ADVANCED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE
IN CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

CSWE
COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Advanced Social Work Practice in Clinical Social Work

Background

In June 2008 the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) approved the 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which moved social work to a competency-based outcomes approach to education. The goal of this outcomes performance approach is to ensure that social work graduates are prepared to work competently with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The 2008 EPAS defines 10 competencies (EP 2.1.1—EP 2.1.10), which are common to all social work practice. Each competency is composed of knowledge, values, and skills that define what social workers must know and be able to do to practice effectively.

For social workers at the advanced practice level the 2008 EPAS further defines that

> advanced practice incorporates all of the core competencies augmented by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration. (EP M2.2; CSWE 2008a)

On passing the 2008 EPAS, CSWE agreed to work with the education community to provide resources for crafting knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration. The first of these resources, *Advanced Social Work Practice in the Prevention of Substance Use Disorders*, was published in fall 2008 (CSWE, 2008b). The publication included prevention knowledge and practice behaviors for each of the 10 competencies to define effective advanced practice in prevention of substance use disorders. This document was the first of its kind; therefore, it also outlined a process by which other documents could be developed for concentrations and receive an endorsement from CSWE.

Development of a Clinical Social Work Statement

In 2009 many social work programs had begun to think about curriculum under the 2008 EPAS and to work on self-study documents. As they were doing so, Ira Colby, Carolyn Jacobs, and Barbara Shank thought that it would be helpful for programs with a clinical social work concentration to collaborate in developing a clinical social work statement. The three approached CSWE, which agreed to host a meeting at the CSWE offices in Alexandria, VA. An e-mail invitation was sent to programs that reported having a clinical social work concentration. The list of invitees was generated from programs whose Web sites indicated the existence of a clinical concentration. In all, 47 programs were invited to attend.

The 2-day meeting was held August 3–4, 2009; 31 people attended from 21 institutions. Participants included program administrators, faculty members, and representatives from associations. Ira Colby, Carolyn Jacobs, and Barbara Shank facilitated the meeting. Dean Pierce, emeritus director of accreditation, provided an overview about the 2008 EPAS and advanced practice to ensure that meeting attendees understood the standards. Accreditation staff members, including Judith Bremner, acting director of accreditation, were

also on-hand to respond to questions and make certain that the work was formatted consistently with 2008 EPAS. During the 2-day meeting, participants drafted a definition of clinical social work, knowledge, and practice behaviors related to each of the 10 competencies. At the end of the meeting, an eight-person steering committee was formed to move forward with editing the document.

The steering committee conducted the remaining work by e-mail and conference call. After revising the work completed during the meeting, the steering committee solicited feedback from three groups: (1) participants from the August meeting; (2) Wynne Korr, chair of the Commission on Accreditation; and (3) the broader clinical social work education community. The steering committee considered the feedback from all three groups before finalizing the publication.

Clinical Social Work

Consistent with EP M2.2, the following document augments and applies knowledge and practice behaviors for advanced practice in clinical social work for each of the 10 competencies. Taken together these competencies are intended to frame a concentration in clinical social work. Following each of the 10 competencies, clinical social work knowledge is outlined in paragraph format, and the practice behaviors follow in the bullet points. The clinical social work material can be seen at a glance in the matrix beginning on p.11.

As a specialty within the practice of social work, clinical social work builds on professional values, ethics, principles, practice methods, and the person-in-environment perspective of the profession. It reflects the profession's mission to promote social and economic justice by empowering clients who experience oppression or vulnerability. Clinical social work requires the professional use of self to restore, maintain, and enhance the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual functioning of individuals, families, and groups. The practice of clinical social work requires the application of advanced clinical knowledge and clinical skills in multidimensional assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychosocial dysfunction, disability, or impairment including emotional, mental, and behavioral disorders, conditions, and addictions. Clinical practice interventions include case formulation based on differential diagnosis and assessment of risks and vulnerabilities and those factors that produce and constrain the strengths and resilience found in the transactions among people, their communities, and the larger social environment. Treatment methods include the provision of individual, family, and group work. Clinical social workers are engaged in crisis intervention, brief and long-term psychotherapy and counseling, client-centered advocacy, consultation, and evaluation. Interventions responsive to all dimensions of diversity are applied within the context of the therapeutic relationship guided by best practices and evidence-based guidelines. Clinical supervision is an important feature of clinical social work in agencies, organizations, and private practice settings.

Clinical social work practice augments the 10 core competencies with knowledge and practice behaviors, which can be used to operationalize curriculum and assessment measures. Clinical social work is grounded in the values of the profession:

> Service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence,[1] human rights, and

[1] These six value elements reflect the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1999).

scientific inquiry are among the core values of social work. These values underpin the explicit and implicit curriculum and frame the profession's commitment to respect for all people and the quest for social and economic justice. (EP 1.1; CSWE, 2008a)

Educational Policy 2.1.1—Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.

Social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission, and its core values. They know the profession's history. Social workers commit themselves to the profession's enhancement and to their own professional conduct and growth. Social workers

- advocate for client access to the services of social work;
- practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development;
- attend to professional roles and boundaries;
- demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication;
- engage in career-long learning; and
- use supervision and consultation.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work recognize the importance of the therapeutic relationship, the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives, the professional use of self with clients, and adherence to ethical guidelines of professional behavior. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- readily identify as social work professionals;
- demonstrate professional use of self with client(s);
- understand and identify professional strengths, limitations and challenges; and
- develop, manage, and maintain therapeutic relationships with clients within the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives.

Educational Policy 2.1.2—Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision-making. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of the profession, its ethical standards, and relevant law. Social workers

- recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice;
- make ethical decisions by applying standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999) and, as applicable, of the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles (IFSW, 2004);
- tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts; and
- apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work are knowledgeable about ethical issues, legal parameters, and shifting societal mores that affect the therapeutic relationship. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- apply ethical decision-making skills to issues specific to clinical social work;
- employ strategies of ethical reasoning to address the use of technology in clinical practice and its effect on client rights;
- identify and use knowledge of relationship dynamics, including power differentials; and
- recognize and manage personal biases as they affect the therapeutic relationship in the service of the clients' well-being.

Educational Policy 2.1.3—Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.

Social workers are knowledgeable about the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and reasoned discernment. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity. Critical thinking also requires the synthesis and communication of relevant information. Social workers

- distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge and practice wisdom;
- analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation; and
- demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues.

Advanced practitioners understand and differentiate the strengths and limitations of multiple practice theories and methods, clinical processes, and technical tools, including differential diagnosis. They deconstruct theories and methods to evaluate how they relate to clients and client systems within their environmental context. They regularly question and reflect on their own assumptions and consider how these might affect practice. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- engage in reflective practice;
- identify and articulate clients' strengths and vulnerabilities;
- evaluate, select, and implement appropriate multidimensional assessment, diagnostic, intervention, and practice evaluation tools;
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of multiple theoretical perspectives and differentially apply them to client situations; and
- communicate professional judgments to other social workers and to professionals from other disciplines, in both verbal and written format.

Educational Policy 2.1.4—Engage diversity and difference in practice.

Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers

- recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power;
- gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups;
- recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences; and
- view themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work as informants.

Advanced practitioners are knowledgeable about many forms of diversity and difference and how these influence the therapeutic relationship and clients' presenting issues. Advanced practitioners are knowledgeable about the ways in which various dimensions of diversity affect (a) explanations of illness, (b) help-seeking behaviors, and (c) healing practices (Cal-SWEC, 2006). Advanced practitioners are cultural beings and understand how clinical practice choices can be culture-bound. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- research and apply knowledge of diverse populations to enhance client well-being;
- work effectively with diverse populations; and
- identify and use practitioner/client differences from a strengths perspective.

Educational Policy 2.1.5—Advance human rights and social and economic justice.

Each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights. Social work incorporates social justice practices in organizations, institutions, and society to ensure that these basic human rights are distributed equitably and without prejudice. Social workers

- understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination;
- advocate for human rights and social and economic justice; and
- engage in practices that advance social and economic justice.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work understand the potentially challenging effects of economic, social, and cultural factors in the lives of clients and client systems. Advanced practitioners understand the stigma and shame associated with disorders, diagnoses, and help-seeking behaviors across diverse populations. They also understand strategies for advancing human rights and social and economic justice in domestic and global contexts. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- use knowledge of the effects of oppression, discrimination, and historical trauma on client and client systems to guide treatment planning and intervention; and
- advocate at multiple levels for mental health parity and reduction of health disparities for diverse populations.

Educational Policy 2.1.6—Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

Social workers use practice experience to inform research; employ evidence-based interventions; evaluate their own practice; and use research findings to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. Social workers comprehend quantitative and qualitative research and understand scientific and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers

- use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry and
- use research evidence to inform practice.

Advanced clinical practitioners are knowledgeable about evidence-based interventions, best practices, and the evidence-based research process. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- use the evidence-based practice process in clinical assessment and intervention with clients;
- participate in the generation of new clinical knowledge, through research and practice; and
- use research methodology to evaluate clinical practice effectiveness and/or outcomes.

Educational Policy 2.1.7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.

Social workers are knowledgeable about human behavior across the life course, the range of social systems in which people live, and the ways social systems promote or deter people in maintaining or achieving health and well-being. Social workers apply theories and knowledge from the liberal arts to understand biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development. Social workers

- use conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation; and
- critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.

Advanced practitioners understand how to synthesize and differentially apply the theories of human behavior and the social environment (biological, developmental, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual). They are familiar with diagnostic classification systems used in the formulation of a comprehensive assessment. Advanced practitioners understand how sociocultural contexts influence definitions of psychopathology. They have a working knowledge of psychotropic medications that are typically used in the treatment of mental health disorders, including expected results and side effects. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- synthesize and differentially apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide clinical practice;
- use bio-psycho-social-spiritual theories and multiaxial diagnostic classification systems in formulation of comprehensive assessments; and
- consult with medical professionals, as needed, to confirm diagnosis and/or to monitor medication in the treatment process.

Educational Policy 2.1.8—Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.

Social work practitioners understand that policy affects service delivery, and they actively engage in policy practice. Social workers know the history and current structures of social policies and services, the role of policy in service delivery, and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers

- analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance social well-being; and
- collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work recognize the connection between clients, practice, and both public and organizational policy. Advanced practitioners have knowledge about factors that influence the development of legislation, policies, program services, and funding at all system levels. They have knowledge of advocacy methods that contribute to effective policies that promote social and economic well-being. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- communicate to stakeholders the implication of policies and policy change in the lives of clients;
- use evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in advocacy for policies that advance social and economic well-being; and
- advocate with and inform administrators and legislators to influence policies that impact clients and service.

Educational Policy 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.

Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal contexts at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively. Social workers

- continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services; and
- provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work are knowledgeable about how relational, organizational, and community systems may impact clients. They anticipate and react to evolving cultural, technological, geographical, political, legal, economic, and environmental contexts. They encourage clients to effect changes within these contexts. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- assess the quality of clients' interactions within their social contexts;
- develop intervention plans to accomplish systemic change; and
- work collaboratively with others to effect systemic change that is sustainable.

Educational Policy 2.1.10(a)–(d)—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels. Social workers have the knowledge and skills to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Practice knowledge includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-based interventions designed to achieve client goals; using research and technological advances; evaluating

program outcomes and practice effectiveness; developing, analyzing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice.

Clinical social work practice involves the dynamic, interactive, and reciprocal processes of therapeutic engagement, multidimensional assessment, clinical intervention, and practice evaluation at multiple levels. Advanced practitioners have a theoretically informed knowledge base so as to effectively practice with individuals, families, and groups. Clinical practice knowledge includes understanding and implementing practice theories (models, metaperspectives, strategies, techniques, and approaches); evaluating treatment outcomes and practice effectiveness.

Educational Policy 2.1.10(a)—Engagement

Social workers

- substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- use empathy and other interpersonal skills; and
- develop a mutually agreed-on focus of work and desired outcomes.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- develop a culturally responsive therapeutic relationship;
- attend to the interpersonal dynamics and contextual factors that both strengthen and potentially threaten the therapeutic alliance; and
- establish a relationally based process that encourages clients to be equal participants in the establishment of treatment goals and expected outcomes.

Educational Policy 2.1.10(b)—Assessment

Social workers

- collect, organize, and interpret client data;
- assess client strengths and limitations;
- develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives; and
- select appropriate intervention strategies.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- use multidimensional bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment tools;
- assess clients' readiness for change;
- assess client coping strategies to reinforce and improve adaptation to life situations, circumstances, and events;
- select and modify appropriate intervention strategies based on continuous clinical assessment; and
- use differential and multiaxial diagnoses.

Educational Policy 2.1.10(c)—Intervention

Social workers

- initiate actions to achieve organizational goals;
- implement prevention interventions that enhance client capacities;
- help clients resolve problems;
- negotiate, mediate, and advocate for clients; and
- facilitate transitions and endings.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- critically evaluate, select, and apply best practices and evidence-based interventions;
- demonstrate the use of appropriate clinical techniques for a range of presenting concerns identified in the assessment, including crisis intervention strategies as needed; and
- collaborate with other professionals to coordinate treatment interventions.

Educational Policy 2.1.10(d)—Evaluation

Social workers critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work

- contribute to the theoretical knowledge base of the social work profession through practice-based research; and
- use clinical evaluation of the process and/or outcomes to develop best practice interventions for a range of bio-psycho-social-spiritual conditions.

Advanced Social Work Practice in Clinical Social Work		
Core Competency	**Clinical Knowledge**	**Clinical Practice Behaviors**
2.1.1 *Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.*	• Recognize the importance of the therapeutic relationship, the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives, the professional use of self with clients, and adherence to ethical guidelines of professional behavior.	• Readily identify as social work professionals. • Demonstrate professional use of self with client(s). • Understand and identify professional strengths, limitations, and challenges. • Develop, manage, and maintain therapeutic relationships with clients within the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives.
2.1.2 *Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.*	• Know about ethical issues, legal parameters, and shifting societal mores that affect the therapeutic relationship.	• Apply ethical decision-making skills to issues specific to clinical social work. • Employ strategies of ethical reasoning to address the use of technology in clinical practice and its impact on client rights. • Identify and use knowledge of relationship dynamics, including power differentials. • Recognize and manage personal biases as they affect the therapeutic relationship in the service of the clients' well-being.
2.1.3 *Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.*	• Understand and differentiate the strengths and limitations of multiple practice theories and methods, clinical processes, and technical tools, including differential diagnosis. • Deconstruct theories and methods to evaluate how they relate to clients and client systems within their environmental contexts. • Regularly question and reflect on assumptions and consider how these might affect practice.	• Engage in reflective practice. • Identify and articulate clients' strengths and vulnerabilities. • Evaluate, select, and implement appropriate multidimensional assessment, diagnostic, intervention, and practice evaluation tools. • Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of multiple theoretical perspectives and differentially apply them to client situations. • Communicate professional judgments to other social workers and to professionals from other disciplines, in both verbal and written formats.

2.1.4 *Engage diversity and difference in practice.*	• Know about many forms of diversity and difference and how these influence the therapeutic relationship and clients' presenting issues. • Know about the ways in which various dimensions of diversity affect (a) explanations of illness, (b) help-seeking behaviors, and (c) healing practices. • Advanced practitioners are cultural beings and understand how clinical practice choices can be culture-bound	• Research and apply knowledge of diverse populations to enhance client well-being. • Work effectively with diverse populations. • Identify and use practitioner/client differences from a strengths perspective.
2.1.5 *Advance human rights and social and economic justice.*	• Understand the potentially challenging effects of economic, social, and cultural factors in the lives of clients and client systems. • Understand the stigma and shame associated with disorders, diagnoses, and help-seeking behaviors across diverse populations. • Understand strategies for advancing human rights and social and economic justice in domestic and global contexts.	• Use knowledge of the effects of oppression, discrimination, and historical trauma on client and client systems to guide treatment planning and intervention. • Advocate at multiple levels for mental health parity and reduction of health disparities for diverse populations.
2.1.6 *Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.*	• Know about evidence-based interventions, best practices, and the evidence-based research process.	• Use the evidence-based practice process in clinical assessment and intervention with clients. • Participate in the generation of new clinical knowledge, through research and practice. • Use research methodology to evaluate clinical practice effectiveness and/or outcomes.

2.1.7 *Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.*	• Understand how to synthesize and differentially apply the theories of human behavior and the social environment (biological, developmental, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual). • Familiar with diagnostic classification systems used in the formulation of a comprehensive assessment. • Understand how sociocultural contexts influence definitions of psychopathology. • Have a working knowledge of psychotropic medications that are typically used in the treatment of mental health disorders, including expected results and side effects.	• Synthesize and differentially apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide clinical practice. • Use bio-psycho-social-spiritual theories and multiaxial diagnostic classification systems in formulation of comprehensive assessments. • Consult with medical professionals, as needed, to confirm diagnosis and/or to monitor medication in the treatment process.
2.1.8 *Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.*	• Recognize the connection between clients, practice, and both public and organizational policy. • Know about factors that influence the development of legislation, policies, program services, and funding at all system levels. • Know of advocacy methods that contribute to effective policies that promote social and economic well-being.	• Communicate to stakeholders the implications of policies and policy change in the lives of clients. • Use evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in advocacy for policies that advance social and economic well-being. • Advocate with and inform administrators and legislators to influence policies that affect clients and service.
2.1.9 *Respond to contexts that shape practice.*	• Know how relational, organizational, and community systems may impact clients. • Anticipate and react to evolving cultural, technological, geographical, political, legal, economic, and environmental contexts. • Encourage clients to effect changes within these contexts.	• Assess the quality of clients' interactions within their social contexts. • Develop intervention plans to accomplish systemic change. • Work collaboratively with others to effect systemic change that is sustainable.

2.1.10 (a–d) *Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.*	• Involve the dynamic, interactive, and reciprocal processes of therapeutic engagement, multidimensional assessment, clinical intervention, and practice evaluation at multiple levels. • Have a theoretically informed knowledge base so as to effectively practice with individuals, families, and groups. • Understand and implement practice theories (models, metaperspectives, strategies, techniques, and approaches). • Evaluate treatment outcomes and practice effectiveness.	
2.1.10 (a)—Engagement		• Develop a culturally responsive therapeutic relationship. • Attend to the interpersonal dynamics and contextual factors that both strengthen and potentially threaten the therapeutic alliance. • Establish a relationally based process that encourages clients to be equal participants in the establishment of treatment goals and expected outcomes.
2.1.10 (b)—Assessment		• Use multidimensional bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment tools. • Assess clients' readiness for change. • Assess client's coping strategies to reinforce and improve adaptation to life situations, circumstances, and events. • Select and modify appropriate intervention strategies based on continuous clinical assessment. • Use differential and multiaxial diagnoses.

2.1.10 (c)—Intervention		• Critically evaluate, select, and apply best practices and evidence-based interventions. • Demonstrate the use of appropriate clinical techniques for a range of presenting concerns identified in the assessment, including crisis intervention strategies as needed. • Collaborate with other professionals to coordinate treatment interventions.
2.1.10 (d)—Evaluation		• Contribute to the theoretical knowledge base of the social work profession through practice-based research. • Use clinical evaluation of the process and/or outcomes to develop best practice interventions for a range of bio-psycho-social-spiritual conditions.

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