful leadership can make the biggest difference.

Part of my motivation is personal: I am shaped by the Intermountain West and Great Basin, environments whose perspectives are often missing in national conversations. I also know how important it is for Indigenous, first-generation, and rural communities to be represented in decision-making spaces. CSWE's commitment to ensuring at least 50% of its leadership comes from underrepresented groups aligns with the work I have devoted my entire career to—directing the University of Utah's Indigenous Social Work Scholars Program, expanding access for first-generation students, and mentoring BSW and MSW students who carry deep commitments to justice and community well-being.

My leadership is grounded not just in advocacy, but in governance.

I serve on strategic planning and reaffirmation committees, admissions panels, and advisory groups that shape program direction, accreditation readiness, and curricular integrity at the local and national levels. Nationally, I have contributed to CSWE through multiple councils and task forces: the Council on Practice Methods and Specialization, the Council on Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity, the Task Force to Advance Anti-Racism through Conference & Faculty Development, the Center for Diversity, Social & Economic Justice Advisory Committee, and the MFP Mentorship Program. Additionally, I have been a volunteer with the Indigenous/Tribal Social Work Educators Association (ITSWEA) APM Planning Committee and served a number of years as an APM reviewer for First Nations/Indigenous tracks.

These experiences have sharpened the skills the NNC requires most: recognizing leadership potential, asking the right questions about alignment with CSWE's priorities, and selecting nominees who understand both the realities and the possibilities of social work education. I believe in collaborative leadership, steady decision-making, and an approach to equity that is both practical and aspirational.

If I have the honor of being selected, I will bring steadiness, curiosity, and a commitment to identifying undergraduate leaders who reflect the strength, diversity, and humanity of the communities our profession serves.

J. Dena Ned, PhD, MSW, (Chickasaw/Choctaw) is Professor/Lecturer at the University of Utah and a member of the CSWE Teaching Academy Cohort I (2025–2026).