



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

## Committee to explore issues related to accreditation of professional doctorates in social work

### October 2015 Report for CSWE Board of Directors

#### Overview

Informed by the various reports dedicated to the issues of practice doctorates and its own discussions, the CSWE Board of Directors moved on 10/30/2013 to create a committee to explore the factors involved in accrediting a professional doctorate in social work.

Members of the committee include:

- Alan Dettlaff, Dean, University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, and Chair, CSWE Commission on Educational Policy
- James Lubben, Professor and Program Director, PhD in Social Welfare, Boston College
- David Patterson, Professor and Director, Clinical Doctorate Program, University of Tennessee at Knoxville
- Christopher Petr, Professor and PhD Program Director, University of Kansas
- Jo Ann Regan, CSWE Vice President of Education, and Chair of the Practice Doctorate Committee

CSWE Staff:

- Dorothy Kagehiro, Research Associate, CSWE Office of Social Work Education and Research
- Adrienne Stokes, Research Assistant, CSWE Office of Social Work Education and Research

The task at hand is to explore “all relevant issues” in the accreditation of professional doctorates in order to bring a recommendation to the CSWE Board of Directors at its October 2014 meeting. The fundamental question guiding the process should be:

***“As the sole accrediting body for professional social work education, what is the appropriate role for the CSWE Commission on Accreditation to have with the professional doctorates in social work?”***

The committee is asked to develop a plan to explore all relevant questions including, but not limited to:

- What is involved in expanding the scope of recognition by CHEA?
- What would be the appropriate infrastructure to accredit a higher level of professional degree?
- What other relevant logistical issues need to be considered by CSWE?
- What is the impact of accrediting, or not accrediting, the professional social work doctorate?

## Committee Activities

The Committee carried out the following activities since June 2015:

1. Conducted one conference call meeting in July 2015 to review the survey, cover letter and other materials before the survey was distributed.
2. Began part 2 of Stage 1 recommendation activities as directed by CSWE Board of Directors at the October 2014 Board Meeting:
3. The Committee had an additional conference call on Monday, October 5, 2015 following the distribution of the draft report to the Board.
  1. Committee reviewed and discussed survey results. Possible reasons for mixed opinions reflected in survey:
    - a. DSW programs at different stages and have different purposes.
    - b. Survey participants represent small number of DSW programs. More such programs being launched every year.
  2. Questions raised and discussed:
    - a. Should we include nonacademic/non-accreditation viewpoints in this process?
    - b. Would non-accreditation parties be able to provide useful input? Would their involvement be premature at this time? What if they don't want to be involved at this time?
    - c. Is it better for this process to be just accreditation-focused for now?
    - d. What would be the value added by a DSW (beyond that of MSW)?
    - e. What would be a DSW curriculum if programs were accredited?
    - f. Should there be more input from doctoral programs (DSW and PhD)?
    - g. We don't want to be in the position of having to "grandfather" in DSW programs not housed in institutions with accredited social work programs if the accreditation process moves forward too slowly or is put on hold.
    - h. What if the Board pursued a parallel process with other social work organizations to involve multiple stakeholders (e.g., employers) and to broaden the perspectives brought to bear on the issue?
    - i. What about retaining the language of "general content" and "educational outcomes" but dropping language referring to "competencies"?
    - j. What were the viewpoints represented on the nursing task force?

### *Stage 1(part 2) Activity*

1. Completed follow-up survey with current and planned advanced practice doctoral programs to determine interest in seeking accreditation and perception of advantages/disadvantages and utility of accreditation for advanced practice doctoral programs. Survey invitations were sent to 19 contacts for advanced practice doctoral programs on August 19, 2015, through Zarca Interactive, an internet-based survey administration platform. The survey closed on September 14, 2015. Eleven (64.7%) programs participated out of 17 successfully delivered invitations.
2. Survey results indicate mixed interest in seeking accreditation and varied perceptions on the advantages/disadvantages and utility of accreditation for advanced practice doctoral programs. Detailed survey findings are included in Appendix A.

## Committee Recommendations

The committee's recommendations were presented and approved at the October 2014 Board meeting and are listed below. Stage 1 activities have now been completed. The committee is presenting to the Board a modified Stage 2 recommendation from the previous October 2014 report in response to the survey findings.

## Previous Recommendations

### Stage 1

1. Survey current CSWE accredited programs to determine current and possible future advanced practice doctoral programs
  - Add items to 2014 Annual Survey, MSW Program section:
    - "Is your institution planning to offer an advanced practice doctorate degree in social work?"
      - i. We already offer such a degree
      - ii. Yes, in the next academic year.
      - iii. Yes, within 2 academic years.
      - iv. No
    - "What type of advanced practice doctorate is offered or planned to be offered?--clinical, teaching, administrative, other?"
2. Conduct follow-up interviews with these programs and key informants (deans, program directors, graduates, and current students) at the current or planned (non-PhD) advanced practice doctorate programs in the United States to determine interest in seeking accreditation and perception of advantages/disadvantages and utility of accreditation for advanced practice doctoral programs.

### Stage 2

If CSWE's COA decides to move forward with doing pilot reviews of the advanced practice doctorate with any programs indicating interest, the following would need to be considered:

3. Initiate a process similar to the two year process nursing employed to develop a report entitled the *Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Practice Nursing* (see <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/dnp/Essentials.pdf>). An appropriate structure would need to be created. The nursing association (AACN) created the Task Force on the Essentials of Nursing Education for the Doctorate of Nursing Practice and charged this task force with development of the curricular expectations that guided and shaped DNP education. See <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/position/DNPEssentials.pdf>. However, it was noted by the nursing accreditor (CCNE) that it has been difficult to develop standards on essentials that were developed by a group outside of the accrediting decision-making body. The Board could consider involving other groups/stakeholders besides the Commission on Educational Policy (COEP) and Commission on Accreditation (COA) to develop documents defining "essentials" for advanced practice doctoral education. However, the COEP and COA are the current CSWE Commissions that could focus on developing:
  - Educational policy and standards
  - Indicators of quality for advanced practice doctoral programs- need more involvement and information about the development and process of the advanced practice doctoral essentials from nursing and/or other professions
  - General content and educational outcomes
  - Continuum of advanced or specialized practice from master's to doctoral degrees

### Stage 3

Once the essentials are established, CSWE would need to do the following:

4. Develop an accreditation process and fee structure by the Office of Social Work Accreditation
5. Seek authorization from CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (accreditation decision-making body) on the accreditation review process
6. Notify the CHEA Committee on Recognition of its intent to begin conducting pilot reviews for a change in the scope of recognition
7. Begin pilot reviews of advanced practice doctorate programs that volunteer to seek accreditation

## Modified Committee Recommendation for Stage 2

- Initiate a process similar to the process nursing employed to develop a report on the continuum of social work education that focuses on general content and differentiation amongst the social work degrees (associate, BSW, MSW, research focused PhD and advanced practice doctorates) with multiple groups/stakeholders besides the Commission on Educational Policy (COEP) and Commission on Accreditation (COA). See the nursing report at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/position/DNPEssentials.pdf>
- Identify what is the general curriculum content and educational outcomes of the advanced practice doctorate level with the involvement of multiple stakeholders (SSWR, GADE, BSW, MSW, PhD and DSW programs).
- An appropriate structure would need to be created to conduct the above process that includes the multiple stakeholders identified. Nursing utilized a task force representing multiple constituencies in advanced nursing practice (see Appendix B in nursing report). The task force conducted multiple regional meetings to provide opportunities for feedback from a diverse group of stakeholders. Additionally, a national stakeholders' conference was held with nursing education leaders and other professional organizations. Other stakeholders the committee discussed included social work organizations, employers, and graduates of DSW programs to gain a broader understanding of the role of the advanced practice doctorate to the social work profession.

## APPENDIX A:

# Findings of the 2015 Survey on the Social Work Practice Doctorate: Report for the Practice Doctorate Committee

September 2015

Prepared by the Department of Educational Initiatives and Research

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## Background

### Members of the Practice Doctorate Committee

- Alan Dettlaff, Dean, University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, and Chair, CSWE Commission on Educational Policy
- James Lubben, Professor, and Program Director, PhD in Social Welfare, Boston College
- David Patterson, Professor, and Director, Clinical Doctorate Program, University of Tennessee at Knoxville
- Christopher Petr, Professor, and PhD Program Director, University of Kansas
- Jo Ann Regan, CSWE Vice President of Education, and Chair of the Practice Doctorate Committee

In October 2013, the CSWE Board of Directors moved to create a committee to explore the factors involved in accrediting a professional doctorate in social work. The Practice Doctorate Committee was asked to explore “all relevant issues” in the accreditation of professional doctorates in order to bring recommendations to the CSWE Board of Directors at its October 2014 meeting. The committee presented its report at this meeting, and the Board voted to begin Stage 1 recommendation activities to survey programs to determine current and possible future advanced practice doctoral programs in social work. In the 2014 CSWE Annual Survey, master’s programs were asked to indicate current or future advanced practice doctoral programs at their institutions. Additional research identified institutions with such programs. A survey was conducted to determine interest in seeking accreditation and perceptions of advantages/disadvantages and utility of accreditation for advanced practice doctoral programs. The purpose of the survey was to assist the CSWE Board in deciding on the appropriate role, if any, for the CSWE Commission on Accreditation concerning professional practice doctorates in social work

Survey invitations were sent to 19 contacts for advanced practice doctoral programs on August 19, 2015, through Zarca Interactive, an internet-based survey administration platform. The survey closed on September 14, 2015. Eleven (64.7%) programs participated out of 17 successfully delivered invitations.

# Survey Findings

## Program Descriptions

**Table 1. Profile of Survey Respondents**

CSWE Region	CSWE-Accredited Programs at Institution	Auspice	Carnegie Classification
Northeast	BSW & MSW	Public	RU/VH
Northeast	BSW & MSW	Private-Other	RU/VH
South Central	MSW	Private-Other	RU/VH
Southeast	BSW & MSW	Public	RU/VH
Mid-Atlantic	MSW	Private-Other	RU/VH
Southeast	BSW & MSW	Public	RU/H
Mid-Atlantic	BSW & MSW	Public	RU/H
National	None	For-Profit	DRU
Great Lakes	BSW & MSW	Private-Other	Master's/L
Great Lakes	BSW & MSW	Private-Other	Master's/L
Mid-Atlantic	BSW & MSW	Public	Master's/L

**Table 2. Basic Carnegie Classification**

Category	Description
<b>Doctorate-Granting Universities</b>	Institutions that awarded at least 20 research doctoral degrees.
RU/VH	Research universities (very high research activity)
RU/H	Research universities (high research activity)
DR/U	Doctoral/research universities
<b>Master's Colleges and Universities</b>	Institutions that awarded at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees.
Master's/L	Master's colleges and universities (larger programs)
Master's/M	Master's colleges and universities (medium programs)
Master's/S	Master's colleges and universities (smaller programs)
<b>Baccalaureate Colleges</b>	Institutions where baccalaureate degrees represent at least 10% of all undergraduate degrees and where fewer than 50 master's degrees or 20 doctoral degrees were awarded.
Bac/A&S	Baccalaureate colleges – Arts and sciences
Bac/Diverse	Baccalaureate colleges – Diverse fields
Bac/Assoc	Baccalaureate/associate's colleges

**Table 3. Type of Practice Doctorate Currently Offered or To Be Offered in Future (Programs Were Able to Select More Than One Category, If Applicable)**

Type of Degree	Number	Percent
Clinical	7	63.6
Teaching	3	27.3
Administration	2	18.2
Policy	2	18.2
General	2	18.2
Respondents	11	

**Table 4. Name of Practice Doctorate Degree Offered**

Name of Degree	Number	Percent
Doctor of Social Work or Doctorate in Social Work	4	36.4
Doctorate in Clinical Social Work	1	9.1
Doctor of Social Work in Clinical Social Work Practice	1	9.1
Doctorate in Social Work in Advanced Clinical Practice and Leadership	1	9.1
Doctorate in Social Work: Education as Practice	1	9.1
Doctor of Social Work in Leadership and Education	1	9.1
No name provided	2	18.2
Respondents	11	

**Table 5. Mode of Course Delivery**

Mode	Number	Percent
Hybrid	4	44.4
Face-to-face	2	22.2
Other	3	33.3
Respondents	9	

Survey respondents reported the following other modes of course delivery.

- 33 weekend residencies over 3 years, (Friday, Saturday, Sunday), 24 are face-to-face and 9 are online
- Entirely online except for one week during the summer in year 2 and year 3
- Face-to-face summer orientation, face-to-face Summer Two residency each year for three years (3 courses), remaining 12 courses entirely online

**Table 6. Years to Completion of Doctorate**

Time to Completion	Allowed by School Policy If Student Is Full-Time		Mean Years Actually Taken by Students to Completion	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
3 years	3	30.0	7	87.5
More than 3 years	5	50.0	1	12.5
Other	2	20.0	--	--
Respondents	10		8	

Survey respondents reported the following other school policies regarding degree completion.

- Course work is 3 years and students have 4 years to complete it or they are terminated from the program.
- Expectation is 3 years but maximum time to degree is 5 years.

**Table 7. Number of Current or Expected Students in Program**

Students in Program	Number	Percent
10-20	3	30.0
21 or more	6	60.0
Have not admitted first cohort of students	1	10.0
Respondents	10	

**Table 8. Estimated Total Student Debt (Tuition and Fees) at Time of Graduation**

Student Debt Load	Number	Percent
Less than \$20,000	1	20.0
\$20,000 - \$30,000	3	60.0
\$30,001 - \$40,000	0	0
\$40,001 - \$50,000	1	20.0
More than \$50,000	0	0
Respondents	5	

## Perceptions of Accreditation

**Table 9. Opinion of Accrediting Social Work Programs Offering Practice Doctorates**

Opinion	Number	Percent
Strongly opposed	3	33.3
Moderately opposed	1	11.1
Somewhat opposed	2	22.2
Somewhat in favor	1	11.1
Moderately in favor	0	0
Strongly in favor	2	22.2
Respondents	9	
Mean rating	3.00	

Respondents offered the following reasons for their opinions in favor or opposition to accreditation.

*“What are your primary reasons for opposing/favoring accreditation of social work programs offering practice doctorates?”*

- Strongly in favor: Accreditation marks programs as meeting national standards. We have designed our program with accreditation in mind and will not have difficulty completing the process. Of course there is cost, and that cost may be transferred to students, but the standardization of quality across programs is of benefit to students and the entire profession.
- Somewhat in favor: I would want some form of accreditation so that it prevents and "anything goes" as a practice doctorate. There must be some floor level of requirements (number of courses, number of full-time committed faculty, dissertation or its equivalent requirements, etc.). I want some room so that all practice doctorates don't look alike, except for the floor requirements.
- Somewhat opposed: If state licensing is the end game - then I can see the rationale. If not, then I'm not so sure it's needed (we don't do it for the PhD, and I continue to think this is a good thing).
- Moderately opposed: Concerned about limiting the autonomous development of doctoral curriculum aimed at encouraging advanced critical thinking utilizing a huge amount of non-social work primary source material. Also, in looking at doctoral social work programs across the country, it is clear that some DSWs do not have a dissertation component, while others do. I am concerned that accreditation will hamper this creativity and stifle the educational advantages of most programs.
- Strongly opposed: Restriction on curriculum. Lack of innovation and creativity. It will create too much homogeneity among programs - despite your protests to contrary. It will play to the least common denominator as BSW and MSW accreditation does not. This is an advanced practice degree requiring the MSW degree which is considered the terminal practice degree so minimal requirements have already been met. This is just one more way that CSWE is finding to charge social work programs.
- Strongly opposed: I am opposed to CSWE accreditation of doctoral programs for the following reasons:



It would beg the complicated question of whether to accredit PhD programs that are practice-oriented, of which there are several. It would be a tacit step toward changing the terminal degree for social work practice from the masters to the doctorate.

Professional licensing and credentialing is tied to the MSW.

I'm not convinced CSWE is the appropriate body if the point is quality control.

- Strongly opposed: The terminal practice degree in social work is the MSW. Both Ph.D. and DSW degrees do not enhance practice in that they are not required in any state for licensing and they do not add to the reimbursement rate for clinicians (i.e., Ph.D. and DSW practitioners do not receive higher reimbursements by insurance companies relative to MSWs). CSWE already regulates licensed social work practice through its accreditation of programs.

- [No opinion given]: Since all students are required for admission to have an MSW and be licensed (LMSW or LCSW) in New York, incoming students have met the requirements for licensing as a social worker. There is no additional license following the DSW. Therefore I do not see accreditation as necessary for this program. The program will focus on teaching social practice and leadership in practice settings, including implementing evidence-based practice services.

Respondents' perceptions of claimed advantages to accreditation are tabled below from least to most persuasive (by mean rating).

**Table 10. Perceptions of Claimed Advantages of Accrediting Social Work Programs Offering Practice Doctorates**

Claimed Advantage	Not At All Persuasive (%)	Somewhat Persuasive (%)	Moderately Persuasive (%)	Very Persuasive (%)	Extremely Persuasive (%)	Mean Rating (1-5 scale)
Improves graduates' opportunities for licensure	90.0	0	0	0	10.0	1.40
Increases the number of applicants	80.0	0	0	20.0	0	1.60
Improves the quality of applicants	70.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	0	1.60
Offers a competitive advantage in recruitment of applicants	70.0	0	10.0	20.0	0	1.80
Provides graduates with a competitive advantage in the job market	60.0	20.0	0	10.0	10.0	1.90
Provides a competitive advantage in attracting qualified faculty	50.0	20.0	20.0	0	10.0	2.00
Ensures minimum standards	50.0	20.0	10.0	0	20.0	2.20
Provides means of comparison with practice doctorate programs at other institutions	60.0	0	10.0	10.0	20.0	2.30
Provides standards that can be cited in obtaining resources from our institution	50.0	20.0	0	10.0	20.0	2.30
Number of respondents						10

Respondents' perceptions of claimed disadvantages to accreditation are tabled below from least to most persuasive (by mean rating).

**Table 11. Perceptions of Claimed Disadvantages of Accrediting Social Work Programs Offering Practice Doctorates**

Claimed Disadvantage	Not At All Persuasive (%)	Somewhat Persuasive (%)	Moderately Persuasive (%)	Very Persuasive (%)	Extremely Persuasive (%)	Mean Rating (1-5 scale)
Reduces the quality of applicants	100	0	0	0	0	1.00
Reduces the number of applicants	66.7	22.2	0	11.1	0	1.56
Imposes a competitive disadvantage in attracting qualified faculty	44.4	44.4	11.1	0	0	1.67
Imposes a competitive disadvantage in recruitment of applicants	62.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	0	1.75
May negatively impact master's programs	77.8	0	0	0	22.2	1.89
Imposes financial costs on students (i.e., higher tuition)	33.3	22.2	11.1	22.2	11.1	2.56
Imposes standards designed for BSW and MSW programs that are not applicable to doctoral programs	44.4	11.1	0	11.1	33.3	2.78

Imposes costs (financial and in faculty/administrative time) associated with the accreditation process and in maintaining accreditation	22.2	22.2	11.1	33.3	11.1	2.89
Loss of academic freedom	33.3	0	0	11.1	55.6	3.56
Hinders innovation and creativity in designing a relevant program	22.2	11.1	0	11.1	22.2	3.67
Provides no advantage to graduates in the job market	25.0	0	0	25.0	50.0	3.75
Provides no advantage to graduates in licensure application	11.1	0	0	22.2	66.7	4.33
Number of respondents						7-9

**Table 12. Statement of Greater Agreement**

Statement	Number	Percent
Benefits to our program from accreditation would outweigh the difficulties associated with accreditation	3	33.3
Difficulties associated with accreditation would outweigh the benefits to our program	6	67.7
Respondents	9	

**Table 13. "If accreditation of advanced practice doctoral social work programs was offered, would your program apply?"**

Position	Number	Percent
Yes	4	44.4
No	4	44.4
Undecided	1	11.1
Respondents	9	

Survey respondents reported the following reasons for their stance regarding application for accreditation.

*"What is your primary reason for your response to the previous question?"*

Yes, program would apply

- To establish basic floor standards so institution are on equal playing field for HOW many resources the school spends on the program. These programs should not be consider cash cows. There should be a very reasonable balance between expenses and income. I feel there is the possibility that too many schools will go short on expenses to make more money. Thus, one way to control this is to have minimal requirements (chair, like PhD, at least 2 full-time faculty assigned to DSW, etc.....)
- Identifying us as a quality program as well as keeping us "honest" in terms of continuous improvement.
- If the CSWE started to accredit the DSW degree, any program that didn't seek accreditation would have a liability.
- I am a firm advocate, supporter of the benefits of accreditation for students, faculty, programs and institutions. I believe 'practice' doctorates should be held accountable for meeting minimum 'quality' standards. If we license and accredit social work practice, BSW and MSW degree levels, and it is best practice to accredit practice doctorates in other professions (PsyD, EdD, DOT, DPT, DNP), we want our graduates to have comparable acceptance of their degree.

No, program would not apply

- We already engage in systematic, rigorous, regularly occurring evaluation of our DSW program to ensure high standards and quality. Since we require the MSW for admission, we know that our graduates have already gone through an accredited program of social work. There are no benefits from accreditation with respect to licensing or career advantage.
- This was explained in an earlier response. CSWE has never accredited Ph.D. programs and to attempt to involve itself in DSW education seems like a blatant power grab.
- Since DSW students are already established professionals who have graduated from accredited programs and hold the appropriate social work license, accreditation is superfluous and unnecessary. Accreditation based on shared curriculum standards would also dampen the creativity and variety of program design

and purpose at the DSW level. I think that the range of types of programs is one of the positives in the creation of DSW programs.

- Imposition of standards that would compromise the integrity of the program.

Survey respondents were provided with an opportunity to request information about accreditation.

*“Is there any information you would want that would clarify your position on the issue of accrediting social work programs offering practice doctorates?”*

- After meeting the floor standards, the program structure (face-to-face, hybrid, online, residency, etc.) and program content be evaluated by the school's own goals for the program, which means a minimum floor standard should be that all schools post their DSW goals and how those are different from PhD, etc.
- This is a critical issue for our profession. Let's not disadvantage our graduates. Our external stakeholders do not understand why our practice doctorate is not accredited.
- Accrediting the practice doctorate is a tacit nod to making it the terminal degree for social work practice, something I am not in favor of. It would also beg the question of whether PhD programs should be accredited. Several social work PhD programs are very practice-oriented, including at least one that requires an internship.