

Successful Baccalaureate Social Work Programs

A GUIDE FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE LEADERS

EDITED BY

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Alexandria, Virginia

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A rectangular graphic with a light gray background and several overlapping, semi-transparent gray geometric shapes (triangles and quadrilaterals) creating a layered effect. The text is centered within this graphic.

Section One

Program Director Responsibilities

Being a BSW Program Director

Susan C. Mapp

Baccalaureate-level social work is a growing field: The number of students increased 7.5% from 2010 to 2020. The number of accredited baccalaureate social work (BSW) programs continues to grow as well, having increased 16.6% in the same period (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2021). To meet accreditation standards, each of these programs must have a designated program director. This is a complex position with numerous and varied responsibilities, especially if the individual is also chair of the department (see sample job description in the appendix). Those in this role must not only ensure that the program is meeting accreditation standards but also grapple with issues common to undergraduate students, including academic concerns (e.g., fulfilling general education requirements) as well as social and emotional concerns (e.g., traditional-aged students dealing with identity issues and nontraditional students navigating barriers in their return to school).

Given their role of overseeing social work educational programs, BSW program directors have issues in common with their MSW program director colleagues. However, their work with undergraduate students and its above-noted challenges mean that their responsibilities also can be more akin to those of department chairs, even when they do not have the title. The occupation of this liminal space means that they overlap with both of these groups but are not fully in one or the other. Despite these challenges, resources for these professionals have been few and far between, a situation not unique to social work. This lack of scholarship on program administration has also been noted in the nursing literature (e.g., Delgado

& Mitchell, 2016), where the skills needed for leadership—“budget, politics, policies, accreditation requirements, leadership and management”—do not align with “the disciplinary and scholarly knowledge” taught in doctoral programs (Berman, 2015, p. 298).

In 2017, the last year for which the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) reported faculty statistics, a third of social work faculty were at or near retirement age (55 or older) (CSWE, 2018). Therefore, it is essential that the profession support its current and future leaders. This challenge is clearly addressed by CSWE in its current strategic plan, in which Goal 3 states, “Develop future leaders and administrators for social work education” (CSWE, 2019).

It is the intent of this book to provide information to aid in the myriad tasks common to BSW program directors, aimed at both current program directors and those who aspire to leadership (or find themselves in leadership roles regardless of aspirations). To do so, it is helpful to describe the development of undergraduate social work education in the United States and the power dynamics that led to the development of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD). Following that is an overview of the little existing literature related to BSW program directors that exists, and then an overview of the book’s structure.

History of BSW Education

Formal social work education is generally recognized to have begun in 1898, with the summer training class organized by the New York Charity Organization Society at Columbia University; this short course evolved into full-scale degree programs (Austin, 1997). These new degrees were primarily at the master’s level because it was believed that many of those who were interested in enrolling would have already obtained an undergraduate liberal arts degree—most of them women (Austin, 1997). Although the first association for schools of social work—the American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW)—initially included undergraduate programs, this quickly changed. After Dr. Abraham Flexner infamously declared in 1915 that social work was not a profession, it was generally accepted that social work would be better recognized as such if it concentrated on graduate education (Stuart et al., 1993).

Early social work education also had a private-public split. Private universities were concentrating on preparing graduates for practice in non-governmental organizations through master’s-level education. In contrast, public organizations, which needed workers as a result of the development

of governmental programs such as formal child welfare offices or programs created through the New Deal, did not see a master's degree as the level of education required for such positions (Stuart et al., 1993). Therefore, public universities focused on developing undergraduate programs to train these workers, many in rural areas (Austin, 1997; Watkins & Holmes, 2008). The schools with undergraduate social work programs then developed the National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA), which accredited undergraduate social work programs (Stuart et al., 1993).

When looking at social work leaders in this era, few were to be found, even though the Great Depression was a time of great need in the country, and social workers were providing many of the services. This was likely due to the preponderance of women in the profession and the prejudice against seeing women as leaders (Atwater, 1950, as cited in Sullivan, 2016). However, leadership as an area of focus for academic study grew in the 1950s (Sullivan, 2016).

In 1952, NASSA and AASSW merged into the organization we have today, the Council on Social Work Education. However, the focus on graduate education remained because only those programs that defined undergraduate education as “preprofessional” were admitted (Stuart et al., 1993). This may be because of the heavy imbalance in the number of programs at the beginning—59 graduate programs as compared with only 19 undergraduate programs (Kendell, as cited in Watkins & Holmes, 2008). Additionally, CSWE did not permit undergraduate programs to be accredited, in part as a result of the lingering influence of Flexner and social work was striving to be recognized as a “profession,” an impact that was even greater because social work was female dominated (Austin, 1997).

However, the growth of social service programs in the 1960s again raised the need for more trained social workers, much as it had in the 1930s. The 1962 Social Security Amendments required trained individuals to work in areas such as foster care and public assistance, and the demand was estimated to exceed the numbers that graduate programs could produce (Stuart et al., 1993). The 1965 report by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare—*Closing the Gap in Social Work Manpower*—called for a continuum of social work education from paraprofessional to baccalaureate to masters (with federal funding) and explicitly recommended professional recognition of social work education at the baccalaureate level. This coincided with the work that CSWE was doing, starting in 1960, to explore the expansion of its work to include undergraduate education (Stuart et al., 1993).

In 1967, Congress appropriated \$5 million for social work education to be evenly divided between the undergraduate and graduate levels. This was followed by additional funding through the National Institute of Mental Health to train social workers to work in the area of mental health (Stuart et al., 1993). This funding led to an expansion of programs and requests to CSWE for help in developing those programs. A series of standards developed throughout the 1960s culminated in a system to formally approve baccalaureate programs in 1970 and ultimately led to an accreditation process in 1974. This was almost concurrent with the 1969 decision by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to “recognize the BSW as the first level of professional practice” (Stuart et al., 1993, p. 7).

The Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors

Concerns about the lack of involvement of undergraduate faculty in developing the CSWE accreditation standards and how they would be implemented helped lead to the development of a group focused on these issues. Additionally, graduate faculty had formed their own interest group—the Conference of Deans—and NASW was similarly seen as unwelcoming (Stuart et al., 1993). Therefore, the existing Southern Association of Baccalaureate Social Workers provided leadership for the Undergraduate Program Director’s Constituency Group of CSWE to develop a national organization focused on undergraduate social work education. This group quickly became a strong advocate for undergraduate education. Even during its formative period, the steering committee not only developed the structure for the new organization but was also active in advocating for continuation of the federal funding provided in the 1960s and for inclusion in NASW and CSWE (Stuart et al., 1993). The Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) was officially formed in March 1975, held its first conference in 1983, and was formally incorporated in 1988 (Stuart et al., 1993).

EPAS Program Director Requirements

As noted, accreditation standards from CSWE require that every BSW program have an identified program director. The 2022 Educational Policy and Administration Standards (EPAS) requires the following in Accreditation Standard 4.3, “Administrative and Governance Structure” (CSWE, 2022):

- 4.3.4.(a) The program has a program director who administers all program options. The program director has a full-time appointment

to social work, with a primary assignment to the program they administer. Institutions with accredited baccalaureate and master's social work programs have a separate director appointed for each program.

B4.3.4(c) The baccalaureate program director has sufficient assigned time for administrative oversight of the social work program, inclusive of all program options. It is customary for the program director to have, at minimum, 25% assigned time to administer the social work program.

The requirements had not changed a great deal when reviewing the available accreditation standards from the last 40 years until the 2022 revision. In the 1984 accreditation standards, in addition to a full-time appointment to the program, BSW program directors were required to have *either* a bachelor's or a master's degree in social work (MSW). If they did not have an MSW, then a doctoral degree in social work was required (CSWE, 1984). The requirement for release time of 25% was added in the 1994 standards, together with the description of leadership ability; "leadership ability" had already existed in the 1984 standards for MSW program directors (CSWE, 1984, 1994). It was not until the 2015 EPAS that the requirement to have an MSW was added, rather than the option of a BSW with a doctoral degree in social work if the master's was in another field (CSWE, 2015).

The 2022 standards, however, removed the preference for a doctoral degree for the BSW program director. More controversial was the removal of the requirement of a minimum 25% release time. The Commission on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) had stated that accreditation standards cannot be prescriptive in such matters, so they had been removed for both BSW and MSW program directors. However, when the draft was released, the outcry among program directors was immediate, as they feared that their institutions would remove this amount of release time if it were not required. The final 2022 standards reflect a nonprescriptive balance that refers to a "customary" release time for carrying out duties associated with administering a program. From there, the program is required to address the director's overall workload, specify the amount of assigned time to carry out administrative functions at their institution, and discuss how this amount is derived, as well as the sufficiency of the release time noted (CSWE, 2022). Each program tells its own story.

Thus, the current list of requirements is not extensive. The program director must have earned an MSW and have a full-time appointment to the program, sufficient release time, and "leadership ability." There are