

GROUP FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF
DOCTORAL EDUCATION (GADE)

Guidelines for Quality in Social Work Doctoral Programs (Revised)
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Guidelines Revision Working Group:

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Purpose of the Guidelines

This document outlines recommended requirements for doctoral programs in social work and social welfare. It was prepared to assist faculty and academic administrators in reviewing and designing doctoral programs in social work.

Working Model and Assumptions

The Purpose of Doctoral Education in Social Work

Although social work has been and is defined in a variety of ways, these Guidelines presume that three independent but interrelated concepts may be used to distinguish analytically what social work can involve. Specifically, social work can be distinguished as: (1) a *practical activity*, reflected in its publicly visible role as a “helping profession” with a commitment to developing and using practical methods of support, intervention, and change in a variety of contexts, particularly those pertaining to disadvantaged and vulnerable populations; (2) a *discipline*, reflected in an emphasis on establishing and maintaining social work as a subject worthy of scientific study and development in its own right within the framework of higher education; and (3) a *research tradition*, reflected in an emphasis on building a particular body of theoretical, empirical, and applied knowledge, as well as an infrastructure for its support, adjudication and dissemination (Tucker, 2002). The province of doctoral education in social work is primarily with social work as discipline and research tradition. Hence, its main purpose is to prepare social work scholars and researchers of the highest quality so that they may make significant contributions to social work education as well as to the scientific and professional literature in social work and social welfare.

Governance

Reflecting the influence of local histories, conditions, and cultures, as well the particular commitments and interests of faculty, doctoral programs may demonstrate substantial differences in their respective models of implementation and educational foci. These Guidelines are not intended to supplant or conflict with this diversity of models and specializations but have been developed and approved to define the requisites of quality in doctoral education in social work.

These Guidelines have not been developed as an endorsement and framework for the accreditation of doctoral programs. In contrast, they strongly presume university control of the quality of doctoral programs and, concomitantly, that doctoral education should develop within the philosophy of the host institution.

Discipline-Profession Assumptions

Consistent with the orientation expressed above about the interdependence between the nature of social work and the purpose of doctoral education, these Guidelines assume that the practice of social work as a profession is guided by the principles of science in its development, acceptance, and use of knowledge, and in its assessments of the effectiveness of its interventions. Within this framework, it is assumed that a well-trained doctoral student will be able to contribute to the advancement of social work as both discipline and profession. Specifically, the well-educated doctoral student will be able to conceive and conduct scientifically-based research aimed at developing in-depth knowledge of a particular subject, problem, process, or phenomenon, as well as being able to define the connection and

contribution of that knowledge to the requirements of professional intervention with clients.

While these Guidelines embrace science and scientific methods as the underlying model of education, including training in traditional research skills (e.g., statistics, research design and the like), no single epistemology or methodology of scientific research is presumed to have a monopoly on truth or problem-solving by this endorsement. Doctoral students should learn not just about research methodologies but also about the epistemological and ontological basis of these methodologies as well as other historical, philosophical, theoretical, empirical, and analytical material. Their education should foster their ability to think and write critically not only about their own and others' scholarly and professional contributions to social work but also about the place, role, contribution, and practice of social work in society.

Dynamic and Changing Profession

Social work has changed over time, and continues to change, as reflected in historical and more recent changes in the knowledge and methods on which it is based and in the domains of research and action it embraces. These Guidelines have been created to reflect the current state of the field and to provide a conceptual framework for the development or assessment of doctoral programs. It is expected that these Guidelines will continue to change over time to keep pace with advances in research and practice.

The Guidelines

This document describes the characteristics of high quality doctoral education in social work in six critical areas. The specifics of quality noted with regard to each

dimension, in their presence and in their interaction, are intended to reflect and guide the structuring of new doctoral programs and the improvement of established programs.

Institutional Context

The characteristics of the university and school within which a doctoral program is located provide important determinants of the program's specific focus and of program quality. The doctoral program should be located in an accredited university, with the culture and commitments of the host institution demonstrating a clear and strong commitment to quality in doctoral education:

- The doctoral program is located in an accredited university that also houses a master's degree program in social work, one that is accredited by CSWE or a comparable national body.
- Doctoral faculty have a doctorate in social work or a related field, a demonstrated record of scholarship, and expertise in teaching and mentoring doctoral students.
- Moral and operating support in the school or program's governance structures (e.g., provost's office, dean or director's office, executive committee, and so on) for the centrality of knowledge development in social work, and the expectation that engaging in research and scholarship is as an essential component of the faculty role.
- Qualified faculty receive encouragement and support for their teaching and advisement work with doctoral students, such as workload credit, compensation, and recognition in tenure and promotion systems equivalent to that offered in other degree-granting programs. There is also adequate recognition of and

compensation for directing or guiding student research, for providing internship opportunities where relevant, and for student mentoring more generally.

- There is a doctoral program director who is provided with at least 25% release time and salary compensation for the work, with a clearly defined role and responsibilities that support achieving program goals. The director has appropriate credentials and seniority.
- In addition to a program director, the program has adequate space and infrastructure such as a stable budget and adequate staffing, allocation of faculty, and technological resources (e.g., smart classrooms, access to computing and technical assistance, etc.), within the department or school as well as in the library and other key areas. These resources include those for student financial support, which are discussed in a later section.
- The school has a clearly stated governance structure, involving both administration and faculty that supports ongoing program development and renewal. Its governance structure provides for appropriate faculty autonomy in doctoral admissions decisions, curriculum development, faculty development, monitoring student progress, and the determination of requirements for completion of the degree.
- The program engages in periodic systematic review and assessment and maintains a database on students and graduates for continuous monitoring of students' progress and other indicators of student outcomes.
- The program seeks out and allocates resources to achieve diversity in faculty, staff, students and perspectives.

Faculty

Faculty members possess the competence to provide the educational experiences required by doctoral students and the commitment to contribute to the evolution of the doctoral program as the locus for these experiences. They have a strong interest in doctoral education and in the creation of the next generations of social work scholars/educators. They also administer the doctoral program as a coherent and structured entity for which they have responsibility and accountability.

Doctoral level faculty are responsible for teaching courses; mentoring students on an individual basis; advising students; participating in examinations; and supervising research internships, teaching internships, and dissertations. Faculty will possess an established record of scholarship as evidenced by the quality of their publications, their activity on research projects (including those funded through grants they have obtained) and their participation in peer review activities, such as editorial boards and proposal reviews. In addition to these competencies, doctoral faculty have a continuing commitment to research productivity, effective teaching, and to ethical behavior toward doctoral students. The latter includes acknowledging the work of students on projects by fully and fairly crediting the contributions to research and their co-authorship of articles.

Faculty in the program are diverse enough in gender, race/ethnicity, philosophical perspectives, methodological expertise, areas of substantive knowledge and other characteristics to meet students' learning and professional development needs. Doctoral faculty members each make distinctive contributions to the overall program. Hence, the faculty as a whole, included newly recruited as well as established

faculty, possesses the range of scholarly expertise required by the program's mission and offer a variety of experiences in which students can immerse themselves.

Students

The quality of students applying and admitted to a doctoral program affects the educational quality of the program as a whole and can contribute to the quality of all of a school's degree-granting programs.

Students accepted into doctoral programs possess the following attributes:

- Adequate academic preparation so that learning at the doctoral level can begin at an advanced rather than at a basic level;
- A strong record of academic achievement as well as a clear motivation for completion of doctoral education in a timely manner;
- Strong intellectual abilities, including the ability to conceptualize and organize the abstract constructs and theoretical concepts necessary for knowledge building and to use synthesized material creatively;
- A demonstrated commitment to advancing social work's knowledge base and the written, oral, and analytic skills necessary to communicate this knowledge in a meaningful way;
- Objectives for their own professional development that are consonant with the goals of the program, including a strong commitment to help meet the knowledge needs of the profession.

Successful applicants who are international students from non-English speaking nations also demonstrate enough proficiency in English so they can learn effectively as well as write and teach as needed.

In addition, programs continuously monitor and evaluate their admission procedures and making adjustments in light of new information and feedback. In assessing the effectiveness of admission procedures, programs usually consider:

- The numbers, academic quality, and preparedness of applicants;
- The numbers, academic quality, and preparedness of students admitted;
- The proportion of students admitted;
- The yield rate, or proportion of admitted students enrolled;
- The distribution of students in relation to the school and university's commitment to diversity; and
- The subsequent persistence and performance of students in the program.

Curriculum

There is no one curriculum model for doctoral education in social work. Instead there are various acceptable models that reflect variation in the missions and philosophies of different universities, schools and departments and variation in faculty expertise. The curriculum may be organized around social work methods (e.g., clinical practice, program management, social policy analysis, etc.), by field of practice (e.g., child and family services, health and mental health services, gerontology, etc.), or by an emphasis on relevant interdisciplinary content (e.g., with social science disciplines, education, etc.). Regardless of the model adopted, the curriculum must be internally coherent, must have education for knowledge development and dissemination at its core, and must clearly contribute to the mission of its school and university.

The conception of doctoral education as creating “stewards of the discipline” (Carnegie Foundation, 2002) means preparing students for the tasks of generation,

conservation, and transformation of knowledge. Because of differences among these three goals, the range of relevant curriculum content in doctoral education in social work is broad. Therefore course work normally require two years of full-time study or the equivalent before concentrated work on the dissertation begins.

Curriculum content areas in doctoral education include:

- Theory and knowledge relevant to the areas of curriculum concentration of the program
- Research methods, qualitative and quantitative, including methods of data analysis and statistics as well as program and/or practice evaluation
- Philosophy of science
- History of the profession
- Social policy
- Diversity
- Ethics
- Content in any cognate discipline(s) relevant to program goals

An individual student's course of study ideally includes both core content areas and content relevant to the individual area of expertise being developed.

The ability to express ideas clearly orally and in writing is also essential. The inclusion of historical, philosophical, theoretical, empirical and analytical material is necessary to enable students to think and write critically about their own and others' scholarly and professional contributions to social work and also about the place, role, contribution and practice of social work in society.

- In addition to courses, required and elective (individualized), the achievement of these curriculum goals is normally accomplished and student achievement of them assessed through such mechanisms as a comprehensive examination or paper or the equivalent.
- Other program requirements, such as a practicum, including a research practicum, are also used.
- Mechanisms of student support, such as research or teaching assistantships, are also designed to support and enhance the knowledge and skill development of the student and thus have a mentoring component as well.
- Finally, a dissertation is required, which is a student-generated work of independent research and scholarship addressing significant, professionally relevant, theoretically grounded questions or hypotheses. The work is guided by a faculty committee that may often include a member from outside of the school or department.

All of these program requirements are designed to aid the student in developing and demonstrating the complex knowledge and skills required of a steward of the discipline.

Because doctoral education aims to assist each doctoral student to develop an individualized area of expertise within the program's general focus, faculty must provide doctoral students with individualized mentoring. While the mentoring of doctoral students may not always be highly rewarded by educational institutions (Carnegie Foundation, 2002), excellence in doctoral education cannot be achieved in its absence.

Indicators of a quality curriculum include:

- The number, range, rigor, depth and currency of courses required of and/or available to doctoral students, including courses in research methods
- Opportunities for students to participate in research, teaching and other kinds of practicum experiences with faculty mentoring
- The quality of the dissertation proposals and completed dissertations produced
- Students' publications and conference presentations
- Graduates' records of accomplishment

Resources

The resources sustaining doctoral education both determine and reflect the program's quality. Universities, colleges, schools and departments undertake the establishment, maintenance, and growth of doctoral education only with a full recognition of the costs involved and with a commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure quality in their programs.

Quality doctoral education depends on an adequate base of financial support to students in the form of tuition scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships. With regard to student recruitment and quality of students recruited, an adequate level and duration of financial support is required in order for students to undertake doctoral study. This is particularly true in social work, where individuals often commence the doctorate in mid-career. The level of financial support also affects such factors as attrition and time to degree completion.

Indicators of adequate financial aid might include: the proportion of pre-candidacy students receiving full tuition scholarships; the proportion of pre-candidacy students receiving stipends or fellowships; the availability of financial aid from a variety of

sources to support training in a variety of substantive areas; and the proportion of students who receive dissertation fellowships or awards. Allocation of student aid between full- and part-time students and mechanisms for student support at the dissertation stage needs to be considered.

If students are to gain the skills required for scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge, they may need a variety of additional resources. Office space for students and travel funds to support students' travel to professional conferences to present papers are also important. Doctoral students may also benefit from consultation regarding qualitative and quantitative methods, access to public use databases, technology training, job acquisition skills, and writing for publication. Centers to enhance teaching skills and access to information on obtaining funding for dissertations both support and encourage students' professional development.

Doctoral education requires faculty resources beyond the demands of other social work degree programs. Thus faculty size is important. In addition to classroom teaching, doctoral instruction occurs through advising, supervising dissertation work, directing research internships, supervising students in teaching internships, and other often individualized activities. The number of faculty involved in the doctoral program is large enough to do this work with the number of students enrolled, and they and they are given adequate workload credit for doing it. The faculty involved in the doctoral program also reflects diversity in expertise so that students can find qualified mentors in their areas of scholarly interest suitable to the focus of the program.

Other resources within the institution are needed. These include an excellent library with a budget adequate to support holdings and acquisitions in social work and the

social sciences, professional librarians knowledgeable about social work, and electronic and other easy access to the library and its holdings. Computer, multimedia, “smart classroom,” laboratory and other technological resources are required, along with access to technical assistance in using them. General support for the ongoing professional development of faculty and of doctoral students (consultation, colloquia, conference travel, etc.) is also desirable.

Close linkages between a doctoral program and a variety of community resources also enhance the quality of the education offered. Programs can also benefit from interdisciplinary partnerships within universities, consortium arrangements with other schools and universities, and relationships with community-based agencies that may provide research and practice internship sites.

Program Review

These Guidelines support the autonomy of doctoral programs and stand in direct opposition to any formal accreditation process. Nonetheless, high quality programs will engage periodically in systematic reviews, using acceptable internal and external peer review procedures. The purpose of such reviews should be developmental in nature, appraising a program’s strengths and weaknesses in a manner that helps it plan for improvements in the future. Normally such reviews would be conducted using a framework similar to that contained in these Guidelines, meaning that among other things, it would consider the realism and realization of the program’s mission, the program’s reputation and contributions, its relations with allied disciplines, quality of faculty and the general adequacy of other key resources, effectiveness of the curriculum, standards of student admission, scholarship, and research, adequacy of

student funding, effectiveness of the program's internal organization for governance and administration, and finally, its future potential.

References

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