



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

**Draft Report from CSWE Joint Research Task Force
Research Scholar Executive Summary of Work on Field Education Standards
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Summary Authors: Kia J Bentley, Research Task Force on EPAS
Jo Ann Regan, CSWE Vice President of Education

CSWE Research Scholar: Helen E. Petracchi, PhD, MSSW, University of Pittsburgh

Task Force Members: Commission on Research (COR)-David Kondrat, Indiana University and
Karen Sowers, University of Tennessee

Commission on Accreditation (COA)-Lisa Clifton, Asbury University, Lynette
Reitz, Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, Dennis Ritchie, George Mason
University and Stacey Borasky, CSWE

Commission on Educational Policy (COEP)-Matthew Theriot, University of
Tennessee, Susan Mason, Yeshiva University and Randy Magen, Boise State
University

Background and Context

CSWE developed a joint research task force in 2015 comprised of members of CSWE's Commission on Research, Commission on Educational Policy, and Commission on Accreditation. The task force was charged with generating questions and making progress toward advancing the science of social work accreditation, specifically by acting to increase the evidence base and better articulate the theoretical basis of CSWE's EPAS. The task force identified five key questions that included:

1. To what extent are the competencies reflective of the demands/expectations of beginning social work practice?
2. What is the rationale for and what data do we need to justify, revise, or eliminate the following requirements: number of faculty required, number of field hours, student-faculty ratios, and two-years post-master's experience required?
3. What are the best practices/models in field education/internship experience across disciplines and their connection to our standards?
4. What is the value and knowledge base underlying our diversity standards and what do we know about its impact on social work education?
5. In what ways have programs restructured curriculum (away from the traditional courses) to respond to the competencies? Barriers and challenges to change? What have been some successful innovative and effective curriculum models to respond to 2008/2015 EPAS?

Activities were identified by the task force for each question. Question #2 was selected for a "gateway" inquiry into the requirements that field instructors have two years of experience and students complete 900 hours of field instruction at the graduate level. The task force decided to issue a call for a scholar to

research this question and selected Dr. Helen Petracchi, University of Pittsburg, as the CSWE research scholar.

Summary of Research Scholar Report

This is a brief summary of a review conducted by Dr. Petracchi who generated a report based on a review of scholarly literature, related documents in the CSWE archives in Minnesota, and conversations with key informants within our own profession as well those in peer professional organizations.

Historical and Literature Review

Perhaps it is not a surprise that historically no documents were located that clearly articulate an explicit reason for the emergence of a specific number of clock hours as a standard for field instruction or, for that matter, years of experience for field instructors. The latter is likely rooted in the profession's early and longstanding emphasis on practice experience and an apprentice model of learning and generativity, even as formal structures of coursework and graduate schools of social work were developing in major cities across America. In the early 20th century, field work in social work distinguished the profession from sociology, and like medicine, assumed people could learn best under "expert," meaning *experienced* supervision. The first mention of a specific number of required hours came out of the American Association of Schools of Social Work in 1933. They noted that 300 hours would be required and appear to relate this to a desired percentage of the curriculum devoted to field education, namely not less than one third and not more than one half or, said another way, no more than 10 semester system credits (or 15 quarter system credits) (CSWE #8-12-4, January 28, 1958). Although documents located in this review did not specify the connection of credits into hours, they likely were extrapolated from estimates of time spent in the classroom and University norms around the designation of course credits in light of hours of expected effort. In mid-century developments in field education, it was noted that the development of "block placements" requiring 600-650 hours emerged. This is likely not a coincidence that it closely approximates working a 40 hour full-time week over the course of a 15 semester. Indeed it seems likely that the number of field hours in "concurrent placements" related to the number of hours for 2-3 full-time days over the course of a semester. In the 1960s, after CSWE had been formed and emerged as the sole accrediting body for social work programs, standards did not specify the number of hours required, only they be "sufficient" to achieve educational goals. Perhaps in response to concern about resulting dramatic variation in field hour requirements, CSWE did institute a requirement in 1974 that undergraduate programs offer a minimum of between 300 and 400 field hours be completed. In the next iteration of standards in 1982, the requirement became 400 hours for undergraduate and 900 hours for graduate programs. Archival documents suggest initial drafts of these standards did not specify number of hours, but nevertheless, the final version does so without explanation. One article by Raskin, Bogo and Wayne in 2006 retrospectively reflects on these developments in field education in social work, suggesting that leaders thought articulation of specifics would bolster arguments to university administrators for increased resources for field education in addition to directly attempt to address undesired wide variation in field requirements across programs. One social work scholar recalls that the settlement on 900 hours may have been related to "simple math," that is, relating field hours to the way that University course credits and work expectations are calculated historically, with 50 minutes of classroom time plus 2 hours of outside study per week equals one course credit. Since 1982, requirements have not changed with no further articulation of rationale.

Review of Other Disciplines

Interestingly, an examination of field internship educational requirements of sibling helping professions like counseling, psychology, marriage and family therapy, midwifery, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, teaching, and public health, indicates some do and some do not specify the number

of internship hours. Some distinguish between total hours and “direct service” hours required, with some greatly exceeding social work in the number of hours required (e.g. doctoral level work in occupational or physical therapy) and some fewer (e.g. some counseling and nursing programs). Two professions (law and nurse anesthesia) requires students address a set number of cases.

Conclusions from Research Scholar Report

Even in the face of missing data, incomplete documents, and imperfect information, it would seem wrong to argue that the CSWE requirements for 400 (BSW) and 900 (MSW) hours of field instruction is arbitrary or irrational. These numbers seem to be rooted in historical assumptions and long-standing traditions (and maybe even a few calculations) within our field related to “apprenticeships” and perceptions of what the appropriate percentage of curricular effort the field education component should be. However, these assumptions or presumptions are simply not clearly articulated anywhere. The 2008 and 2015 EPAS declare field education to be our “signature pedagogy” and this echoes many other historical statements that affirm the central place of field education. Consensus exists, however, that more research is needed to understand the most effective structures for these placements, and perhaps more importantly, to help begin to offer up a theoretical or empirical rationale for specified requirements and make our standards more consistent with those.

Next Steps

The work of the joint research task force will be transferred to the EPAS 2022 committee that will incorporate the remaining research questions into the environmental scanning activities. The EPAS 2022 Joint Committee of both COEP and COA identified five areas for focus in the 2022 EPAS that include Technology, Data-Driven Standards, Diversity, Field Education and Changing Resources in Higher Education.

A Commission on Research representative will be added to the EPAS 2022 committee to assist with the environmental scanning activities. A priority for the COR representative will be to assist CSWE in developing a survey for feedback from program and individual members on the impact of standards on programs. Information about the impact on quality, both positive and negative, of all standards where prescriptive numbers are used (e.g. faculty to student ratios, reassigned time for administration) will be collected.

A meeting of the EPAS 2022 committee is planned in May 2019 with a review of the environmental scanning data collected and the joint research task force questions.

For more information on the research scholar report, please contact Jo Ann Regan, Vice President of Education, at jregan@cswe.org