



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

POST-MASTER'S SOCIAL WORK FELLOWSHIP
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

Accreditation Standards approved by the CSWE Commission on Accreditation on October 7, 2021.

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INTRODUCTION

Fellowship programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)'s [Commission on Accreditation \(COA\)](#) provide those that hold a master's degree in social work with training and [supervision](#) within one or more defined areas of social work [practice](#). The Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards (Fellowship Standards) provide a framework for [host sites](#) developing fellowship programs and outline the standards for a quality program. The Fellowship Standards focus on four categories: (1) Program Mission and Goals, (2) Curriculum, (3) Learning Environment, and (4) Assessment. The program mission and goals serve as the foundation of the program. The curriculum and learning environment are developed with fulfillment of the mission and goals in mind. The assessment mechanisms implemented by the program serve to assess if the program is meeting its mission and goals, curriculum requirements, and learning environment elements.

The Fellowship Standards describe the operational and programmatic structural elements that CSWE deems essential to a quality program. The standards provide consistency and quality of the fellowship program for the [trainees](#) and the individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities they serve. Achieving accreditation demonstrates to the public and prospective trainees that the program meets a standardized level of educational quality.

The Fellowship Standards are written to support institutional autonomy and encourage innovation, while maintaining the quality of fellowship programs and the integrity of the accreditation process.

In evaluating a social work fellowship program, the [Fellowship Review Committee \(FRC\)](#) supports COA in assessing the degree to which the program meets these standards. A self-study, conducted by the program prior to the on-site evaluation, provides data indicating the extent to which the program has complied with the standards.

The Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards, along with the Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Processes and Procedures, serve as the basis to evaluate the quality of the fellowship program offered and to hold the program accountable to these expectations to the community, the profession, and the public.

STANDARD 1: PROGRAM MISSION AND GOALS

The mission and goals of social work fellowship programs address the [profession's purpose](#) and are grounded in the profession's values and [National Association of Social Worker \(NASW\)'s Code of Ethics](#). The profession's [purpose](#) and values of service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence, are among the core values of social work. These values frame the profession's commitment to engage in respect for all people and further the quest for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

A fellowship program's mission and goals, in addition to reflecting the profession, specifically describe the fellowship's purpose and commitment to providing education, training, and [supervision](#) to social workers within one or more defined areas of [practice](#). The mission and goals are developed to be consistent with the mission of the site hosting the program and the needs and opportunities associated with the program setting and context. The [host site](#) and context are evaluated when identifying the program's defined area(s) of social work [practice](#).

A program's mission guides the program's operations, including curriculum and learning environment, and directs future growth. Program goals are developed that support successful achievement of the fellowship's mission. Each program uses qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate and continuously improve program quality.

- 1.1 The program's mission communicates the program's purpose, is consistent with the [profession's purpose](#) and values, and identifies the program's defined area(s) of practice.
- 1.2 The program's mission aligns with the mission of the host site.
- 1.3 The program goals support the program's mission. The mission and goals are grounded in the profession's values and [National Association of Social Worker \(NASW\)'s Code of Ethics](#).

STANDARD 2: CURRICULUM

The program's curriculum is guided by the program's mission and goals and consists of a formal educational structure inclusive of [didactic](#) and [fellowship practice experiences](#) required for the program. A fellowship's curriculum is centered on the advancement of social work knowledge and [practice](#) with an emphasis on [supervision](#) and training. Specific to the program's defined area(s) of social work [practice](#), the fellowship expands and builds on the competencies obtained through completion of a social work master's degree and is focused on moving a social worker from a consumer of learning to a provider of service. The curriculum provides a structure for the designation of types, lengths and sequencing of the learning experiences that ensures the achievement of the program's outcomes and consistency across all [program delivery options](#).

- 2.1 Curriculum Design:** The curriculum is designed to ensure congruency between the didactic and fellowship practice experience components of the program to achieve program outcomes within one or more defined areas of social work practice.
- 2.1.1** The program has an integrated educational structure that includes didactic and fellowship practice experiences.
 - 2.1.2** The program's curriculum is guided by the program's mission and goals.
 - 2.1.3** The program's curriculum expands on knowledge acquired through completion of a master's in social work degree and prepares all trainees with substantive expertise in the program's defined area(s) of social work practice.
- 2.2 Fellowship Competencies:** A fellowship's curriculum allows the trainee to achieve the program's outcomes through advancing professional competence. The fellowship program utilizes a competency-based framework to develop its curriculum within the program's defined area(s) of practice.
- 2.2.1** The program implements a competency-based framework for curriculum development.
 - 2.2.2** The program identifies observable behaviors that indicate achievement of competence specific to the program's defined area(s) of practice. Behaviors identified by the program are measurable, specific to the program's defined areas of practice, and expand and build upon the competencies obtained through completion of a master's in social work degree.
- 2.3 Program Requirements:** The program demonstrates compliance with minimum requirements that provide the trainee with learning experiences which result in professional competence in one or more defined area(s) of social work practice.
- 2.3.1** The program provides as systematic set of learning experiences that address the knowledge, values, skills, and [cognitive and affective processes](#) all trainees need to achieve the program outcomes within a set period of time. Fellowship programs are completed in no fewer than 9 months and no more than 36 months.

2.3.2 The program offers a comprehensive curriculum that meets minimum required hours within the program's defined area(s) of social work practice. Fellowship programs require trainees to complete a minimum of 1,000 total program hours including 100 didactic instruction hours and 900 [fellowship practice experience](#) hours. Of the 900 fellowship practice experience hours, at least 100 hours are supervision.

2.4 **Supervision focus:** The program's curriculum offerings include instructional guidance provided to the trainee by an experienced social worker throughout the course of the program. The supervision model is developed to ensure the advancement of the trainee's knowledge and expertise in the defined area(s) of social work practice. At the discretion of the program, the program may provide supervision hours that can be counted towards licensure in accordance with state requirements.

STANDARD 3: LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The program's learning environment is developed to complement the curriculum and is guided by the program's mission and goals. The learning environment is composed of the following elements: the program's commitment to [anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion](#); admission criteria, program orientation procedures; administrative policies and procedures; program trainee's role in governance; instructors; administrative structure; and resources. The learning environment is manifested through policies that are fair and transparent in substance and implementation, the qualifications of the instructors and administration, and the adequacy and fair distribution of resources. The culture of human interchange; the spirit of inquiry; the support for difference and diversity; and the values and priorities in the educational environment, including the [fellowship practice experience](#), inform the trainee's learning and development. The learning environment is as important as the curriculum in shaping the professional character and competence of the program's [fellows](#). Heightened awareness of the importance of the learning environment promotes an educational culture that is congruent with the values of the profession and the program's mission and goals.

- 3.1 Admissions:** A program's admissions procedures allow for equitable evaluation of the trainee's ability to be successful in the program.
- 3.1.1** The program publishes equitable and inclusive admissions policies, with particular attention to underrepresented groups. At a minimum, the program requires that the trainee has earned a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program. This includes individuals whose degree was recognized as equivalent through CSWE's [International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service \(ISWDRES\)](#) and graduates from Canadian social work programs accredited by CASWE covered by the [memorandum of understanding between CSWE and CASWE](#).
- 3.1.2** The program adheres to policies and procedures for evaluating applications and notifying applicants about decisions and any contingent conditions associated with admission.
- 3.1.3** The program requires all trainees to complete all program requirements and does not grant program credit for didactic or professional experiences conducted outside of the program.
- 3.1.4** The program ensures each trainee is provided with program expectation information prior to commencing the fellowship program. With the protection of both the program and the trainee in mind, the program expectation information provided to the trainee includes the following elements:
- Program costs (tuition and other fees)
 - Compensation (financial and benefits)
 - Duration of Agreement
 - Designated Learning Experiences (including practice settings and hours of supervision provided)
 - Expectations of the trainee (hours of work, performance requirements)
 - Designated workspace and equipment provided
 - Expected learning outcomes and program competencies
 - Fellowship-specific administrative policies (see Fellowship Standard 3.3)

- 3.2 Program Orientation:** A program's orientation procedures ensure that the trainees and instructors are aware of program's purpose and requirements.
- 3.2.1 The program orients trainees and instructors to the program's mission and goals.
 - 3.2.2 The program orients trainees and instructors to the program's evaluation procedures.
 - 3.2.3 The program orients trainees and instructors to the Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards.
 - 3.2.4 The program orients trainees and instructors to the program's Administrative Policies. At the discretion of the program, it may choose to utilize a fellowship handbook that trainees and instructors may reference.
- 3.3 Administrative Policies:** A program publishes equitable administrative policies and implements consistent procedures designed to protect the trainee and program.
- 3.3.1 The program implements appropriate advisement policies and procedures, including avenues for communication and frequency of feedback.
 - 3.3.2 The program implements appropriate retention policies and procedures including didactic and fellowship practice experience evaluation procedures and requirements the trainee must fulfil to maintain active status through fellowship completion.
 - 3.3.3 The program implements appropriate termination policies and procedures including termination for reasons of didactic and professional performance. The program's termination policy identifies the effect termination from the program would have on the trainee's employment status, if applicable.
 - 3.3.4 The program implements an equitable grievance policy, including procedures for appeal that ensures due process for the trainee and instructors.
 - 3.3.5 The program implements appropriate professional, family, and sick leave policies including how these leaves could impact the trainee's ability to complete the program.
 - 3.3.6 The program implements policies and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations including non-discrimination, privacy, and confidentiality policies.
 - 3.3.7 The program implements policies and procedures that demonstrate a commitment to providing an [anti-racist, diverse, equitable, and inclusive](#) learning environment for trainees and instructors.
 - 3.3.8 The program maintains a record of current and past trainees and the program awards a certificate of completion to trainees that complete all program requirements.

- 3.4 Instructors:** Instructor quantity and qualifications are sufficient to carry out the program's mission and goals.
- 3.4.1** Program instructors are qualified by education and experience. The instructors possess the academic background, professional experience, and ongoing professional development to ensure the delivery of quality fellowship education. Instructors who act as supervisors for the required 100 hours of [supervision](#) hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and have 2 years of post-master's social work [practice](#) experience. This includes individuals whose degree was recognized as equivalent through CSWE's [International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service \(ISWDRES\)](#) and graduates from Canadian social work programs accredited by CASWE covered by the [memorandum of understanding between CSWE and CASWE](#). Other instructors may be from other disciplines.
- 3.4.2** The program employs a sufficient number of instructors who possess demonstrated expertise to support the program's mission and goals.
- 3.4.3** The program provides ongoing professional development experiences for instructors to support their roles within the program. The professional development experiences enhance the effectiveness of the instructors which results in program improvement.
- 3.5 Administrative Structure:** A program's administrative structure is sufficient to meet the program's mission and goals. The administrators possess the necessary education, knowledge, and skills to make decisions regarding the delivery of the fellowship program.
- 3.5.1** The [program director](#) possesses the qualifications necessary to administratively oversee all aspects of the program. The program determines the role and responsibilities of the program director.
- 3.5.2** A program coordinator is appointed if the program director does not hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program or if the program director does not have 2 years of post-master's social work [practice](#) experience. The program coordinator is responsible for overseeing the program's curriculum, including the didactic components and fellowship practice experiences. The program determines the roles and responsibilities of the program coordinator.
- 3.5.3** The program's administrative structure supports the program's mission and goals.
- 3.6 Resources:** The program is allocated resources within the host site that are sufficient to create, maintain, and improve the learning environment in support of the program's mission and goals.
- 3.6.1** The program maintains financial resources that support program sustainability, attainment of the program's mission and goals, and promote continuous program improvement.

- 3.6.2** The program has sufficient staff, other personnel, and technological resources to support all of the educational activities.
- 3.6.3** The program has sufficient office space, classroom space, and computer-mediated access for instructors and trainees to achieve the mission and goals.
- 3.6.4** The program's host site is committed to supporting the program and providing the necessary resources. The program's host site commits to protecting trainees by establishing a plan for teaching out trainees currently enrolled should it decide to discontinue offering the program.

STANDARD 4: ASSESSMENT

Assessment is an integral component of any quality social work education program. Assessment involves the systematic gathering of data about trainee performance and competency attainment in support of the program's mission and goals. Assessment also involves gathering data regarding the curriculum and learning environment in a commitment to ongoing continuous program improvement. Given that social work practice is complex and multidimensional, the assessment methods used by programs and the data collected may vary by context.

The program systematically gathers data, monitors outcomes, and analyzes information to determine the effectiveness of the program and the extent to which the program's mission and goals are achieved. The evaluation process is planned, organized, scheduled, and documented to ensure ongoing quality education in the program's defined area(s) of social work [practice](#). The timing and procedures administered are appropriate for the program context and structure.

As a result of the assessment process, the program makes iterative changes to continuously strengthen the program's mission and goals, curriculum, learning environment, and assessment methods utilized.

- 4.1 **Program Mission and Goals Assessment:** The program annually gathers data, monitors outcomes, and analyzes information to assess achievement of the program's mission and goals.
- 4.2 **Curriculum Assessment:** The program annually gathers data, monitors outcomes, and analyzes information to assess curriculum effectiveness via attainment of competencies specific to the program's defined area(s) of social work practice.
 - 4.2.1 **Competency Assessment:** The program implements a systematic process for ongoing assessment of trainee outcomes for all Fellowship Competencies identified in 2.2.1. Assessment of competence is done throughout the course of the program and by the appropriate program instructors. Feedback is provided to the trainee at regular intervals to ensure timely program completion and appropriate progression of trainee advancement.
 - 4.2.2 The program implements an annual process for evaluating whether the program's [didactic](#) and [fellowship practice experience](#) offerings prepare trainees with substantive expertise in the program's defined area(s) of social work practice. Specifically, the program evaluates the curriculum based on trainee achievement.
 - 4.2.3 The program implements an annual process for evaluating trainee outcomes and their implications for program renewal across [program delivery options](#). Program delivery options include multiple program formats or variances in how trainees complete didactic components or use practice sites.
- 4.3 **Learning Environment Assessment:** The program systematically gathers data, monitors outcomes, analyzes information to assess the effectiveness of the program's learning environment in preparing all trainees for professional practice in the program's defined area(s) of social work practice.

- 4.3.1 The program implements a systematic process for ongoing assessment of the learning environment, including administrative policies and how it conducts program orientation. At a minimum, the process is conducted once per cohort and involves data from multiple sources, including the program trainees and instructors.
- 4.3.2 The program implements an annual process for evaluating instructors which may include assessment of teaching ability, [supervision](#), and trainee support. Data are gathered from multiple sources, including trainees, and feedback is provided annually to the instructors for continued program improvement.
- 4.3.3 The program implements an annual process for evaluating the program's administrative structure which includes assessment of the [program director's](#) and, if applicable, the program coordinator's, administrative abilities, ability overseeing the curriculum, and effectiveness in meeting the roles and responsibilities established by the program. Data are gathered from multiple sources, including program trainees and instructors. Feedback is provided annually to the program director and the program coordinator, if applicable, for continued program improvement.
- 4.4 **Assessment of Program Effectiveness:** The program annually gathers data, monitors outcomes, and analyzes information regarding program completion and the post-completion preparedness of [fellows](#) to assess the effectiveness of the program and guide the program's ongoing continuous improvement efforts.
 - 4.4.1 The program implements an annual process for evaluating program completion data. The program's process includes calculating the program's completion rates, and time to complete the program for each program delivery option.
 - 4.4.2 The program implements an annual process for evaluating post-completion preparedness of [fellows](#) for practice in the program's defined area(s) of social work of practice, for each program delivery option. The program's process may include collecting information from [fellows](#), employers, or other stakeholders.
 - 4.4.3 The program analyzes information regarding program completion and the post-completion preparedness of [fellows](#) to guide the program's ongoing continuous improvement efforts.

Anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI)*:

Anti-racism: A process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.

Diversity: The presence of differences that may include, 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/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status.

Equity: The fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement recognizing that all people do not all start from the same place. Equity is achieved by promoting justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Actively addressing equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society and making adjustments to imbalances.

Inclusion: The act of creating environments in which individuals and groups are engaged, respected, valued, and supported through the elimination of practices and behaviors that result in marginalization. Inclusion is achieved when all individuals are welcomed to fully participate.

*Definition subject to change and contingent upon approval of 2022 EPAS.

Cognitive and affective processes: includes critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgement.

Critical thinking: an intellectual, disciplined process of conceptualizing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing multiple sources of information generated by observation, reflection, and reasoning.

Affective reactions: the way in which our emotions influence our thinking and subsequently our behavior.

Exercise of judgement: the capacity to perceive and discern multiple sources to form an opinion.

Commission on Accreditation (COA): recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States and its territories.

Didactic: didactic activities are defined as planned sessions of instruction that are included in the fellowship curriculum. The didactic components of the program are the non-practice experience learning activities required by the program.

Fellow: term used to describe an individual who has successfully completed a fellowship program. See “trainee”.

Fellowship: a social work fellowship is a post-master’s practice-based training program within one or more defined areas of practice. Fellowship programs offer trainees direct practice experiences, didactic/structured learning, supervision, and other activities (teaching, research, educational dissemination).

Fellowship Review Committee (FRC): serves as the primary review body for fellowship programs seeking initial or continued accreditation and is responsible for making accreditation decision recommendations to CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA).

Host Site: the organization, institution, or facility that hosts the fellowship program. In accordance with the Eligibility Requirements, programs must be hosted by sites offering social work services in the United States, its territories, or on U.S. military installations. If more than one organization sponsors the fellowship, there must be a contractual agreement between the organizations that outlines specific responsibilities and ownership for the fellowship.

Practice: refers to any of the three types of social work practice: micro-level, mezzo-level, and macro-level. Social work practice experience is defined as providing social work services to individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities.

Fellowship Practice Experience: accredited programs provide at minimum 900 hours to trainees throughout the course of the program. These are hours of social work services provided by the trainee to the individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities the fellowship's host site serves.

Profession's Purpose: The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally. (pg. 5, [2015 EPAS](#))

Program Delivery Options: multiple program formats or variances in how trainees complete didactic components or use practice sites. The program describes the program delivery options it offers in Standard 2.1.1. The program formats offered by the program are reported in Standard 2.3.1 and any variances in how practice sites are used by trainees are reported in Standard 2.1.3.

Program Director: the individual responsible for the direction, conduct, and oversight of the fellowship. If the program director does not hold a master's in social work degree from a CSWE-accredited program and 2 years of post-master's social work practice experience, then the program appoints a Program Coordinator with those credentials, per Standard 3.5.2.

Supervision/Supervisor: Supervision is a fundamental element of fellowship training; see Standard 2.4. The program's supervision model is developed to ensure the advancement of the trainee's knowledge and expertise in the defined area of social work practice. Supervision is a continual learning experience provided throughout the course of the program. For accreditation purposes, the term supervisor refers to a type of program instructor. Supervisors are social workers that provide the minimum 100 required hours of supervision. Supervisors must hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and have 2 years of post-master's social work practice experience. In states where applicable licensure exists, it is encouraged for the supervisors to be licensed.

Trainee: term used to describe an individual currently completing a fellowship program. See definition for "fellow".