



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

333 John Carlyle Street, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314

TEL 703.683.8080

FAX 703.683.8099

www.cswe.org

Statement on Cairn University Concerns With Draft 2022 EPAS

On May 26, Cairn University President Todd J. Williams informed students that he and the Board of Trustees had decided to end Cairn's baccalaureate and master's social work programs. Although accreditation is voluntary, we are disappointed that the university did not consult with CSWE before making the decision.

In a letter to students, President Williams cited concerns over the financial sustainability of Cairn's programs as well as concerns, held by Williams and the Board of Trustees, about the draft Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) currently under development by the Joint EPAS Writing Committee (made up of members of the CSWE Commissions on Accreditation and Educational Policy).

Williams cited concerns about the need for social work programs to address human sexuality and gender identity in a manner that is "inconsistent with the University's biblical position on human sexuality." This language appeared in the 2008 EPAS and in the 2015 EPAS and has not been dramatically changed in the draft 2022 EPAS. In fact, in the 2022 draft, Competency 2 includes more language about social workers understanding the pervasive nature of racism in our society as well understanding "how diversity and different experiences with equity and inclusion characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the development of identity."

Williams' letter stated that "previous CSWE guidelines have permitted institutions to interpret the guidelines in a way that aligns with their university mission" and implied that the draft 2022 standards remove this permission for interpretation and force programs to teach "a set of critical theory and intersectionality assumptions and values inconsistent with our biblical view of humanity, human nature, and the world." This is a false statement, and it is worth mentioning here that CSWE is aware of efforts in some states to limit the ways that some institutions educate students about racism, diversity, and equity.

The current 2015 EPAS and the draft 2022 EPAS articulate competencies that all students must achieve and do not specify theories to be taught. Programs have never had the flexibility to "interpret" standards to align with university mission. In the current draft 2022 EPAS, programs are no longer *required* to articulate how the university and program missions align. That said, such alignment is also not prohibited. In addition, programs may add competencies to their program beyond EPAS requirements, and some programs at religiously affiliated institutions add an additional competency related to spirituality.

It would be unfortunate if Cairn's president and Board of Trustees ended their social work programs based on misinterpretations of the draft EPAS and without participating in the open feedback process. It is also unfortunate that it appears students and faculty were abruptly alerted to the decision to end the baccalaureate and master's programs, the latter of which received candidacy-status accreditation this year.

That said, CSWE will gladly work with Cairn administrators to support the students and faculty of their programs in accordance with Policy 1.2.9 of the *EPAS Handbook* (Program Closure and Withdrawal of Accredited Status), so that they will be able to continue their studies and work and pursue their dreams and careers in social work.