QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR PHD PROGRAMS IN SOCIAL WORK

Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE)

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for the development, review, and improvement of PhD programs in social work.[1] The specific requirements and structure of PhD programs in social work will depend in large part on the PhD policies and procedures of the college or university, as well as the chosen focus of the program. Thus, some variability in and diversity of programs across institutions can be expected. This document is not meant to be proscriptive, but instead provides guidelines to which programs may aspire. This document was approvedby the GADE membership at its annual meeting in April, 2013.

These 2013 guidelines build upon and advance previous similar efforts, including a special edition of *Arete* in Spring, 2001 and GADE quality guidelines issued in 1992 and revised in 2003. Scholarship disseminated over the past decade has informed this current document, including further work from the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (Walker et al., 2008), a study of social work doctoral education involving student respondents (Anastas, 2012), and a national initiative regarding the science of social work (Brekke, 2012; Fong, 2012). In addition to these sources, this document is informed by the results of a national survey[2] of 416 social work faculty, administrators, and PhD students that was conducted in December, 2012 by the GADE Task Force on Quality Guidelines. This survey asked respondents to express opinions about the importance of various aspects of a social work PhD program.

PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WORK PHD EDUCATION

As is the case with PhD education in other fields and disciplines, the purpose of the PhD in social work is to prepare students to be scholars who function as "stewards of the discipline." The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate articulated that a steward of the discipline is one who generates and critically evaluates new knowledge, conserves the most important ideas and findings that are the legacy of the discipline, understands how knowledge is transforming the discipline and the larger world, and communicates their knowledge responsibly to others (Walker et al., 2008). Thus, PhD-trained social

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[1] The guidelines provided here are specifically for PhD programs in social work; for more information on the Doctorate in Social Work (DSW), the *Report of the Task Force on the DSW Degree Convened by the Social Work Leadership Forum* is available from GADE at www.gadephd.org.

[2] Parts of this survey were originally administered in 2005 by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as part of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate. The findings of the study were reported in the 2008 book *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century* by George Walker, Chris M. Golde, Laura Jones, Andrea Conklin Bueschel, and Pat Hutchings.

work scholars improve the art and science of social work by generating, disseminating, and conserving the knowledge that informs and transforms professional practice. The domains of social work inquiry derive from the social work's mission and purpose: "to enhance human well-being and help meet the needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW Code of Ethics).

With this purpose in mind, a social work PhD program should be organized with sufficient structure and resources for PhD scholars, upon completion of their PhD programs, to have specific skills and knowledge in the following areas: in-depth knowledge of social work as a profession and discipline, research and scholarship, and teaching.

QUALITY GUIDELINES

KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIAL WORK AS A PROFESSION AND DISCIPLINE

Graduates of PhD programs in social work should have in-depth knowledge of social work as a profession and discipline. It is important that the new knowledge that PhD stewards of the discipline develop and disseminate be contextualized within the distinguishing characteristics and most important ideas and findings that constitute the legacy of the social work profession. Students with an MSW bring a solid foundational knowledge of social work as a professional practice, which is deepened and expanded in the PhD program relative to theory, research, and knowledge development. Students without an MSW need opportunities to develop foundational knowledge about the social work profession through independent learning and/or selected coursework. Quality PhD programs should build expertise and skills in the following areas:

<u>**Core expertise and skills**</u>

Graduates are able to:
- Locate their work in the intellectual landscape of social work.
- Critically analyze theories, practices, policies, and research.
- Understand the relations among social work education, research, and practice.
- Understand how knowledge in social work is relevant to public issues, including promoting social justice and increasing equity.
- Understand the role and importance of social work values and ethics in research and knowledge development.
- Develop expertise in at least one specialized area of knowledge.

<u>**Additional recommended expertise and skills**</u>

Graduates are able to:
- Articulate the major issues and controversies in social work, both past and present.
- Understand the contributions of social work to society.
- Know the state-of-the-art practices/interventions within the student's field of inquiry.
- Analyze social policies at an advanced level.

RESEARCH/ SCHOLARSHIP

Because social work PhD graduates are charged with generating knowledge, they must be able to conduct high quality research and communicate the findings to diverse audiences. Research skills, broadly defined, involve the systematic collection and analysis of data that shed light on research questions relevant to social work. Quality PhD programs build expertise among their graduates in the following areas:

Core expertise and skills

Graduates are able to:
- Conceptualize significant, meaningful, and relevant social work research questions.
- Critically evaluate and review published work in the student's area of expertise.
- Identify the strengths and limitations of their own research.
- Conduct research that is guided by theory.
- Understand both the technical aspects and conceptual underpinnings of a broad range of methodological and statistical techniques.
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge in the selection and application of the most rigorous, feasible, and appropriate methodological and data analysis approach(es) for the research question(s) posed.
- Proactively and consistently implement plans for the responsible and ethical conduct of research.
- Design and implement appropriate procedures for sampling and data collection.
- Widely disseminate knowledge that contributes to the advancement of social work research, practice, and policy, including: writing publishable, peer-reviewed manuscripts; presenting at local, national and international conferences; and producing policy briefs /white papers.

Additional expertise and skills

Graduates will be able to:
- Develop research and funding proposals, both independently and in collaboration with others.
- Develop a research career plan or trajectory.
- Participate in an interdisciplinary research team.

TEACHING

Most PhD students in social work aspire to work in settings in which they have opportunities to both conduct research and to teach (Anastas, 2012; Task Force Survey, 2012). This aspiration is congruent with being a steward of the discipline, who both develops and disseminates knowledge. In addition, PhD programs of all types have long been criticized for failing to adequately prepare students to teach. Quality PhD programs recognize that preparation for quality teaching involves more than helping PhD students become knowledge experts, it also involves developing competency in relevant classroom teaching skills and understanding the relationship between their research and their teaching. A common approach to building these skills is for students to complete a required or elective course on the theory and practice of teaching social work. Competencies in the teaching arena are:

Core expertise and skills:

Graduates will be able to:
- Understand and apply theories of adult learning.
- Design and teach a course in a social work curriculum.
- Create a learning culture and classroom climate that is inclusive of a diverse population of students and diverse learning styles.
- Address ethical dilemmas that might arise in teaching.
- Understand the place of social work education within the larger context of higher education.

Additional recommended expertise and skills

Graduates will be able to:
- Engage students using a variety of instructional strategies.
- Apply state-of-the-art instructional technology and strategies.
- Understand CSWE accreditation issues and processes.
- Develop a written teaching philosophy.
- Understand contemporary issues in social work education, including online teaching, student motivation, and academic integrity.

RESOURCES/ADMINISTRATION/STRUCTURES

In order to achieve the competencies described above, the students, faculty, and administrators in PhD social work programs require a variety of structures and supports. Students require financial support, appropriate mentoring, and clear, concise expectations that facilitate timely completion of program milestones leading to successful program completion. Faculty and administrators need recognition and workload assignments that place value on the importance of the amount of faculty commitment, time, energy, and expertise that is required to administer PhD programs and to teach and mentor PhD students. Quality programs set clear and rigorous criteria for PhD admission, collect data to inform periodic reviews of the entire program, and set goals for and monitor student progress toward degree. Students have a right to learn in a learning climate that is safe, secure, non-threatening, and inclusive.

Core supports for all students

- Opportunities for appointments as Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) and/or Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). These are essential both for skill development and to provide financial aid.
- Tuition assistance and/or other forms of financial support, such as tuition waivers and work-free stipends, fellowships, or scholarships.
- Professional development funds for travel and/or advanced training.
- Assignment to an official, formal academic advisor/mentor who serves as a part of a larger mentoring team of faculty, staff, and peers.
- Opportunities to take interdisciplinary courses and/or courses with students from other disciplines.
- Adequate workspace provided by the school or university.
- Access to affordable and quality health and mental health services.

- Resources to refine writing, data analysis, presentation, and other core skills at no additional cost to the student.
- Full access to state-of-the-art library resources.

Core characteristics and resources for program administration

- The courses in the PhD curriculum are logically connected and sequenced, and students have opportunity for individualized electives.
- The required minimum number of coursework or credit hours, excluding enrollment for exams and dissertation, is generally set by the academic institution, but typically ranges from 36 to 54, but may be higher in some programs, especially those that do not require the MSW for admission.
- The PhD program has clear written expectations for students and engages in continuous monitoring of student progress, including processes for dismissal that are consistent with institutional and program guidelines.
- Comprehensive examinations have a clear rationale, purpose, and timeline for completion.
- Dissertations are conducted within a supportive climate that provides the necessary resources for successful completion within a reasonable timeframe.
- The PhD program regularly reviews admission criteria and course content, including external reviews and assessment every 7-10 years.
- The PhD program director has senior rank at the associate or full professor level and operates within clearly defined role and responsibilities with adequate staff support.
- The PhD program director has adequate percent effort, salary compensation above the base salary, and funded professional development opportunities to successfully lead the program.
- Faculty who work with students beyond the classroom receive workload credit and recognition in tenure and promotion procedures.
- Faculty who teach in the PhD program have a demonstrated record of scholarship and quality teaching.
- The social work PhD program is located in an accredited college or university that also houses an accredited MSW program and has adequate opportunities for collaboration across disciplines and departments.
- Admissions criteria are clear and transparent to applicants, although the specifics of such criteria may vary from one program to another based on program focus, mission, and objectives. When applicable, programs follow the guidelines of their institutions and/or those of the Council of Graduate Schools (see http://www.cgsnet.org/april-15-resolution).
- The PhD program ensures that international students have adequate English language proficiency upon admission.
- The program actively recruits diverse student cohorts.

RECOMMENDED ASPIRATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

PhD programs and students have a vested interest in each student completing the PhD program in a reasonable time, with a record of scholarship and teaching that enables them to compete for the employment opportunities of their choice.

Toward that end, programs should establish goals regarding measurable outcomes for students, such as:

- At least 80% of those who initially enroll graduate with a PhD within the timeframe established by the host institution.
- The median time to degree when admitted with an MSW (or related Master's degree) is 4 to 6 years for full time students.
- Dissertations are successfully completed within 1-2 years of dissertation proposal defense.

Prior to graduation, students have:
- Made at least two or three presentations at national or international conferences.
- Published at least one sole or first authored, peer-reviewed journal article.
- Published at least two or three co-authored peer-reviewed journal articles.
- Independently taught at least one course at the BSW and/or MSW level as the instructor of record.
- Opportunities to substantively contribute to the development of a research proposal submitted for internal or external funding.

CONCLUSION

These guidelines are aspirational, intended to help institutions develop and improve PhD programs in social work. They do not constitute accreditation standards, as is the case for Bachelor's level (BSW) and Master's level (MSW) professional programs in social work, which are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Quality PhD programs in social work set high standards and supply adequate resources to meet those standards. These guidelines are intended to be a dynamic document that should be regularly updated to reflect the latest knowledge about quality doctoral education.