

Preface

The fourth edition of our book highlights the wind of change that moves throughout our country and the world. Ideally, our writing encourages thoughtful reflection on values and beliefs that deepen our relationships with others through economic, ecological, and social justice. As in our previous writings, our book embodies hope and connectedness thanks to the encouragement received from family members, friends, students, and the support of our professional relationships.

As always, we applaud the SAGE publishing team for their commitment to quality publications. We offer special thanks to Avren Keating, associate content development editor, whose patience helped us to meet writing deadlines and to consider new ways to communicate our ideas through creative expository writing, relevant details, and varied chapter examples that draw students into critical content. We appreciate Shannon LeMay-Finn for offering highly thoughtful and relevant editorial suggestions and changes. Perhaps more than ever, we recognize the importance of working with long-time colleagues we can depend upon and laugh with even in challenging times. Ideally, our dedication to the social work profession is apparent in this book because the well-being of people worldwide is integral to our lives.

Our Impetus for Writing This Book

The fourth edition of *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession* is appropriate for adoption in introductory social work courses and bridge courses to MSW programs. Our book provides an historic backdrop of the social work profession by highlighting the role of advocacy in human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice. Our practice, policy, and community involvement with social service agencies suggests that many social workers actively engage in client- and community-based advocacy. Therefore, throughout our book, advocacy is described at a clinical/client level and at organizational, community, national, and international levels. An advocacy perspective was relevant to social work practice and policy in previous years and even more so now, as we face challenging national and international issues. By linking direct practice to policy development, our book encourages readers to critically consider the connections between the needs and wants of individuals and those of society. Critical thinking is essential to this effort. Analytical thinking integrates micro, mezzo, and macro practice into a holistic/integrative perspective of practice and policy underpinned by advocacy to ensure human needs and rights are achieved.

The fourth edition of *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession* continues to use a dynamic advocacy framework to understand the historical development of social work practice and policy, significant figures influencing social work history, multiple practice settings, types of practice performed, and policy development. The advocacy practice and policy model composed of four interlocking components—economic and social justice, supportive environment, human needs and rights, and political access—provides a lens through which to view and analyze social issues of the day. Additionally, the model focuses on human diversity and its intersections along with cultural competence and humility.

Throughout our book, the development of a sense of being a professional and contemporary practices in social work are addressed in the context of a changing digital workplace and world. These applications view social workers as professional practitioners and client and community advocates, thereby offering a unique and clear alternative to the perspectives of competing books. Features such as Time to Think, Spotlight on Advocacy, Current Trends boxes, and end-of-chapter questions/exercises encourage students to critically think of social work's dynamic force and contribution to confronting complicated life situations at the individual, group, local, state, national, and international levels. Perhaps more important, the book's structure and features prompt readers to pause, reflect, and consider their opinions, perspectives, reactions, and strategies related to events/situations often far from their own reality.

Our book motivates readers to stretch and think beyond, to connect the dots, and to critically analyze issues, population groups, their beliefs, concepts, roles, and environments. These aspects of cognitive discourse distinguish our book from other introductory textbooks.

Structure of the Book

Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession is organized into three parts. Part I introduces readers to a definition of social work, reviews the history of the profession, and describes advocacy as a major aspect of social work. In this section of the book, the dynamic advocacy practice and policy model is defined through examples and applications. Throughout the book, elements of the model serve as themes for exploring practice and policy content areas and connecting them to exercises that engage students in critical thinking to highlight essential features of each chapter.

In Part II, the chapters examine how social workers respond to human needs and life situations—poverty and inequality; family and child welfare; health care and health issues; physical, cognitive, and developmental challenges or disabilities; mental health; substance use and addiction; aging; military service; and criminal justice. The chapters in this section assess the strengths of people and communities in light of possible advocacy strategies. At every juncture, social workers are seen as leaders, experts, cofacilitators, and innovators who understand life's complexities, value diversity, appreciate the role of culture, and address ethical dilemmas.

We are pleased that Part III of *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession* goes beyond the standard text coverage by including chapters with thought-provoking exercises on communities at risk and housing; the changing workplace; environmentalism; and international social work. Each of these chapters introduces material especially selected to stimulate intellectual curiosity. Additionally, the role of housing is examined in reference to quality of life and opportunity, and environmental issues are described innovatively to encourage social work professionals to be more involved in all forms of lifelong service.

Pedagogy

- **Chapter opening vignettes** demonstrate key themes in the chapter.
- **Time to Think** sections give students a chance to reflect on chapter materials as they're reading.
- **Boxes**
 - **Social Work in Action:** brief case studies that showcase a topic and reveal how social workers have addressed, or can address, real-life social issues.
 - **Spotlight on Advocacy:** highlights a social worker or researcher working on the chapter's topic. These boxes include discussion questions at the end of each box.
 - **Current Trends:** these boxes introduce topics that are newly arising related to the chapter or section topic and ask students to reflect.
- Each chapter ends with **key concepts**, **discussion questions**, and **exercises** to support class discussions and possible in-class and out-of-class assignments.
- Additionally, we have included in this Preface a correlation chart to map the chapters to the latest **EPAS 2022** for CSWE accreditation.

New to This Edition

In creating the fourth edition of our book, we gave special attention to feedback from readers and reviewers of our previous three editions. These noteworthy changes are included in this fourth edition:

- Areas for advocacy in social work shift over time. Considering the national and international political climate, contemporary topics involving social work advocacy and political action at the federal, state, and local level have been added and updated, especially in the areas of migration, poverty, health/mental health care needs, opioid crisis, housing, and environmentalism. We recognize that social workers remain the largest provider of mental health services and embrace both case and cause advocacy.
- Increased attention has been given to national and international affairs and ethics and the need to critically analyze dilemmas and apply ethical considerations in social work practice and policy.
- Additional content on active-duty service members and retired service members who may consider themselves “veterans” of the military and enhanced content related to substance use and addiction services have been added along with questions and exercises (including recommended podcasts) that engage students in reflection and critical thinking on these topics and fields of practice.
- Content involving the intersections of diversity and multicultural practice has been highlighted through examples and questions that encourage discussion and analytical thought.
- Updated EPAS correlation grid to highlight how each chapter aligns with the latest standards.

Chapter-by-Chapter Changes

Note: for all chapters, photos and references/citations are updated. Additionally, we have tried to diversify characters and names used in vignettes and examples. The following chapters have additional changes:

Chapter 1

Learning objectives, boxes, figures, and end-of-chapter discussion questions and exercises have been updated for this chapter.

Chapter 2

This chapter has expanded coverage on the history and life experiences of Indigenous Americans in the context of social policy and social work practice. Chapter 2 also introduces social work examples for reflection on developing generalist social work practice related to poverty, discrimination, and equality.

Chapter 3

This chapter includes examples of the change process with a focus on empowerment, critical thinking, and the strengths perspective. Discussion about the PERCEIVE Framework for Decoding Nonverbal Behaviors has been deleted.

Chapter 4

The chapter opening vignette is an updated discussion of food apartheid. This chapter also adds new research on poverty in the United States by race and ethnicity; the boycotting of Russian products as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; the 2020, 2022, and 2025 national elections in relation to policies and directives; and contemporary reproductive rights for women.

Chapter 5

This chapter sees an expanded section on children and poverty with updated statistics. New information about the Trump and Biden presidencies has been added. This chapter’s discussions regarding Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, SNAP, Earned-Income Tax Credit and public housing content have been updated.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 has a new learning objective involving career interest. Discussions are included addressing children raised by same-sex parents and experiences of same-sex parents; the importance of culturally

and linguistically appropriate services; President Trump and presidential candidate Kamala Harris's conflicting views on immigration policies; child advocacy centers and the limited knowledge about short- and long-term outcomes for children and families.

Chapter 7

Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 have been updated. Content about Affordable Care Act policy is changed and less emphasis is placed on coverage of COVID-19 in Chapter 7. Additional information regarding diversity interactions has been added. Pedagogical elements such as the Social Work in Action box and end-of-chapter Discussion Questions and Exercises are revised and enhanced.

Chapter 8

The title of this chapter adds the term *disabilities* and *disabilities* is added next to *challenges* throughout the entire chapter to reflect the significance of the term in federal/state/local/agency policies and the trend to not use euphemisms such as “challenged,” “handicapable,” and “special needs.” Additional updates include new information regarding the DSM-5-TR terminology, Dr. Temple Grandin, and historical content. Time to Think queries and Figure 8.1 have been updated as well.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9's pedagogical elements, including learning objectives, references, tables and figures, and the end-of-chapter discussion questions and exercises, have all been revised. The Current Trends box, the Spotlight on Advocacy box, and the Diversity subsection of the chapter have all been updated as well. ACA coverage has been reorganized to be more cohesive.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10's learning objectives, figures, tables, exercises, discussion questions and Time to Think sections have all been updated.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11's learning objectives, figures and tables, Spotlight on Advocacy box, discussion questions and exercises have all been updated. Some boxes from the third edition are converted to become part of the main text narrative.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 has a new learning objective regarding the Dynamic Advocacy Practice and Policy Model. The Current Trends box has also been updated, and the lengthy appendix regarding crime statistics was removed.

There is a concerted effort made throughout this chapter to eliminate negative, labeling, and stigmatizing terms.

Chapter 12 has added discussions concerning class, gender, race, and other disparities that are present at various stages in the criminal justice system; how social workers can be valuable as early responders for those in crisis or with trauma; the complex nature of exposure and desensitization to violence and the need for additional research; the Bail Project and Advocates for Trans Equality (A4TE); implicit bias in relation to intersections of diversity; and the importance of environmental factors and an ecological perspective for viewing human development.

Chapter 13

This chapter concerning veterans, service members, their families, and military social work has been moved to Part II of the book.

Information on “unified commands” and combatants, moral injury, MST, the revival of the “warrior ethos,” effects of the Trump presidency's new policies on recruitment, and minimum ages has been updated.

Terminology has been updated in Chapter 13 as well: *active-duty service members* and *retired service members* are terms used alongside *veterans*.

Chapter 14

There is a new learning objective added to focus students toward understanding how social work involves housing and community practice.

New content includes housing factors and overall health and well-being, residential vacancies and homeownership, the impact of the 2024 presidential election on housing and community, the HUD Annual Assessment Report, the impact of Hurricane Helene, program effectiveness for people experiencing homelessness, housing challenges for urban and suburban dwellers, housing connectivity and walkability, and more.

Chapter 15

This chapter's Social Work in Action box now includes EAP content. Updated information in Chapter 15 includes new workforce numbers to reflect women in the workplace; content on aspects of COVID-19 and implications associated with working from home; the wage gap and union workers; and the Fair Pay Act. The table in the third edition on stress in the workplace has been removed.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 added a focus on international concerns, new examples of environmental issues and the social worker's role in addressing disasters, sustainability, and environmental justice. Chapter content has also updated the executive branch's role in environmental issues.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 provides additional, current language and context regarding international migration, documentation, and deportation.

The following have also been updated: employment of social workers data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, UNAIDS data regarding HIV/AIDS, food insecurity in U.S. households, poverty findings from the United Nations Human Development Reports, findings from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, updated language and data concerning current wars and conflicts, Trump's approach to migration practices and policies, the Women's March, the 2024 Bangkok UN Summit, and a new example of company promoting social justice and advocacy (Ben & Jerry's Foundation).

Epilogue

The epilogue has a refreshed focus on self-care and resilience for social workers in a new post-peak-COVID environment.

Making Course Content Come Alive

As educators, we have been influenced by our social work practice and policy experiences and that of others, current service endeavors, and the evolving world around us. Whatever our work responsibilities involve, the classroom remains our primary playing field or focus where we are dedicated to conveying the important role social workers play in society and people's lives. We contend that advocacy is critical to teaching, research, and service. Consequently, *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession* is designed to generate critical thinking and discussion, encourage interactive learning and reflective thinking, and expand horizons. The text will also be in e-book format, and ancillaries are available. In other words, we take a multisensory approach to teaching and learning that extends the walls of the classroom to the community and well beyond. Indeed, a compelling motivation and reason for revisions to accommodate an e-book format and Vantage involved making this text more readily available to faculty members and students who teach and learn best using an online, remote course design.

To facilitate teaching, *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession* is closely aligned with the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) new Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and incorporates reflective practice, encouraging students to engage in critical thought and reflection and to contemplate a professional social work career. As suggested by the four butterflies on the cover, life is precious, transformative, colorful, fragile, and ever changing. We hope this book will contribute to each reader's transformation as a person and aspiring social work professional.

Sage Vantage

As noted above, this text is available in Sage Vantage—an intuitive learning platform you and your students will love.

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Sage Vantage for *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession*, 4th edition integrates all the textbook content with assignable multimedia activities and auto-graded assessments to drive student engagement and ensure accountability. Unparalleled in its ease of use and built for dynamic teaching and learning, Vantage offers customizable LMS integration and best-in-class support.

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Video Activities for *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession*, 4th edition

- Chapter 1: The Pillars of Social Justice
- Chapter 2: COVID-19 and Food Insecurity
- Chapter 3: Domestic Violence on the Rise During COVID-19
- Chapter 4: Addressing Food Deserts
- Chapter 5: Housing Issues in New Orleans
- Chapter 6: Training Simulations for Child Protection Workers
- Chapter 7: Free Health Clinic
- Chapter 8: Benefits of Texting for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

- Chapter 9: Social Media and Mental Health
- Chapter 10: Animal Sedative (Xylazine) Adds New Pain to Opioid Crisis
- Chapter 11: AI Character Fosters Companionship for People Living with Dementia
- Chapter 12: Activists Demand Justice Over Racist Texts from Police
- Chapter 13: Beekeeping Program for Veterans
- Chapter 14: With Homelessness on the Rise, the Supreme Court Weighs Bans on Sleeping Outdoors
- Chapter 15: Amazon Workers Protest Return-to-Office Mandate
- Chapter 16: AP Explains Impact of Potential EPA Rule Cuts
- Chapter 17: UN Peacekeepers Under Fire for Abuse

Data Activities for *Introduction to Social Work: An Advocacy-Based Profession*, 4th edition

- Chapter 1: Ethical Decision-Making Framework
- Chapter 2: Cost of Living and Pay Satisfaction
- Chapter 3: Client System with Inputs and Outputs
- Chapter 4: The Intervention Process and the Advocacy Practice and Policy Model (APPM)
- Chapter 5: Household Income Quantiles
- Chapter 6: Rates of Unpartnered, Cohabiting, and Married Adults
- Chapter 7: Top Ten Leading Causes in the U.S. for Ages 1-44 from 1981-2023
- Chapter 8: Experiences of Negative Interactions with a Health Care Provider, by Gender
- Chapter 9: Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness Among U.S. Adults, 2022
- Chapter 10: States Where Marijuana Is Legal, 2024
- Chapter 11: Varying Abuse Subtypes and Victim-Abuser Occurrence Frequency
- Chapter 12: Americans Divided on Whether People Convicted of Crimes Spend Right Amount of Time in Prison
- Chapter 13: Defense Spending Accounts for About Half of Total Discretionary Spending
- Chapter 14: Fewer Homes Built in 2023 than in 2004
- Chapter 15: Job Satisfaction, by Race and Age
- Chapter 16: Associated Press Explains Impact of Potential EPA Rule Cuts
- Chapter 17: How People Around the World View Gender Inequality in their Country

Additional Teaching Resources

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- Learning management system cartridges that easily integrate with your course management system so student test results and graded assignments seamlessly flow into your gradebook;

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- PowerPoint® slides that offer a flexible, accessible, and customizable solution for creating multimedia lectures;
- Tables and Figures from the book are available to support lecture preparation and class discussions.

A Note on Language

Appropriate use of language is critical to recognize diversity, inclusiveness, and respect for the dignity of individuals and groups of people. Language is powerful for defining realities, one's sense of self, experiences, perspectives, practices, and identities, and often serves as a basis for prejudice and discrimination. Inclusive language promotes respect for and understanding of the lives of all people, which includes many forms of diversity.

Identifying and using inclusive and empowering language and terminology is a difficult, dynamic, and ongoing venture for social workers, educators, and various professionals as well as for your authors. As one example, we struggled and wrangled with the use of the word *disability*, a word embedded in law via the Americans with Disabilities Act. In the first three editions of this book, we took great care to avoid the term *disability*, instead referencing "people with physical, cognitive, and/or developmental challenges." The intent was to avoid endorsing the term *disability* as a negative, stigmatizing label. However, following consultation with multiple sources (e.g., review of current literature, the NASW Code of Ethics, statements from the American Psychological Association, Center for Disability Rights, and thoughts from consumers of services and professional colleagues), we have moved to embrace our deep-seated professional practice of leaning into the NASW Code of Ethics for guidance. The following Ethical Principle (1.05 under Cultural Competence) appears particularly appropriate.

Social workers should demonstrate awareness and cultural humility by engaging in critical self-reflection (understanding their own bias and engaging in self-correction); recognizing clients as experts of their own culture; committing to life-long learning; and holding institutions accountable for advancing cultural humility.

Hence, when considering Ethical Principle 1.05, this fourth edition of our book emphasizes an awareness and respect that use of the word *disability* varies among clients depending on culture and context. Some people with disabilities prefer the term *disability* and person-first language (e.g., using "person with a disability" terminology) to promote a positive, disability-affirming recognition and understanding of disability as a non-shameful element of one's identity. In contrast, for other people, the term *disability* is a stigmatizing label evoking prejudice and discrimination, while ignoring the abilities of people. Recognizing, understanding, and discussing these divergent perspectives and meanings can promote cultural understanding and humility for all. Consequently, great care has been taken in each chapter to carefully use and embrace terms such as *disability*, *persons with disabilities*, *mental ability* or *challenges*, *physical abilities* or *challenges*, and *cognitive ability* or *challenge* in context and ways intended to be respectful and contribute to advancement of cultural understanding and humility.

Disability is but one example of the complexity of terminology and language. Colleagues, clients, and students commonly remind us that terminology regarding various identities and forms of diversity is ever changing and can be confusing, contentious, and insufficient. For example, it can be argued that the acronym LBGTQ+ includes all human sexuality identities, but in North America some people prefer to use LBGTQIA2S+ to represent "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit plus other sexualities." *Latinx* gained popularity as a gender neutral term for people of Latin American origin, but it now carries a variety of connotations and meanings for people, arguably falling short of acknowledging important differences among Latin American identities and population groups. And, regarding race, "BIPOC" (an acronym for Black, Indigenous, and other

People of Color) is often preferred as it more clearly directs attention to the historical oppression of Black and Indigenous people. Please recognize that at the time of the publishing of our fourth edition of this book, the authors and editors have made a concerted and informed attempt to embrace diversity and inclusive language in several realms, in the spirit of promoting human dignity and worth for all.

EPAS Competencies

2022 EPAS Competencies—Considerations From the Authors

Chapter 1 ■ The Social Work Profession			
Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 1	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication.	Definition of a social worker and Time to Think Box 1.1. How you are perceived by others. Definition of social work goals and values.	Use a role-play based on a case study that prompts students to identify personal values and how others view them. Conduct a mock interview with students portraying social workers during an interview with the media. Complete an evaluation by peer review.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to address and manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Review of intersections of diversity.	Ask students to write an essay describing their critical thoughts about someone they know who experiences or represents intersectionality and diversity. Develop a rubric for scoring the students' understanding of others as experts on their own lives as it relates to the intersections of diversity.

Chapter 2 ■ The History of Social Work			
Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 2	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics within the profession as appropriate to the context.	Description of the relationship of social welfare and social work practice and policy in response to social issues and embedded values and ethics, particularly in result of the 2024 U.S. presidential election.	Develop a student-generated list of social issues of concern from the 2024 presidential elections, based on the NASW Code of Ethics. Discuss the issues in small groups.

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Chapter 2 ■ The History of Social Work (*Continued*)

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 2	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Description of the social welfare programs and policies that emerged during periods of U.S. history. Explanation of the prevailing values in and impact of the programs.	Ask students to write a book critique describing a social welfare program or policy that depicts difference in a character. Students should identify whether the character was affected by elements of power and privilege in the program or policy and how. The instructor will grade the critique with a rubric. Ask students to interview and write a summary about a person who lived through one of the time periods defined in Chapter 2, gathering details on what they thought was significant about the period in relationship to power, privilege, and bias and why. Have students present their summary orally, and grade both the oral and written summaries with a rubric.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Timeline of policy development. Discussion of the effects of a political election on the repeal, introduction, and passage of social policy in relationship to advancement of human rights and social, racial, economic, and/or environmental justice.	Require students to complete a short paper to share in class that describes a policy and its impact on social services. Score the students' ability to assess how social welfare and economic policies impact social services in relation to advancement of human rights and social, racial, economic, and/or environmental justice. Encourage students to attend and summarize a community-based political forum focusing on advancement of human rights and social, racial, economic, and/or environmental justice.

Chapter 3 ■ Generalist Social Work Practice

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 3	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication. Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes.	The knowledge base of social work and the NASW Code of Ethics. The change process.	Develop role-plays of dilemmas related to professional behavior and ethics. Discuss the role-plays in class, with feedback from the instructor regarding professional demeanor and behavior. Design case studies to demonstrate use of the change process. Score students' work on a rubric assessing their knowledge and application of the Code of Ethics as demonstrated by their behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication.

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 3	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, community, research, and policy levels.	Description of systems theory and client systems. Overview of the client systems with inputs and outputs. Empowerment theory and the strengths perspective and the role and importance of advocacy in relationship to advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion at various system levels.	Form student groups to share elements of their systems and life experiences, generating lists of differences and similarities, particularly in relation to sexual orientation and other forms of diversity, followed by discussion with feedback from the instructor. Ask each student to interview someone who is not a friend or family member and identifies little with the student's personal values. Ask students to describe how they would apply these values and perspectives with engagement of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in social work practice. Request students assess their strengths or those of another, considering how the strengths can be used in practice and policy development regarding engagement of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in social work practice.

Chapter 4 ■ Advocacy in Social Work

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 4	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics within the profession as appropriate to the context.	Examination of the ethics of advocacy and the importance of the NASW Code of Ethics.	Have students develop a presentation describing how they differentiate personal values from professional values when honoring client self-determination and advocating with clients for change. Develop a grading rubric for classmates to score the use of ethical principles in practice.
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.	Definitions of various forms of social and economic justice in the context of advocacy and promoting social justice and human rights.	Require students to identify how a boycott can be useful when advocating for human rights and/or socioeconomic justice. Use a rubric to rate the students' use of a boycott to advocate for human rights and socioeconomic justice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Present oneself as a learner and engage clients and constituencies as experts on their own experiences.	Examination of advocating for the elimination of food apartheid in a community, emphasizing the client's perspective in advocacy.	Ask students to identify and critically analyze how the featured social worker consulted with others and learned from clients as experts in informing advocacy efforts.

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Chapter 4 ■ Advocacy in Social Work (*Continued*)

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 4	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Specific behaviors and actions used in advocacy, as demonstrated in advocacy activities and the Dynamic Advocacy Model.	Encourage students to attend a local, state, or federal legislative hearing and critically consider advocacy activities in relation to the presented policy. Ask students to describe advocacy actions that had a positive or negative effect on advancing human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	Apply theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as other culturally responsive and interprofessional conceptual frameworks, when assessing clients and constituencies.	The dynamic, interlocking tenets of Dynamic Advocacy Model.	Ask students to identify how to apply the Dynamic Advocacy Model, as well as other theories and frameworks, to a local, state, or national issue in which change is being advocated.

Chapter 5 ■ Poverty and Inequality

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 5	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	All materials included in the Dynamic Advocacy Model section, including economic and social justice and current trends.	Ask students to present orally on an article from a national newspaper that presents an economic, human rights, social justice, or environmental justice issue, outlining ways to advocate for human rights associated with the selected issue. Scoring is completed by students and instructor with a 5-point peer review. Suggest that students examine wage scales for various workers in the context of estimated weekly expenses. Ask students to list issues of concern and thoughts for promoting economic justice.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services.	Definitions and details of various social welfare programs and content on advocating for and with people with low incomes.	Using the cycle of advocacy, have students write a paper on one social welfare program at the local, state, or federal level and assess the program's alignment or lack of alignment with social justice, anti-racism, and anti-oppressiveness. Score the students' use of social justice concepts and affective delivery of social services with a grading rubric.

Chapter 6 ■ Family and Child Welfare			
Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 6	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Section on diversity and family and child welfare, examining various forms of diversity and intersections of diversity.	Ask students to identify and list concrete challenges for children and families based on multiple forms of diversity. Use a grading rubric to score students' critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Social policy and practice issues involving advocating for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice for children and families (including use of the Dynamic Advocacy Model).	Assign students to give brief, 5-minute class presentations or share video clips identifying two features of social policy or practices and how each feature affects well-being, service delivery, rights, and access to needed goods and services for children and families. Use a grading rubric to score students' critical thinking.

Chapter 7 ■ Health Care and Health Challenges			
Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 7	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Application of ethical thinking in scenarios related to health disparities and advocacy regarding human rights, revealing how power, privileges, and health care resources may be allocated differently in rural and suburban areas versus large cities. Definition of health disparities. Examination of the complexity of U.S. health care and economic and social justice.	Divide students into small groups to identify how health disparities are evident in relation to social, economic, and environmental injustice. Prepare case studies of ethical dilemmas that relate to power, privilege, and health care resources. Have students reflect in a short, rubric-scored, written paper how they view and make ethical decisions to address inequities of managed care present in service delivery scenarios for people with illness or challenges. Discuss the cases in class.
			Encourage students to visit a health care setting to consider how advocacy for economic and social justice occurs in a managed-care environment. Ask students to write why they selected the setting and what they noticed during their visit. Provide guidelines for the agency visit and paper. The paper is discussed in class and self-graded based on reflection and constructive feedback.

(Continued)

Chapter 7 ■ Health Care and Health Challenges (*Continued*)

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 7	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
5. Engage in policy practice.	Use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services.	Diversity intersections in health care section. The application of health care to populations who tend to experience disproportionate rates of health disparities and stigma.	Ask students to design a poster that describes how a social justice, anti-racist, and/or anti-oppressive perspective can be used to advance health-related policy that improves access to health care services and resources. Posters are displayed, peer reviewed, and constructively critiqued by the instructor using a rubric.
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	Incorporate culturally responsive methods to negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of clients and constituencies.	Content from the diversity intersections in health care section and use of the Dynamic Advocacy Model for considering health care as a right. Content on consumer-driven health care plans for addressing human needs and promoting human rights.	Ask students to explore a policy issue making headlines on radio, on a podcast, in a local newspaper, or in <i>Social Work Smart Briefs</i> . Using interprofessional, collaborative group-work learning, ask students to write a position paper advocating for a physical or disability rights issue with an emphasis on culturally sensitive and responsive advocacy. Ask students to consider submitting a paper to an appropriate magazine for publication.

Chapter 8 ■ Physical, Cognitive, and Developmental Challenges or Disabilities

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 8	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context.	Types and definition of physical and mental challenges. Advocacy with and on behalf of people with physical and mental challenges and disabilities. Using the NASW Code of Ethics as a guide, the content employs appropriate language and terminology when referring to individuals with disabilities and those facing physical, developmental, and/or mental challenges. This content can also be found in a special note in the book constructed by the authors regarding diversity and language usage.	Ask students to visit organization websites serving people with varying rehab setting and mental health challenges and share their findings in class. Ask them to complete a reflection paper, scored by a rubric, about ethical considerations when advocating for clients with physical or mental disabilities. Solicit ideas from students about how the strengths perspective can be applied to help engage people with varying abilities.

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 8	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Advocate for human rights at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community system levels.	Definition of health disparities. Advocacy on behalf of people with physical, developmental, learning, and cognitive challenges using the Dynamic Advocacy Model content across system levels.	Encourage students to select and visit a physically challenging setting to identify how beginning-level advocacy for economic, environmental, and social justice might occur in such a setting. Develop a rubric to score the students' ability to identify how to advance economic, environmental, and social justice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Different types of challenges (developmental, learning, cognitive, physical) and how managed-care policies and mandates influence the provision of equitable and good health care for all. Diversity section examining and providing reflection on diversity in relationship to physical, cognitive, and developmental challenges.	Ask students to read and critique a fiction or nonfiction book or view a feature film that features someone living with a disability or physical, developmental, or cognitive challenge and how the character has managed the stigma. The critique should include how as a result of the reading/viewing, students have identified personal values and biases toward this population group. Use a rubric to provide feedback. Encourage students to visit a mental health or assisted living agency or an agency that addresses the needs of people with varying physical or mental challenges and disabilities. List and discuss in class the strengths and resilience demonstrated by people or shared by people via their own lived experiences.

Chapter 9 ■ Mental Health

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 9	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.	How people differentially experience the mental health system based on their intersections of diversity (e.g., ability, age, class, ethnicity, faith perspective, gender, race, marital status, and race). Content from the Dynamic Advocacy Model section.	Assign students a paper describing how people are treated differently in the mental health care system and how culture and values privilege people with power, resources, and social-economic status. Use a grading rubric to score students' abilities to recognize and identify oppression, marginalization, stigma, and alienation in the mental health system as related to intersections of varying diversity.

(Continued)

Chapter 9 ■ Mental Health (*Continued*)

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 9	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Content about mental health settings and services that encourage reflection and critical thought about students' past experiences and value orientation as well as the importance of lived experiences.	Ask students to write a paper exploring attitudes toward mental health services and mental health legislation and populations served and underserved. Students should consider and discuss their suitability for working with people who have mental disorders or co-occurring disorders, such as addictions, specifying how they would manage personal values to allow professional values and client lived experiences to guide practice. Use a rubric to score student's ability to recognize and manage personal values. Suggest students visit or explore online the mental health services available on campus. Discuss the positive aspects of such services and areas that would benefit from improvement. Also discuss to what degree social work services are available to students and the lived experience of students with campus service delivery.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Description of specific policies and the application of the Dynamic Advocacy Model.	Select a policy described in the chapter and read the policy in its entirety. Ask students to define the services that emerged from the policy and then consider the costs and benefits of program implementation. Identify what element(s) of the Dynamic Advocacy Model are relevant and helpful for advancing rights and justice.

Chapter 10 ■ Substance Use and Addiction

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 10	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Time to Think boxes that encourage students to identify their past lived experiences, beliefs, and value orientations in relation to substance use and addiction.	Ask students to write a paper exploring their thoughts and attitudes toward various substances, based on their lived experiences with family members and friends. Students should disclose the validity of what they have learned from others about substances and their use. Develop a grading rubric to score the students' ability to learn from others and appropriately see others as experts.

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 10	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
5. Engage in policy practice.	Use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services.	Treatment and intervention concepts and policies related to substance use and their relationship to current moral, personal, and social dilemmas.	Request that students select two evidence-based journal articles on substance use and addiction. Review in class how the articles define services and how the services relate to treatment policies.

Chapter 11 ■ Helping Older Adults

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 11	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes.	Terms and definitions involving successful aging, longevity, lifespan, and life expectancy.	Encourage students to visit long-term residential care websites for older adults and identify quality-of-care outcomes and share findings in class. Students should complete a reflection paper on the use of technology to gather information about programs and care outcomes for older adults in long-term care facilities. Develop a rubric to assess student ability and comprehension.

Chapter 12 ■ Criminal Justice

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 12	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice.	Apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs.	Content examining incarceration rates and trends with crime rates.	Have students complete an exercise structured to identify important findings from the crime statistics and provide an explanation as to whether this information constitutes quantitative or qualitative findings and the value of such findings for informed practice. Develop a rubric to score students' ability to critically analyze research findings for use by social workers.
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	Critically analyze outcomes and apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	Content examining incarceration and recidivism rates, particularly for persons of color.	Organize a classroom debate in which students take a deep dive into racial differences regarding incarceration and/or recidivism rates. Do findings support a retributive or a rehabilitative approach in criminal justice? How can organizations and communities act to improve outcomes? Score participants based on their critical analysis of the outcomes of various approaches.

Chapter 13 ■ Veterans, Service Members, Their Families, and Military Social Work

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 13	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.	Demonstrate professional behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication.	Issues affecting service members, veterans, and their family members.	Encourage students to visit a Veterans Administration (VA) hospital, clinic setting serving service members, college/university veterans' organization, or Department of Defense (DoD) websites and share their findings in class. Ask students to complete a reflection paper on how they would uniquely maintain professional values and professionalism as an advocate for service member/veteran services. Develop a rubric to assess student abilities and comprehension.
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context.	Application of ethical thinking in relation to scenarios related to ethical dilemmas in counseling recruits, veterans, service members, or military family members that reveal how rank and culture influence how services and resources are allocated differently across ranks and military subcultures, including branches of military service and between enlisted and officer members in the military.	Prepare case studies of ethical dilemmas related to power, privilege, and military social work resources. Ask students to reflect, in a short paper, on how principles in the NASW Code of Ethics apply to the case examples. Develop a rubric to assess students' abilities and comprehension.

Chapter 14 ■ Communities at Risk and Housing

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 14	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.	Description of the use of secret shoppers for advancing equal opportunities for housing.	Ask students to create a short video demonstrating how a secret shopper would advance fair housing. Develop a rubric to score student understanding and use of such practice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Opening vignette where the social worker forms a resident council to advocate with residents for needed services and policy change at an apartment community.	Have students complete a short essay explaining and reflecting on how the vignette's social worker might have engaged clients, particularly single-parent women of color, as experts concerning their lived experiences. Design a grading rubric to score students' ability to recognize clients as experts.

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 14	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.	Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to engage in culturally responsive practice with clients and constituencies.	Vignette of the featured social worker, who promotes safe and affordable housing in a community at risk. Recognition of various housing types and how the social worker uses her knowledge and skills to engage single-parent women of color in group, organizational, and/or community development.	In class, challenge students to place themselves in the vignette social worker's role, working to identify and reflect on her knowledge and skill strengths with clients. Have students complete a one-page paper describing how the vignette social worker might best use empathy and cultural responsiveness in her practice with clients and constituencies.

Chapter 15 ■ The Changing Workplace

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 15	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Definition of the workplace and issues related to discrimination and injustices in the workplace, includes content in the Dynamic Advocacy Model section. Policies and practices to enhance social and economic justice in the workplace.	In class, ask students to break into teams and debate this question: Should the minimum wage be increased to a level supportive of living wages—and why or why not? Students and the instructor should use a grading rubric to score the use of key concepts and advocacy principles in the debate. Ask students to compile a list of economic, social, and environmental factors that might support or undermine their choice of professional career. How important are various diversity factors (e.g., race and gender) to employment choice and attainment? Develop a grading rubric to score students' understanding of injustices in the workplace.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Current work-related issues and changes that have occurred in the workplace. Content from the Dynamic Advocacy Model and the diversity in the changing workforce sections.	Request students find and discuss a current-events article that pertains to a work-related issue. Explore in class the concerns and possible policy-related solutions aimed at advancing human rights and social, racial, economic, and/or environmental justice.

Chapter 16 ■ Environmentalism			
Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 16	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Ecological social welfare and practice section. Use of the Dynamic advocacy model.	Ask students to design a poster that outlines advocacy strategies for a particular social, economic, or environmental justice issue. Using a rubric, peers and the instructor score the posters in terms of knowledge and understanding of advocacy actions. Ask students to map where environmental issues have occurred in the United States and list the reasons why. Discuss the role of social work practice and policy in advancing human rights to promote environmental justice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Environmental issues section and diversity and environmentalism section.	Divide students into small groups and ask them to find a news article or social media post about an environmental disaster and its influence on people in their communities. The groups then discuss whether and how the official response to the disaster reveals the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values. The groups can then present their findings to the class. Using a rubric, peers review the presentations in terms of critical reflection and self-awareness regarding the role of values, power, privilege, and diversity/ differences in working with clients and constituencies.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Ecological social welfare and policy section. Environmental issues section. Use of the Dynamic Advocacy Model.	Ask students to select an issue related to climate change or a particular natural disaster. Ask them to list measures that would help prevent the problem and how they would advocate for preventative action and environmental justice. Ask students to list and debate the advantages and disadvantages of international environmental policies such as the Paris Climate Agreement.

Chapter 17 ■ International Social Work

Competency	Social Workers	Content Examples in Chapter 17	Examples of Ways for Students to Demonstrate Practice and Policy
2. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.	Current issues facing international social workers section. Use of the Dynamic Advocacy Model.	Ask students to identify ways social workers could advocate to advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice during times of conflict and war. Ask students how engagement in politics could be effective. Score student responses based on critical thinking to advance human rights and various forms of justice. Ask students to research organizations that advocate on behalf of immigrant rights in the U.S. Who would possibly oppose or support these organizations and their attempts to promote rights of and justice for immigrants, and why?
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.	Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledging them as experts on their own lived experiences.	Diversity and international practice section. Dynamic Advocacy Model section.	Assign a paper in which students provide examples to show why acknowledging clients as experts on their own lived experiences is important when practicing international social work. Use a rubric to assess students' abilities to recognize the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies.
5. Engage in policy practice.	Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	The Dynamic Advocacy Model and content examining social work principles for international practice.	Include an essay item on an examination that asks students to describe and explain two ways in which social workers can advocate for global human rights and social and economic justice. Use a grading rubric to score the students' ability to understand global human rights and social and economic justice.

Chapter 1

The Social Work Profession



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Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Summarize the goals of the social work profession.
- 1.2 Explain the importance of diversity and advocacy in social work.
- 1.3 Describe the theories and values that inform social work practice.
- 1.4 Evaluate the education options for social workers.
- 1.5 Compare practice options for social workers.

Asha Chooses Social Work

As a first-year student, Asha has completed hours for her service-learning course at a Family Success Center. Family Success Centers are “one-stop” shops that provide family-friendly activities and wraparound resources and supports for families to prevent them from experiencing a crisis (New Jersey Department of Children and Families, n.d.). She has enjoyed working with the

diverse array of people who came to the center, and clients there have told her that she is a good listener, counselor, and advocate for them. Asha's advisor has suggested that she might make use of her newly discovered skills by becoming a social worker, a versatile "helping" career that traverses multiple fields of practice.

Asha has conducted some research and has learned that with a bachelor of social work (BSW), she could work as a generalist practitioner or apply to an advanced-standing master of social work (MSW) program and quickly become either an advanced generalist or a specialist. Asha also has explored websites for the National Association of Social Workers and the Board of Social Work regulations in her state. Once Asha receives her BSW degree, she knows she can send the board her transcripts and become credentialed.

With great excitement, Asha has also learned that if she declares social work as her undergraduate major at her university, she would qualify to be an advanced-standing applicant for many graduate-level MSW programs. MSW-prepared social workers can work in a wide range of specialty fields of practice, such as hospice, veterans' services, and behavioral health. They can work in policy, advocacy, or research in community-based settings; various types of institutions; state, federal, or local agencies; international disaster relief organizations; or political action campaigns. Asha feels confident she would enjoy social work, a profession in which she could advocate for people and causes, help develop policies, and provide direct practice (e.g., services and resources) to people who need them.

As a student, you may be wondering which career might best suit your personal values and the life you envision for yourself. Social work is a versatile and worthy profession to consider. Integrity, decency, honesty, and justice are values held in high regard by social work professionals. If you decide to become a social worker, you will also join a field that provides considerable career mobility and opportunity.

Social work is a helping profession, like counseling, psychology, and other human services. Social work is different, though, and will likely interest you if you care especially about economic, social, and environmental justice and wish to advocate for individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities that face socioeconomic disadvantages. To help groups and communities, social workers require an understanding of politics and power and the ability to assess human needs and the environment.

This chapter introduces the goals, competencies, and responsibilities of the 21st-century social worker. It describes social work's core values, roles, fields of practice, career paths, and employment opportunities to help you decide whether the profession of social work is right for you.

The Social Work Profession: Purpose and Goals

Social work is a **profession** because it requires specialized, formal training and education that leads to credentialing (e.g., state licensure). Other professions include law, medicine, accounting, teaching, and counseling. However, social work's unique purpose is to assist with and advocate for change in the lives of individuals and in communities to reduce or eradicate the effects of personal distress and social and economic inequality (Soydan, 2008). Social work is meaningful work as its goal is to help improve outcomes for people (Tan et al., 2023).

Professional **social workers** generally graduate from a department, program, or school of social work with either a bachelor's or a master's degree (or perhaps a doctorate) in social work. Although some social work positions do not require a credential, a professional social worker is generally considered to be someone who has received a social work degree and has become certified or licensed by the state in which they practice.

Many social workers have achieved historical prominence, such as social work pioneer Jane Addams (who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1931), civil rights activist Dr. Dorothy I. Height, and Frances Perkins

(the first woman to serve as a cabinet member, as secretary of labor in 1933). Social work pioneer Del Anderson transformed veterans' services, Bernice Harper led hospice social work, Joan O. Weiss helped establish the field of genetic counseling, and Dale Masi developed the employee assistance field (Clark, 2012).

Social work professor and researcher Dr. Brené Brown has become quite successful as a “public” social worker, offering the profession’s perspective through books, television interviews, and online talks about shame, vulnerability, and courage. Others with social work degrees who have brought the profession’s perspective to diverse careers include writer Alice Walker and personal finance guru Suze Orman (Social Work Degree Center, 2022).

Throughout history, what people have seemed to need most are resources for living, as well as a sense that their life matters to others. Beyond feeling secure and accepted for who they are, people also hope to live a meaningful, healthy, and successful life. These are the central concerns of social workers. Their professional role is to work with people to secure the basic **human needs, rights, and values**: food, water, shelter, and such intangible resources as emotional, economic, and social support.

The purpose of professional social work was articulated formally by the **National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**, the voice for the profession:

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends:

- Helping people obtain tangible services (e.g., income, housing, food)
- Providing counseling and interventions with individuals, families, and groups
- Helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services
- Participating in relevant legislative processes (NASW, 1973, pp. 4–5)

The NASW considers social work an applied science and art that assists and advocates for people who are struggling to function better in their world and that effects societal changes to enhance everyone’s well-being (Connolly et al., 2018).

The NASW describes four major goals for social work practitioners. The **Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)**, the body that accredits schools of social work, adds another goal that relates to social work education. These goals are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 ■ Professional Social Workers’ Goals

Professional Goal	Social Workers’ Roles
1. To enhance the problem-solving, coping, and developmental capacities of people	<i>Facilitators</i>, who “meet people where they are” and assess clients’ environments <i>Coaches, counselors, educators, trainers, and culturally competent solution-focused guides</i> <i>Coaches</i> help people who need better social skills. <i>Counselors</i> provide guidance, structure, and training. <i>Psycho-educators</i> teach clients and their family members about mental illness and its etiology, progression, consequences, and treatment alternatives. Social work <i>trainers</i> train or instruct people about social issues and concerns. Social workers also serve as <i>competent and solution-focused guides</i> to help people effectively problem solve and live well-balanced lives.
2. To link people with systems that provide them with opportunities, resources, and services	<i>Brokers</i> , who help build relationships between clients and service systems

(Continued)

Table 1.1 ■ Professional Social Workers' Goals (Continued)	
Professional Goal	Social Workers' Roles
3. To promote the effectiveness and humane operation of systems that provide people with resources and services	<i>Advocates</i> for cases and causes, who consider socioeconomic, political, and other contexts and who focus on the available resources for serving people <i>Administrative supervisors</i> , who oversee staff and ensure that services are delivered efficiently and effectively <i>Consultants</i> , who guide community organizations and agencies by identifying strategies to expand and enhance services <i>Coordinators and liaisons</i> , who enhance communication and coordination among social and human service resources to improve service delivery and who link an agency or program to other agencies and organizations <i>Program developers and evaluators</i> , who design and evaluate programs or technologies to meet social needs
4. To develop and improve social policy	<i>Activists or advocates</i> , who concentrate on the statutes, laws, and broader social policies that underlie the funding and provision of resources <i>Policy and practice analysts, developers, and planners</i> <i>Policy analysts</i> consider whether processes and results are rational, explicit, clear, legal, politically feasible, and compatible with social values. Three approaches to policy analysis involve the study of process formulation, product choices, and performance (e.g. cost-benefit of policy implementation outcomes). <i>Policy developers and planners</i> make deliberate choices about appropriate courses of action, and these choices involve rational decision-making and incremental decision-making.
5. To promote human and community well-being	<i>Activists</i> , who use education, research, and service delivery to alleviate oppression, poverty, and other social and economic injustices

Source: Adapted from Zastrow & Hessenauer (2023) pp. 28–30 from primary sites. Goals 1–5 from NASW (1982, p. 17).

The general public often confuses social workers with other human service providers, among them school counselors, mental health counselors, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, public health workers and administrators, nurses, chaplains, and police or others involved in criminal justice and corrections. Although the roles and settings for some of these occupations overlap, each has distinctive features, perspectives, methods, and areas of expertise. (See Table 1.2 for more detail on the similarities and differences between social work and some of these other occupations.) But social workers incorporate the knowledge and skills of these other occupations as needed to serve clients and communities. They are not limited to a single perspective or set of methodologies. Thus, at the undergraduate level, social workers are called **generalist practitioners**

Table 1.2 ■ Comparison of Social Work and Similar Occupations		
Discipline and Similar Occupations	Similarities to Social Work	Differences From Social Work
<i>Psychology</i> : Study of behavior and cognitive processes; application of that knowledge to the evaluation and treatment of psychological disorders Psychotherapists Psychologists (PsyD or PhD doctoral preparation) Psychiatrists (MD; physicians with an advanced specialty)	Is a practice profession Requires accreditation and postdegree supervision Requires graduate-level training for counseling clients (as psychotherapists) Allows practitioners to conduct psychotherapy Occurs in some of the same settings, with many of the same clients	Requires PhD or PsyD degree for practice Requires 2 years of supervised work experience before independent practice Focuses on client's psychological issues Administers psychological tests Allows practitioners to prescribe medications in some states Requires MD training/degree for psychiatrists

Discipline and Similar Occupations	Similarities to Social Work	Differences From Social Work
<i>Counseling</i> : Practice of meeting with, listening to, and guiding individuals and groups with mental health, social adjustment, and relationship problems Therapists Marriage counselors Family therapists	Is a practice profession Requires a graduate degree Requires licenses and certifications Engages in psychotherapy Does not allow practitioners to prescribe medications Occurs in some of the same settings, with many of the same clients	Focuses mostly on the individual as a problem requiring assessment and intervention Does not typically include training in community practice (advocacy, organizing) Requires a graduate degree for practice
<i>Sociology</i> : Study of characteristics and interactions of populations Sociologists (PhD)	Studies patterns of human behavior, especially origins of that behavior and societal development Shares interests in human diversity and oppression	Is a social science, not a practice profession Examines people's patterns (e.g., social behavior and organizations) and family groups, community, and societal contexts
<i>Nursing</i> : Practice of caring for the physical and mental health of individuals, families, and communities to optimize quality of life Nurses (BSN, MSN, FNP, DNP)	Is a practice profession Has a caring/helping focus Is practiced in hospitals, clinics, and so forth	Offers RN and LPN designations denoting responsibilities and authority Focuses on health and well-being
<i>Criminal justice</i> : Practice of facilitating law enforcement, operating the court system, and investigating and preventing criminal behavior Law enforcement and correction officers	Has a practice orientation Occurs in some of the same settings, with many of the same clients Shares concerns about individuals and families	Often requires a BS in criminal justice or human services Focuses on the law and social order Supports authority structures Has a limited focus on the individual's environment
<i>Public health</i> : Practice of researching epidemiological and environmental health trends and protecting the health of populations Public health clinicians, researchers, and officers	Has a practice orientation Focuses on groups and communities Is practiced in health clinics and community-based settings	Requires a BS in public health Requires training in epidemiology, biostatistics, and health policy and administration Focuses on health and the physical environment

Social Work and Human Diversity

When assisting and advocating for people in need, social workers inevitably meet and interact with diverse people from multiple backgrounds. Many social workers would argue that one of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of their career is the ability to expand their knowledge of and appreciation for human diversity. They have a chance to learn about the strengths, needs, uniqueness, values, causes, and traditions associated with various forms of human difference and work with many kinds of people. Consider how much you like hearing people's life stories. When you hear people's life stories, you get clues as to what they need, value, and dream about. As a social worker, there are thousands of people and larger client systems that could benefit from your assistance.

Social workers engage individuals, families, couples, groups, organizations, and communities. They work with veterans, medical and psychiatric clients, older adults, survivors of interpersonal violence, immigrant families, children in foster care, members of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and others) community, and people experiencing homelessness. In addition, social workers empower and advocate for people with developmental challenges, behavioral health troubles, or trauma and people experiencing financial insecurity. On a large systems level, social workers form community advisory boards, attend neighborhood and town meetings, and help develop

policies promoting social justice and social-economic opportunities. People of all races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and religious backgrounds seek help from social workers, so it is likely that each day in the life of a social worker will be an adventure.

Social Work in Action

Brené Brown Promotes Research About Vulnerability



Dr. Brené Brown speaking at a conference.

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Dr. Brené Brown has a BSW, an MSW, and a doctorate in social work and serves as a professor and researcher at the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work. Before Dr. Brown became a mega speaker on the global circuit, she was a typical academic, Texan, and storyteller. Her 2010 TEDx talk "The Power of Vulnerability" catapulted her to fame. It is one of the top five most viewed TED talks.

Brown's newest book is titled *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience* (Brown, 2021). Her content explores 87 emotions and experiences that relate to us being human.

Oprah Winfrey promoted Dr. Brown by interviewing her and highlighting concepts she developed and wrote about. For example, Brown coined the term *wholehearted leadership*. She later published two *New York Times* bestsellers and developed two companies. One of these companies, The Daring Way, is a training program that helps professionals implement Dr. Brown's findings on courage, shame, vulnerability, and worthiness in their own work. Dr. Brown delivers national presentations on the concepts of courage, vulnerability, worthiness, shame, and empathy. In her videos "Power of Vulnerability" and "Listening to Shame," Dr. Brown specifically discusses social work and emphasizes that social workers are called to "lean into the discomfort" and establish meaningful connections with people.

Dr. Brown remains popular, and she concludes from her qualitative research that vulnerability is not weakness; vulnerability requires emotional risk, exposure, and uncertainty and fuels our lives. Essentially, vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage: "Innovation, creativity, and change come from the birthplace of vulnerability."

In her clip about shame, she concludes that although shame is not guilt, it is highly correlated with such behaviors as addiction, depression, suicide, and eating disorders. In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Dr. Brown (2010) says, "Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do."

Dr. Brown exemplifies how a social work education can propel you into a many-faceted future. She is teaching social work students and the wider world about social work theory and

methods. Dr. Brown's stories about courage, shame, worthiness, forgiveness, and vulnerability resonate with many. Now they are also adding richness to a social worker's tool kit.

1. How might you incorporate Dr. Brown's ideas about courage, vulnerability, and bravery when listening to people's stories?
2. Consider what experiences make you feel vulnerable. How does vulnerability feel to you? What role might empathy play for social workers who counsel people who feel vulnerable?

Clients differ from social workers. A person's lived experiences, personal values, belief systems, and circumstances can influence how they perceive other people and situations. Like everyone else, social workers are influenced by their family, spiritual beliefs, culture, norms, race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as life stage, socioeconomic status, and abilities, among other factors.

In social work classes, students learn about the concepts of culture, norms, life stages, and socioeconomic status because all of these concepts relate to the work that social workers do with clients. **Culture** refers to the customs, habits, skills, arts, values, ideology, science, and religious and political behaviors of a group of people in a particular time period. In classes about multicultural issues, culture gets explored in depth, as clients' cultures have a large influence on how they live and work and often on how they interact with the social worker and the systems they encounter. **Norms** are the rules of behavior—both formal and informal—and the expectations held collectively by a culture, group, organization, or society. Tipping in restaurants and punctuality are examples of typical American norms.

It is difficult to summarize human development into clear cut stages. Nevertheless, development psychologists and others have created theories to better understand our cognitive and intellectual development. The stages of life are the different phases that people pass through during a regular lifetime.

Theorist and psychologist Erik Erikson wrote about eight particular life stages: infancy, toddlerhood, preschool years, early school years, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood (Erikson Institute, 2025; Perry, 2022). More recently, Jeffrey Arnett and colleagues (2014) introduced a new life stage called “emerging adulthood” because more 18- to 29-year-olds are spending a longer time in education and marrying and parenting at a later age.

Social work classes about human behavior in the social environment examine major stages of the human life cycle. Cycle stages have traditionally included pregnancy, infancy, toddler and childhood years, puberty, older adolescence to adulthood, middle adulthood, and older adulthood (Barker, 2014).

Psychology courses are often required for declared social work majors. These courses explore theorists such as Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Karen Horney, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget and their concepts. Kenneth Bancroft Clark is a psychologist who's notable for his famous “Doll Study” wherein 200 Black children were given the choice of white or brown dolls; children as young as 3 showed preferences for white dolls (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, n.d.). One psychological theory that is particularly relevant to social work is Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which argues that every period of life, or **life stage**, is characterized by some underlying challenges and orientations that modify a person's behavior and priorities. According to Erickson, the degree to which a person reconciles the conflicts inherent in each stage of development largely determines the likelihood of their coping successfully in subsequent stages (Maree, 2021). By learning about Erickson's psychosocial development theory and other theories, social workers can better understand the clients with whom they work (Cherry, 2024).

Socioeconomic status (SES), or *socioeconomic class*, refers to a categorization of groups of people according to a specified demographic variable, such as level of income, level of education, or location of residence. Sociologists often categorize socioeconomic classes as upper, middle, working class, and impoverished. Other observers make further distinctions, such as upper middle class and lower middle class. In social work there are instances when economic injustice affects clients such that

class advocacy is needed (Larkin, 2019). Social workers use their class advocacy skills when they try to remove barriers so clients can receive services; for example, when affordable housing units in a neighborhood disappear due to gentrification, they intervene to help clients access housing. Housing reveals a person's economic environment, and quality housing reflects the level of a community's development. The housing services field clearly blends social work's micro and macro approaches to meet people's economic and built environment needs. This will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

Social workers go to considerable lengths to broaden their perspectives. They increase their self-understanding by reading and taking classes (in the arts and humanities, as well as on subjects such as psychology, sociology, sexuality, biology, neuroscience, and gerontology), learning foreign languages, engaging in personal therapy, participating in self-reflection, and receiving professional supervision and feedback (Green et al., 2005; Mo & Chan, 2023). By seeking this type of self-knowledge, trained social workers are likely to become sensitized and acquire advanced understanding of the differences among people. They become better at appreciating other viewpoints and at developing and evaluating more creative policies and intervention strategies (Karger & Stoesz, 2022). In contemplating social work as a career, you must look within and evaluate your readiness to **advocate** for the typical social work client, who may be vulnerable and possibly affected by social and economic injustice. You will also be required to respond to human needs with flexibility and creativity because resource availability and funding usually fall short of the need, although they vary across communities, regions, and states.

Time to Think 1.1

How well do you know yourself and empathize with others who do not have your privileges? Are you aware of how others perceive you and how you come across to others?

Diversity and Social Justice

As rewarding as the experience of human diversity can be, it can be troubling as well. Those who are different from the types of people with whom we are most familiar are often stereotyped as being inferior in some way. Consider people who experience severe autism symptoms, deafness, blindness, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury, amputations, and more. That prejudiced attitude may lead to actual discrimination in the way those who are “different” are treated. They may have a deprived and constrained childhood, struggle to meet their needs as they age, and feel a reduced sense of self-worth. Professional social workers work toward economic and social justice and the fair distribution of resources and rights among all members of society.

The broad range of potential disabilities can pose many unique challenges for social workers. Six common types of disability are physical, cognitive, mental illness, auditory, speech, and visual. In society, people with disabilities may experience victimization, stigmatization, and segregation. Therefore, social workers must be ready to recognize and address ableism as it arises in their practice (Clarke & Westmore, 2022). Ableism is a system of discrimination based upon the incorrect belief that disabled people are inferior to nondisabled people. Ableism can appear in language used. Medical, social, and human rights models of disability exist and will be explored in greater depth in a future chapter.

The bases for prejudice and discrimination, which are discussed throughout the book, include the following categories of difference.

Class

Societies are divided along social and economic lines (Chavez, 2023). Social *status* is based on familial descent, occupation prestige, and cultural standing, while social *class* is based on

economic background. Essentially, SES matches social class. Sociologists frequently subdivide society into five classes: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, working class, and impoverished.

Some social work clients are only marginally employable because of discrimination in the workplace, low educational attainment, and little experience. The term *marginal employment* is the circumstance in which the formal employment of adults (or groups of adults within families) fails to generate the earnings needed to afford a generally acceptable standard of living, either because they work too few hours or because wages are too low. As a result, they may experience all that comes with financial insecurity. The jobs that are available to them generally pay poorly, so these clients may struggle with transportation issues, finding affordable day care, mental health issues, physical challenges, and finding affordable health insurance. Since the beginning of the profession, social workers have advocated for services and programs for those people with low incomes who need support for a rewarding family life, stable housing, adequate nutrition, educational opportunity, and employability with adequate pay. Social workers recognize that use of public assistance is not due to personal shortcomings. Large-scale issues within the community or society as a whole (e.g., a shortage of jobs with a living wage and benefits, inadequate transportation systems, substandard schools, minimal child-support enforcement, or lack of quality, affordable day care) also undermine a person's efforts to advance in life (Secombe, 2011, p. 74). According to the Global Living Wage Coalition (2018), a living wage is remuneration received for a standard workweek by a worker in a specific place, enough to allow a decent standard of living for the worker and their family. Elements of a decent standard of living include education, food, health care, housing, water, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs, including funds for unexpected events.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Although women have made important strides in U.S. society, they still face gender stereotypes, which are overgeneralizations about behaviors and characteristics based on gender. Rosenthal et. al (2020) have captured how sexual stereotypes can be rooted in longstanding interlocking systems of power and oppression and how societal institutions can internalize stereotypes within communities and individuals. Therefore, to assure culturally competent practice, social workers need to treat stereotypes as generalizations—assumptions that require testing (Gasker, 2023).

Social workers partner with women's rights groups, educators, and other professionals to advocate for and develop positive and meaningful services and programs for women, especially in education, employment, reproductive services, childcare, civil rights, and the political arena. Women tend to earn significantly less than men. Unpaid family care for older adults and children forces women, more than men, to reduce their number of paid work hours. According to data found at the Urban Institute, women who have children, on average, forfeit 15% of their earnings to provide family care. Until affordable childcare and elder care options are available, parity in earnings between men and women will be hard to obtain (Figart & Mutari, 2022; Johnson et al., 2023).

Because social workers engage with many different people, it is especially important for them to understand basic terms related to gender. Everyone has a *gender identity*—a person's internalized psychological experience as being a woman, a man, or another gender. Some believe gender identity refers to a blending of masculine and feminine or neither (Long et al., 2024). *Gender nonconformity* refers to the degree to which a person's appearance, behavior, interests, and subjective self-concept differ from conventional gender norms of masculinity and femininity. The term *transgender* refers to a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person was assigned at birth.

In recent years, members of the LGBTQ+ community have been far more successful at winning some degree of social justice for themselves, such as the right to marry members of the same sex. However, discriminatory behavior and interpersonal slights toward members of the LGBTQ+ community have not disappeared. Social workers counsel LGBTQ+ individuals facing prejudice and convene groups with them to discuss ways to cope with both subtle and aggressive discrimination. Social workers may also advocate for the LGBTQ+ population on a community, state, or national level through organizing activities and policy development.

Race

Race refers to a group of people who have in common some visible physical traits, like skin color, hair texture, facial features, and eye formation. The term *race* has been applied to linguistic groups (the African/Latino/Asian/Jewish/Arab race) and political, national, or ethnic groups with few physical traits that distinguish them from their neighbors (e.g., Irish/French/Spanish/Slavic/Chinese race; Wade & Takezawa, 2024). The United States is a racially diverse nation. In fact, by 2050, one quarter of people in the United States will be Latino American, and 1 in 10 will be of Asian or Pacific Islander descent. The Black population is projected to increase from 41.1 million to 65.7 million by 2050, going from 14% of the U.S. population to 15% (Frey, 2021).

Yet despite the country's racial diversity and decades of social action and legislative and judicial remedies to promote racial equality, racial inequality remains an issue in the United States. Therefore, promoting diversity and social justice is an important part of social work practice. To work effectively with racially diverse clients, social workers engage in lifelong learning to increase their racial and cultural awareness, sensitivity, and humility. Increased education and awareness enable social workers to better advocate for social justice for historically marginalized people. Although cultural differences might separate social workers from people they serve, historically culture greatly influenced how organizations, communities, nations, groups, and families developed (Tice et al., 2020). Social work education emphasizes the importance of **cultural competence**, a set of attitudes, behaviors, skills, and policies enabling people and organizations to have effective interpersonal and working relationships that rise above cultural differences. When social workers engage in work across systems, they need to be aware of their explicit and implicit biases (Tice et al., 2020, p. 61). *Implicit bias* refers to unconscious stereotypes that affect humans' actions and decisions. By contrast, *explicit bias* refers to people's conscious attitudes and beliefs about a person or group.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to the shared national origin, race, religion, or language of a people. It's a person's ethnic affiliation, by virtue of characteristics and traditions. Ethnicity is a powerful determinant of a person's patterns of behavior, feeling, and thinking. Many people adhere to at least some of the traditions and beliefs of their ancestors. In the United States, a "nation of immigrants," people of many ethnic subcultures live side by side. However, ethnocentrism—believing that one's own ethnic group and way of life are superior to those of others—can create intolerance and prejudice. Immigrants who do not speak English and are undocumented are vulnerable groups often exploited by business operators, landlords, and others. Some may be victims of human trafficking, and many have challenges accessing health care, education, or social services. Public discourse on the "rights" of undocumented people and government's obligations toward them has become increasingly common (McCracken & del Mar Fariña, 2020). Immigrants from Middle Eastern countries and Arab Americans face suspicion and harassment, are regularly profiled at airports and on highways, and are frequently seen by law enforcement and the public as either potential terrorists or people who support terrorism (Alsaïdi et al., 2023; Hashem & Awad, 2021; Khoury & Krumer-Nevo, 2023).

Voices of Muslim Arab American women concerning discrimination, identity, and well-being have become more prominent as the Arab American Institute reports growing numbers of Arab Americans holding U.S. citizenship and being counted as white for U.S. Census purposes (Alsaïdi et al., 2021, p. 163). Rather unstudied is the realities of discrimination based on religiosity and microaggressions. Arab Americans appear to hold very highly interconnected ethnic and religious identities. Researchers Hashem and Awad (2021) have reported that across Muslim and Christian Arab communities, psychological distress experiences are similar.

Social workers fight against such intolerance and prejudice by promoting respect for and understanding of all ethnic groups and cultures. For example, social workers frequently support ethnic centers, immigrant enterprises, language diversity, and cultural events that showcase ethnic pride and provide a forum for the public to learn about specific ethnic values and traditions. And well they should: In the coming decades, immigration will account for increased amounts of the nation's population growth (Horowitz et al., 2019; Sendlár, 2024).

Understanding the ways in which people tend to think about ethnicity can be helpful to social workers when engaging with clients. According to Rothman (2008), people tend to think about ethnicity in four ways, focusing on different qualities. For example, there is “ethnicity as class,” suggesting a distinctive lifestyle (e.g., Chinatown, Little Italy); “ethnicity as politics,” relating to common experiences of oppression or stigmatization (e.g., civil rights movements); “ethnicity as revival,” connoting a consciously focused return to traditions, foods, celebrations, and clothing styles that a group may have brought to the United States (e.g., moving from a melting pot to a tossed salad notion); and “ethnicity as symbolic token,” thereby expressing a remembered and sentimentalized identity (Rothman, 2008).

Age

As the population of older adults grows in the 21st century—by 2050, the population of older people in the United States (ages 50+) is expected to more than double—social workers will find themselves more and more challenged to help ensure “good aging” (Cire, 2014; Lieberman, 2011, p. 137). The U.S. population is older today than it has ever been, and the older population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse (Population Reference Bureau [PRB], 2024). As well, more older adults are divorced, and older women are living alone (PRB, 2024). Population demographics point to the importance of preparing social work professionals with the competencies to address the urgencies of a burgeoning aging population (McCracken & del Mar Fariña, 2020). Age-friendly principles and initiatives (e.g., age-friendly universities; age-friendly health systems; age-friendly public health systems) remind us that older adults are a resource to their families, economies, and communities.

Caregiving is an extremely important issue for families because people are living longer and middle-aged children—especially women—are finding themselves part of the “sandwich generation” (people who must care for both children and their older adult relatives). Social workers can help families manage stressors involved with intergenerational care.

Older adults, who have some of their basic needs addressed through Medicare and Social Security, often struggle with fixed incomes, housing, health problems, and loneliness. Medicare is the U.S. national social insurance health care program for everyone older than 65 (including blind and disabled people), administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMMS). Medicare benefits include hospital, home health, hospice insurance coverage and more. Coverage also exists for those with end stage renal disease and for some prescription drug costs (Medicare Part D). Funding comes from social security contributions, monthly premiums from participants, and general federal revenues.

Medicaid was created in 1965 to pay hospital and medical services for people who cannot afford them. Eligibility is based on income and assets. Funding comes from federal, state, and sometimes county governments under the auspices of DHSS/CMS. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients can also be assisted with Medicaid applications in their social security offices.

Services such as home-delivered meals, transportation, and medical coverage for problems associated with the aging process may be underfunded or unavailable. Being acquainted with older adults and attentive to their specific desires and needs enables professional social workers to improve or rectify the life situations of this group of people.

Historically, social workers have advocated for justice and human rights for all people, despite their age, ability, class, gender identity, race or ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Social workers must therefore challenge “isms”—such as ageism, ableism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, and sexism—as they advocate for vulnerable individuals and groups. Although we live in a society that perpetuates biases and “isms,” social workers can work to lessen stigma and promote strengths and contributions related to diversity. It is also imperative that social workers examine and acknowledge their own biases prior to direct practice with clients or when developing social policy. Checking biases should be considered a lifelong commitment.

Intersections of Diversity

Social workers typically encounter multiple forms of diversity in a single individual. For instance, a woman experiencing a physical or mental disability may also be an older adult who is economically disadvantaged,

living paycheck to paycheck. For example, Rachel, a 72-year-old retired woman, has trouble walking because of severe knee pain, yet she is unable to afford surgery because SSI and Medicare health insurance will not completely cover the cost. This gap between Rachel's income and her medical coverage impedes her ability to receive the health care treatment she needs. Holes in medical coverage (gaps in the combined coverage received from private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid) may leave Rachel without needed treatment and medications. The ever-changing complexity of medical protocols and health insurance coverage further complicates matters. In turn, the medical issues are an impediment to older, economically disadvantaged people's ability to make doctor appointments, keep themselves and their homes in good repair, and buy medicine or nutritious food. On a regular basis, social workers find themselves creatively seeking to identify resources and fill gaps in services for clients with needs that span categories of difference.

Intersectionality, a term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, refers to the entirety of a person's dimensions of difference and social identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Most diversity includes a complex range or intersection of issues, not simply one. A person may be a white, gay, Jewish, older adult who was born with congenital heart disease and lives in an urban environment. Or a person may be a single, middle-aged, Christian woman who emigrated from India and works as a nurse in a rural setting.

Some of those diversity differences may create problems in meeting one's needs, but others may create advantages. For example, a man who is a retired middle manager has enjoyed some of the privileges of gender and class, but if he is also gay or lives with a psychological disorder or disability, he may have faced difficulties in his life that require access to social services. His multiple aspects of diversity have likely sometimes placed him in the role of being the oppressed and sometimes in a position to be the oppressor (Jani et al., 2011; Kolluri & Tichavakunda, 2022).

As a social worker, you must understand the complex interrelationships that exist across all social identities so that you can work with clients to devise strategies that will make a difference and create social change (Adams & Joshi, 2010; Collins, 2010; Krueger et al., 2022). Keep in mind that people are more than labels or any of their categories of difference.

Informing Practice

You may be starting to realize how complex the practice of social work can be. It requires knowledge of human development and behavior, as well as social, economic, and cultural institutions, social welfare policies, and the interaction of these various factors. The social work profession not only provides this knowledge but also educates its members to be proactive advocates for client systems. The essential lessons for aspiring social workers involve theory and practice skills as well as social work values.

Theory and Practice

Social workers draw on ideas and theories to guide their assessments, interventions, and advocacy decisions. These perspectives emphasize the importance of resilience, strengths, solutions, social justice, and safe, sustainable communities. Professional social workers may adopt a primary practice theory that fits their views about human nature, particularly for the purpose of assessing a client, a situation, and the results of efforts to make changes. Chapter 3 describes these theoretical foundations in more detail.

In addition, social workers are committed to **evidence-based practice**, which is, simply stated, using a select intervention for an issue, problem, or condition based on the results of research (O'Hare, 2020). Social workers base their methods on the results of previous studies because they need to be accountable regarding effectiveness to their clients as well as third-party payers (such as insurance companies). In addition, they want to use best practices as documented in their profession's knowledge base. Social workers are obligated to ask themselves, "What evidence do I have that my proposed idea, intervention, or policy initiative will best serve my client(s)?" Social workers' reasoning skills are enhanced through classes in research methods, policy, and statistics.

The knowledge base for social work is constantly evolving to match developments in other disciplines and changes in living conditions. Contemporary social workers embrace technology and neuroscience (Perkins et al., 2023; Farmer, 2009).

Neuroscience recognizes that the brain/mind is dependent on ongoing social relations throughout our lives (Ray, 2025; Shapiro & Applegate, 2018; Siegel, 2013). Children exposed to ongoing stress and trauma, such as exposure to community violence, may develop schemas (models) of the world as a hostile place and experience changed attitudes about people, life, and the future.

In addition to neuroscience, environmental social work (Dominelli, 2013; Gray et al., 2012) and models for social work in a sustainable world (Dominelli, 2012, 2018; Mary, 2008; Kumaresan et al., 2023) now provide additional ideas and paradigms for social work professionals. There are three types of sustainability in social work: economic, environmental, and social. Social work has focused on social contexts, touched on the economic, and largely ignored the environmental. Social workers are becoming increasingly involved with social sustainability, which recognizes that individual health and well-being, nutrition, shelter, education, and cultural needs must be met. Essentially, social sustainability is concerned with the longevity and well-being of a community. Economic sustainability refers to practices designed to create the long-term economic development of a nation or company while also managing the environmental, social, and cultural aspects of its activities. Environmental sustainability connotes the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and well-being today and tomorrow.

Social Work Values

The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values that undergird social work's unique purpose and perspective. The following are the core values as put forth by the NASW (2021):

1. **Service:** to provide assistance, resources, and benefits to help people achieve maximum potential
2. **Social justice:** to uphold equal rights, protection, opportunity, and social benefits for everyone
3. **Dignity and worth:** to see every person as unique and worthwhile
4. **Importance of human relationships:** to value the exchange between social worker and client
5. **Integrity:** to maintain trustworthiness
6. **Competence:** to practice within the scope of known skills and abilities

The NASW Code of Ethics

Social work values are reflected in the **NASW Code of Ethics**, which serves as a social and moral compass for social work professionals. This code has four sections—Preamble, Purpose, Ethical Principles, and Ethical Standards—which are summarized in the Appendix of this book. The *Code of Ethics* serves six purposes (NASW, 2021):

- Identify core social work values
- Summarize broad ethical standards
- Identify professional obligations when conflicts arise
- Hold the social work profession accountable
- Socialize new practitioners to social work's mission, values, ethical standards, and principles
- Define unethical conduct

Ethical decision making is a process. Often, social workers struggle with complex scenarios, and the guidelines help direct their actions. In addition, although the *Code of Ethics* cannot guarantee ethical behaviors, and a violation of standards in this code does not automatically imply violation of the law, these principles stipulate ideals to which all social workers should aspire. Beyond NASW, many states have developed social work licensure and/or ethics boards to promote, monitor, and reinforce ethical social work practice.

Conscious and Mindful Use of Self

The term *use of self* often confuses beginning students. In a nutshell, this concept means you are combining knowledge, values, and skills gained in social work education with aspects of your personality traits, belief systems, life experiences, and cultural heritage. To help you integrate your authentic self into skills you will need in your social work field placement, and ultimately your social work career, it will be helpful to view yourself from five different perspectives: use of personality, use of belief system, use of relational dynamic, use of anxiety, and use of self-disclosure (Dewane, 2006; Gordon & Dunworth, 2017; Kaushik, 2017; Newcomb et al., 2022; Walters, 2017). Personality consists of a person's emotional and intellectual structure, including abilities, attitudes, enduring patterns of understanding, interests, and relationship to the environment. Your personality may differ from your client's, and being conscious of differences will facilitate trust and engagement. Beliefs are a state or habit of mind wherein trust or confidence is placed in a person or thing. Your client's beliefs may differ from yours, which may affect how easily trust is established. Relational dynamics are how people relate, communicate, and interact. Being aware of relational dynamics helps facilitate awareness, deep understanding, and empowerment. Anxiety is a feeling of worry, unease, or nervousness, typically about a certain outcome—something that may imminently happen. Managing anxiety is important to alleviate attention and move forward. Self-disclosure may occur when a social worker reveals personal information, values, and behaviors to a client for a positive therapeutic purpose designed to help the person achieve their goal(s). In the social work literature, the concept of *use of self* means consciously using knowledge, skills, and values in interventions. Self-awareness is a crucial skill used to be cognizant of one's hidden personality traits so that relationships with other people may be enhanced.

Time to Think 1.2

How do your ethics stand up against social workers' professional ethics? In the workplace, what might make it difficult to adhere to a professional code of ethics? Refer to the National Association of Social Workers website to access the NASW *Code of Ethics*.

Professionalism

In addition to valuing a code of ethics, social workers identify as professionals. With that status comes a set of characteristics that help ensure the highest standards of practice: a culture of professionalism, a professional authority setting standards, recognition of that authority by the community, a systematic body of theory, and a code of ethics (Greenwood, 1957; Pascoe, 2023).

Professional identity does not come ready made; it is an extension of one's social identity by virtue of embodying three key qualities—connectedness, effectiveness, and expansiveness (Forenza & Eckert, 2018; Long et al., 2024; Webb, 2017).

The roots of social work are in medicine and science; therefore, social work is constantly searching for its evolving professional identity (Forenza & Eckert, 2018, p. 18; Karki et al., 2023). A strong predictor of professional identity is membership in a professional organization, such as NASW, and pursuing leadership opportunities in professional organizations. When you feel like you belong and have the support and care you need and the number and quality of relationships you desire you will experience connectedness. Professional effectiveness refers to the practice of making the most out of the resources (learned skills) at our disposal. Expansive social work professionals come across as effusive, unrestrained, free, and open. Altogether, these three qualities can help social workers quickly build a trusting alliance with people who require their help.

It takes time for professional identity to develop, and it requires strong mentors who care about investing their time and energy in teaching, leadership, and advocacy. Professional identity results from a developmental process that facilitates a growing understanding of self in one's selected career. When a social worker can articulate their role to others, within and outside of the discipline, the process has begun.

Developing social workers must also learn how to merge the personal and professional by knowing themselves well. To develop a professional identity, social workers reflect on every area of their life so

they are in tune with their own personal values and beliefs and understand how their life experiences and gender role expectations have shaped them.

Likewise, gaining **self-awareness**—the ability to clearly understand one’s own strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, and beliefs—is a process that is worthwhile yet not always easy to achieve. Much of the journey to becoming an effective social worker involves developing your self-awareness—with classmates, professors, and clients who continuously challenge your thinking. Getting in touch with your values and feelings is extremely important. As you deepen your self-awareness, both professionally and personally, you develop a greater capacity to attend objectively to your clients’ wants and needs. Being aware and secure in your thoughts, values, and feelings leads to good physical and mental health, moments of joy, and contentment, which is something every social worker should be mindful of.

Advocacy

A key element of social work values is **advocacy**, simply defined as activities that secure services for and promote the rights of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (Tice et al., 2020). Advocacy covers everything from ensuring special educational services for a child with different learning abilities to presenting facts about people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged before the U.S. Congress. Social workers intercede in not only cases but causes.

Spotlight on Advocacy

Suze Orman Talks Candidly About How Social Workers Can Get Smarter About Money

Suze Orman is an outspoken, straightforward financial advisor who in the past has helped NASW celebrate its “March Is Social Work Month” and professional image campaigns. When Orman was young, she earned a social work degree before her life took off in other directions. Although she never formally worked in a social work agency, Orman has enthusiastically promoted the profession, saying, “Social workers are vital to the fabric of the United States of America. . . . Those who enter the social work profession know about the low pay, so they need to ‘stand in their power’” (Wright, 2011). In 2024, Orman advised Millennials to prioritize necessities and use money to purchase needs versus wants (Louis, 2024).

Orman previously helped NASW celebrate Social Work Month, and she discussed how her social work studies helped her understand how people think and feel about money and enabled her to talk about money on a personal level: “You have to understand people to understand money” (Wright, 2011). Decent salaries can be earned in the social work profession, so she also offered social workers some financial advice. Although not all people who complete social work education will become like Suze Orman, graduates who possess degrees in social work will locate meaningful work and be able to move from setting to setting quite easily. In some respects, social work is a business, and your degree is your ticket to success.

As part of the Social Work Month 2019 series, NASW interviewed Orman on the NASW *Social Work Talks* podcast (Episode 27; McDonald, 2019). First, she tells listeners that “you are smart about money when you pay yourself first.” Second, she suggests that people learn the tenets of saving—the three laws about living below your means, needs versus wants, and getting pleasure out of saving versus spending. Third, regarding investments, Orman says to have a Roth IRA: “Use the Roth 401(k)s or 403(b)s that your employer possibly has. Use the Roth model versus the traditional because when you’re not making that much money anyway, the



Suze Orman at the Time 100 Gala

David Shankbone via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY 3.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

tax write-offs don't really matter. Also, make sure your money is all in a situation where, when you do need it in retirement, you don't have to pay any taxes on it. If you're going to buy a home, buy a home that's a small home that you can afford, that you have paid off by the time that you know you are going to retire. A number-one goal ought to be paying off a mortgage as soon as possible." She also discusses student loans and much more.

1. What role can social workers play when working with clients to be financially literate and good stewards of their money? How financially literate do you consider yourself to be?
2. What do you think about Orman's crediting her social work training for her success, specifically in terms of her ability to understand how people think and feel about money?

One of the key differences between social workers and other service professionals is that social workers are expected to know and care about clients' environments. That is what undergirds and gives force to much of their advocacy. On a broad level, clients' environments include issues of economic, environmental, and social justice. As a professional matter, social workers embrace a political vision based on democratic values. They are also guided by the NASW *Code of Ethics*, which is influenced by the beliefs and tenets of three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Monotheistic religions believe in one God. The NASW *Code of Ethics* does not explicitly mention religious freedom; however, modern social work values and practice competencies have biblical foundations (Racovita-Szilagyi & Diaconu, 2016). Professional social work ethics do not restrict social workers from practicing their religion in their personal lives; however, when acting in a professional capacity they ought not to exploit clients for religious purposes or impose their religious beliefs on clients (Barsky, 2019). Social workers envision solutions and engage in problem solving designed to protect legal and personal rights and to ensure a dignified existence for everyone. With a worldwide perspective, social work professionals must also understand social and economic conditions at all levels of government. They must understand how economic downturns, the changing balance between conservatism and liberalism, capitalism, and globalization affect their clients and their practice.

To become a more effective professional advocate, you should seek to expand your worldview. Social workers who have studied sociology, economics, political science, public health, and other social sciences can better help clients navigate social service systems and approach decision makers to advocate for changes in social policies. Education prepares social workers to assume a wide array of roles: activist, advocate, broker, case manager, coordinator, group facilitator, initiator, mediator, negotiator, policy analyst, public speaker, and researcher. These roles will be revisited throughout subsequent chapters.

Social Work Education

Nearly every state in the United States requires that social workers have a social work degree from an accredited school. The CSWE is the professional entity that accredits social work programs by monitoring social work educators and ensuring that high educational standards are met. CSWE is the authority that officially articulates the goals, values, and training objectives within the profession and oversees curricula development (CSWE, 2022). Its mission is to ensure that social workers are trained to work at a professional level in many different dimensions of practice.

Major Social Work Competencies From the EPAS

In 2022, CSWE delineated nine social work competencies that students in the discipline must acquire and demonstrate before they graduate. These competencies reflect common practice behaviors and social work ethics and are measurable. They are intended to ensure that every social work graduate has "sufficient knowledge, skills, and values" to practice effectively. These nine core competencies, known as the **Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)**, are accompanied by related practice behaviors that social work educators and field directors and instructors assess:

- Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice

- Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice
- Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- Engage in policy practice
- Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (CSWE, 2022)

Social Work Degrees

Social work education is provided at both the undergraduate and the graduate level. CSWE has accredited undergraduate departments, programs, and schools in colleges and universities that offer social work training. If you complete an undergraduate degree in social work, you may proceed to graduate social work programs or immediately take social work positions in agencies.

Since 1971, CSWE has authorized “advanced standing” for students who have finished approved undergraduate social work programs, and some schools of social work have made it possible for such students to obtain their master’s degrees within 2 years, with some requiring only 1 year of graduate work. Graduate training programs for the master’s degree in social work in the United States usually take 2 years and combine instructional classes with fieldwork practice in agencies.

The social work profession, like the psychology and nursing professions, is legally regulated by state licensing boards and offers specialized credentials and practice certifications. Unfortunately, in some states, no licensure certification exists for social workers who hold undergraduate degrees in social work. This means that people who possess other academic degrees can occupy social work positions and sometimes incorrectly call themselves “social workers,” thereby confusing the general public. Too often, the media blame social work for an act carried out by someone who never received a social work degree but still works in a human service agency.

Bachelor of Social Work

The **bachelor of social work (BSW)** degree readies graduates for generalist social work practice, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 3. The BSW, the BA in social work, and the BS in social work are the entry-level degrees for the profession. The academic credential is precisely defined: a bachelor’s degree from a college or university social work program or department that is accredited by CSWE. Once declared social work majors complete their degree, they may choose to send the CSWE a copy of their transcript, along with a completed application from their state’s Consumer Affairs or Board of Social Work Examiner’s website, and apply for their license credential. Many states also require license applicants to pass a written national social work examination.

Important goals of social work education are not only to cover social welfare content and practice skills but also to provide a liberal arts education so that students can become informed citizens. The liberal arts–oriented BSW curriculum introduces student learners to social welfare history, communication skills, human behavior theories, and critical thinking about diversity and the human condition. Courses with an emphasis on human biology, economics, statistics, and political science enhance knowledge about human behavior and social policy development. Increasingly, BSW students also choose or are required to learn American Sign Language or a foreign language.

Master of Social Work

A **master of social work (MSW)** degree readies graduates for advanced, specialized professional practice. It must be obtained from a program or department accredited by CSWE. The MSW degree is viewed as a terminal degree, meaning that select social work programs may hire MSW social workers as faculty to teach clinical or policy courses or as non-tenure-track faculty—especially in fieldwork instructor roles.

The curriculum of master's degree programs builds on generalist BSW content. MSW students develop a concentration in a practice method or social policy area; alternatively, some master's degrees focus on advanced generalist practice. Thus, the MSW social worker should be able to engage in generalist social work practice and also function as a specialist in more complex functions and tasks.

The basic program for the MSW degree typically includes, in some fashion, five core areas:

- Human behavior and the social environment
- Social work practice or methods
- Social policy
- Research methods
- Human diversity

Decades ago, social work education at the master's level placed considerable emphasis on specialization in fields such as psychiatric (mental health) social work, medical (health) social work, and school social work. Since the 1960s, some graduate programs have centered on a generalist curriculum. Students complete a 2-year educational program that qualifies them to work in some agencies, such as child welfare. Additionally, at some schools, the research methods course requires students to complete an individual or group thesis, a research project, or multiple research classes. MSW programs also offer elective courses to provide a well-rounded program for graduate social work students. Dual-degree programs and certificates are also offered at the master's level.

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work or Doctor of Social Work

For most social workers, an MSW degree is sufficient for advanced study and professional development. Although the number of doctoral programs has been growing, only a small percentage of NASW members hold one of the two doctorate degrees:

- Doctorate of philosophy in social work (PhD): Readies graduates to teach or conduct research or to specialize in clinical practice or policy development
- Doctorate of social work (DSW): Prepares graduates for advanced practice and administrative positions or other leadership in social work

Some MSW degree holders who are satisfied with this terminal degree or are working on their doctorates teach at community colleges or in universities as part-time adjunct instructors or sometimes in non-tenure-track clinical and teaching faculty positions. Other doctorate-level social workers assume administrative positions at agencies or enter **private practice** as clinicians or therapists.

These degrees involve advanced and specialized study, a focus on research, and completion of a dissertation, and they promote a commitment to continuing education credits—especially in the areas of clinical work, cultural competence, and ethics.

Field Education/Practicum

Whichever level of social work education you pursue, you can anticipate spending time in the “real-world classroom.” Referred to as social work’s “signature pedagogy,” **field education**, also known as an internship or practicum, is the part of the social work curriculum that students most eagerly anticipate. In the field, you finally get a chance to apply what you have learned, under the supervision of a credentialed social worker who is approved by the college or university’s social work program.

The placement settings for practicums or field education range widely. Students might be placed in hospitals, courts, domestic violence shelters, prisons, schools, mental health facilities, child welfare agencies, nursing homes, or community planning sites or with political candidates or NASW chapter offices. In these placements, students engage in practice, conscientiously applying theoretical concepts and intervention skills learned in the classroom. When students have completed field education,

they are expected to be able to demonstrate all the competencies required of the generalist social work accredited curriculum.

Time to Think 1.3

How many hybrid or fully online (distance learning) classes are you currently taking? How many of these are social work courses? What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning about the profession of social work through an internship experience that is online rather than in person?

Certificates and Certifications

In pursuit of their social work degrees, BSW students may complete minors or certificates that verify specialized knowledge and skills; for example, certificates in child welfare and gerontology are very popular, as are minors in psychology or sociology. After graduation, social work professionals may also wish to obtain special certificates or certifications. Social work programs, departments, and schools collaborate with continuing education partners to offer special certificates and 1- to 2-hour courses that provide continued education. State regulatory boards approve credentials such as the following:

- Certified social worker (CSW)
- Licensed social worker (LSW)
- Member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW)
- Licensed master social worker (LMSW)
- Licensed independent social worker (LISW)
- Licensed clinical social worker (LCSW)

Beyond the social work degree and professional license, credentials (professional certifications) are often voluntarily sought by social workers to demonstrate professional commitment, achievement, and excellence in social work at the national level. The NASW Credentialing Center supplies information about credentials, as they vary by state. NASW specialty credentials are open to all qualified applicants. For example, a CSW credential is available to case managers who possess only a BSW degree. The majority of other professional credentials (e.g., ACSW, LMSW, LCSW, LISW) typically require an MSW degree. The ACSW credential, established in 1960, is available to members and social work leaders in all practice areas and is a widely recognized and respected social work credential. If a social worker is 2 or 3 years beyond receiving their MSW degree and has accumulated a significant number of supervision hours and taken a standardized examination, they may qualify for the LCSW credential. LCSWs must have either an MSW, DSW, or PhD degree. Many LCSWs pursue a clinical or mental health counseling path because they can bill insurance companies for services—whether in private practice or with an agency (NASW, 2014, 2021).

An organization called the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) processes social work license applications, as well as social work license exam preapprovals. The ASWB is a nonprofit organization composed of and owned by the social work regulatory boards and colleges of the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the 10 Canadian provinces. It is the only nonprofit organization devoted to regulating social work. ASWB maintains and owns the social work licensing examinations used to test a social worker's competence for practicing ethically and safely.

In addition, NASW offers credentials such as the Certified Advanced Social Work Case Manager (C-ASWCM), which was created in 2000 as a specialty practice credential. People who obtain this credential do so because they want to meet complex client needs and have a strong sense of professional identity and commitment to core values found in the NASW *Code of Ethics*, the NASW *Standards for Social Work Case Management*, and the NASW *Standards for Continuing Professional Education* (<http://>

socialworkers.org). Social workers hope that securing such credentials will enhance their professional and public recognition and increase their visibility as a specialized professional social worker. To obtain specialized credentials, a person must have an MSW degree from a CSWE-accredited graduate program; document more than 2 years of paid, supervised, post-MSW case management experience; pass an ASWB MSW-level exam; and adhere to the NASW *Code of Ethics*.

Sometimes when students are completing their MSW programs, they also pursue dual degrees or graduate certificates. One example is a Graduate Certificate in Aging Studies. In some MSW programs, if a student concentrates their electives in gerontology (e.g., Biology of Aging, Psychology of Aging, Social Aspects of Aging) and completes their internship in a setting connected to gerontology, they can also obtain this graduate certificate along with their MSW degree.

In all 50 states and the District of Columbia, social workers have options for becoming certified or licensed at various levels of social work practice. In fact, it may be illegal to practice social work without a license, depending on the state and practice setting. Because licensure requirements are not always sufficiently taught to undergraduate students, those majoring in social work will want to consult handbooks, state statutes, written resources, and websites (Apgar & Luquet, 2023; Boland-Prom et al., 2015; Groshong, 2009; Monahan, 2013; Morrow, 2023; NASW, 2011; Whitaker et al., 2006). Educator Dr. Dawn Apgar publishes a series of exam guides and practice tests that cover all four areas of social work certifications: bachelor's, master's, clinical, and advanced generalist (Apgar & Luquet, 2023).

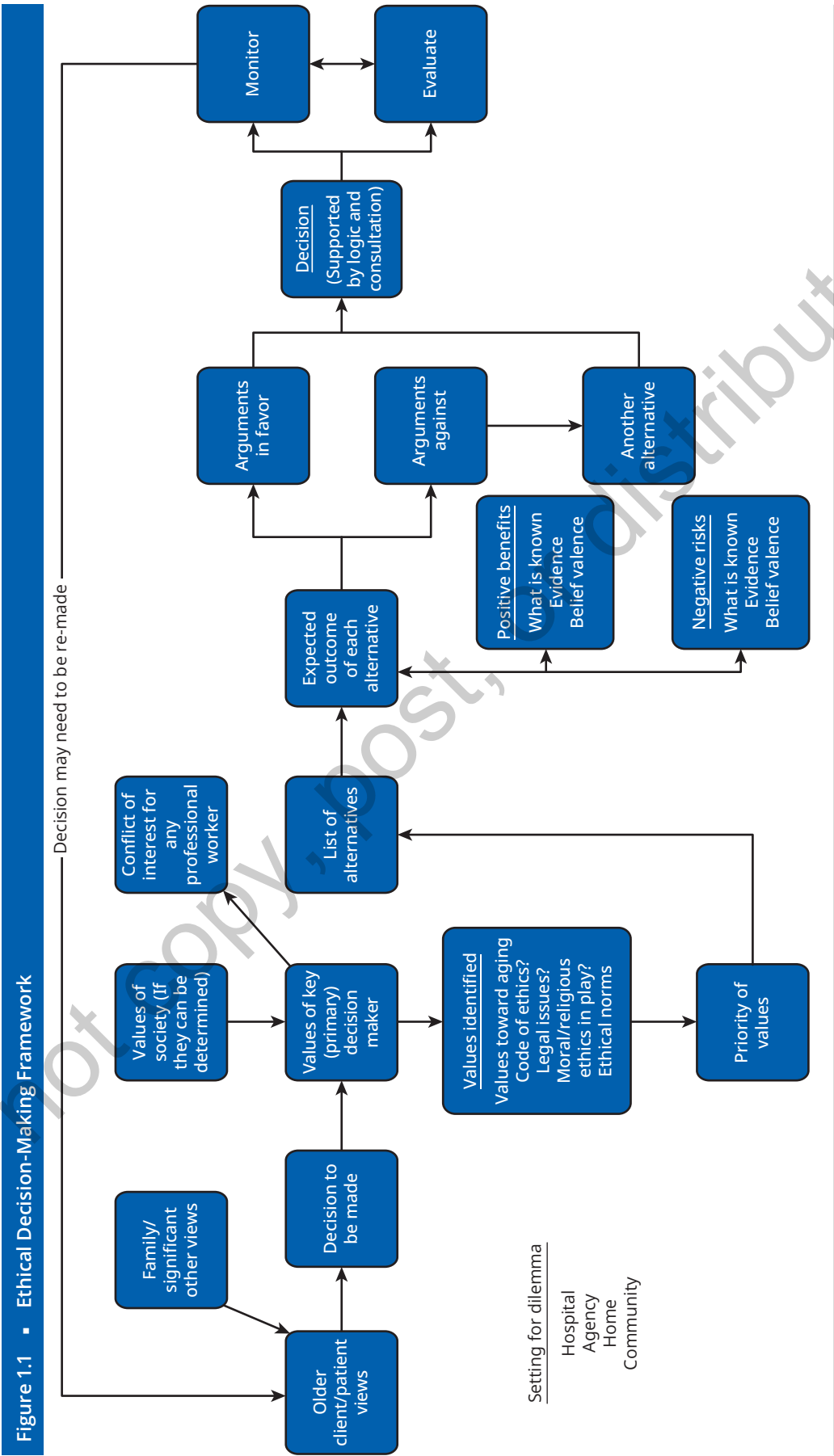
Social workers must be cognizant of four distinct sets of requirements and guidelines: constitutional law, common law, executive orders, and statutory law. And social workers' decisions should be morally defensible and aligned with the ethical standards of the social work profession (Reamer, 2023). For example, in New Jersey, hospital-based and MSW-degreed social worker Mike may assist inpatient clients with discharge planning, information, and referral; however, without his LCSW credential, Mike is not legally able to bill patients additionally for the time he spends assessing and counseling. In Florida, mental health social worker Jessica finds that the LMSW credential she received in New York will not suffice; by virtue of Florida law, practicing social workers must possess an LCSW credential and complete and document a specific number of continuing education credits in HIV and domestic violence before they can practice and bill insurance companies in the state.

Social Work Practice

The social work profession has a dual purpose and responsibility of supporting individual and social change. Knowledge from a variety of disciplines, integrated from formal classes and personal learning, helps social workers assess complex situations and determine effective interventions. Many people benefit from and appreciate these interventions, and our society is better for them. However, social work professionals often work with individuals and organizations that are not ready for or capable of change. So social workers also have to use such practice skills as assessing, strategizing, brokering, collaborating, intervening, linking, listening, motivating, and responding in their professional lives. The broker role is a function of social workers in which client systems are helped to identify, locate, and link available community resources and community segments are linked with one another to enhance their mutual interests. Linking is a procedure used in group therapy and social work with groups and clients to encourage relating more closely. In addition, they must be ready to pose alternative solutions, seek consensus, negotiate, and mediate (Liu & Thien, 2024; Thien & Liu, 2024). It is no wonder that social work is considered a “doing” profession and that it is taught through experiential approaches such as service learning, internships, and field education.

The multidimensional approach to social work education gives graduates at all levels the knowledge and skills they need to work in a variety of settings at various levels of practice. It also helps them prepare for a professional career that offers much personal satisfaction and a promising future, with many opportunities to grow, advance, and blaze new paths.

Social workers must act ethically and help clients make decisions that are ethical. Author Holly Nelson-Becker (2018) has developed an ethical decision-making framework to help practicing social workers think through how to “do ethics” for particular clients (see Figure 1.1). The framework considers the context or setting of the dilemma, the type of client, values, and risks.



Source: Nelson-Becker (2018, p. 68).

Social Work Roles and Settings

Traditionally, social workers have provided charity, created agencies and resources, developed or advocated for policy changes, and delivered services to people and communities in socioeconomic distress. Historically, as Chapter 2 describes, they have been key to the development of social welfare policies, such as child labor laws, fair pay and work condition standards, and services for older people and those with health or mental health challenges. Today, the main purpose of social work remains much the same: to empower people to grow and live healthy, productive, and meaningful lives. Social workers accomplish this purpose by working directly with people, organizations, communities, and government entities and by advocating for societal change. Most people who consider a career in social work do so because they want to work with people and make a difference.

Social workers' activities within their practice are more diverse than ever. They support people to increase their capacities for problem solving and coping. They assist people to obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between people and their environments, and change organizational responsiveness to people. Social workers are also professional social activists or advocates, working to influence, develop, and evaluate social policies and legislation affecting clients and their communities (Krueger et al., 2022). Here are some examples of the broad array of practice activities they might undertake:

- Presenting people with ideas and relevant research findings on how to raise and nurture children through training and small-group meetings
- Caring for older adults through case management services and visits to residential facilities, senior centers, and hospice facilities
- Offering private counseling to couples with relationship issues
- Modeling how to maintain constructive, safe, and caring households through in-home visits and courses with family members
- Advocating for policy changes within institutions and local, state and national governments, and for supporting the rights of persons advocating for themselves, by organizing and leading meetings or writing letters and articles
- Advocating with the national government for service members and veterans by writing position papers, speaking in public forums, and testifying before committees

Social workers undertake these activities in a wide variety of settings: medical facilities, government and nonprofit agencies, corrections facilities, home health and long-term care settings, state and federal government, schools, community-based mental health agencies, faith-based organizations, the military, service member and veterans' programs, corporations, and private practice. Social workers may also find employment in banks, theater groups, law firms, community gardens, police stations, and international agencies (Gabbrill, 1997; Gibleman, 1995; Lightfoot & Zheng, 2021; Singer, 2009).

Levels of Practice

No matter the precise setting, social workers also categorize their work on the basis of the **level of practice**, or the size of the client system with which they intervene: micro, mezzo/meso, or macro. Table 1.3 delineates these three levels, with examples of each (Gasker, 2023). The issues that enter into practice at each level are discussed in Chapter 3.

Professional social workers often operate on multiple intervention levels. Certainly, across a career, a professional social worker is likely to experience all three levels of practice. In addition, rarely does a situation involve only one level at a time. For instance, a woman who has been sexually assaulted on campus and feels traumatized may need individual counseling, and the social worker may also schedule

Table 1.3 ■ Levels of Practice		
Level	Subject of Intervention	Examples
Micro	Individual or couple	Counseling a traumatized person who has been raped or a couple who are debating divorce
Mezzo/meso	Family, group, or organization	Facilitating a cancer support group or delivering a presentation on the needs of military families
Macro	Community or society	Working for a political campaign or advocating for legislative changes

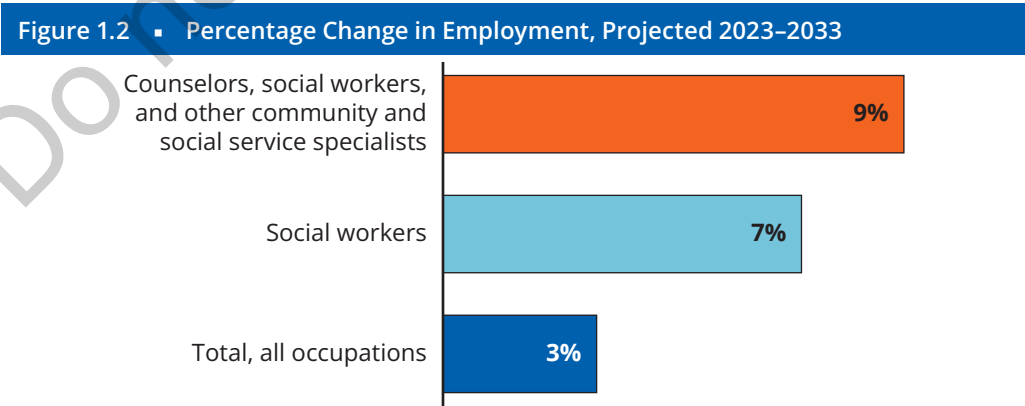
a meeting with her and her parent(s) or guardian(s) to ensure that they are sensitive to the woman’s concerns; the social worker may also intervene with campus authorities (e.g., the Title IX officer) to appropriately and ethically alert officials to a problem that may affect other students and the need for specialized campus programming and services.

Social Work as a Career Opportunity

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), the median annual wage for social workers was \$61,330 in 2024. The lowest 10% earned less than \$41,850, and the highest 10% earned more than \$99,500. In social work, the pay varies depending on where you work. For example, salaries for BSW-degreed social workers may start lower at nonprofit agencies than at government-funded child welfare agencies. In order of annual median wages from high to low, these industries employ the most social workers:

- 1. Individual and family services
- 2. Local government, excluding education and hospitals
- 3. State government, excluding education and hospitals
- 4. Educational services; state, local, and private
- 5. Community food and housing, emergency and other relief services, and vocational rehabilitation services

The overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 7% from 2023 to 2033, much faster than the average for all occupations (see Figure 1.2). Increased demand for health care and social services will drive demand for social workers, but growth will vary by specialization.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2025).

Employment of child, family, and school social workers is projected to grow 5% from 2023 to 2032 (see Table 1.4), faster than the average for all occupations. Child and family social workers will be needed to work with families to strengthen parenting skills, prevent child abuse, and identify alternative homes for children who are unable to live with their biological families. In schools, more social workers will be needed as student enrollments rise. However, employment growth of child, family, and school social workers may be limited by federal, state, and local budget constraints.

Table 1.4 ■ Employment Projection Data for Social Workers, 2023–2033			
Occupational Title	Number Employed, 2023	Projected Number Employed, 2033	Percentage Change, 2023–2033
Social workers	751,900	806,600	7
Child, family, and school social workers	365,900	383,800	5
Health care social workers	193,200	211,900	10
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	123,700	138,100	12
Social workers, all other	69,000	72,800	5

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2025).

Employment of health care social workers is projected to grow 10% from 2023 to 2033, much faster than the average for all occupations. Health care social workers will continue to be needed to help aging populations and their families adjust to new treatments, medications, and lifestyles.

Employment of mental health and substance use social workers is projected to grow 12% from 2023 to 2033, much faster than the average for all occupations. Employment will grow as more people seek treatment for psychological disorders and substance use disorder. In addition, people arrested for drug offenses are increasingly being sent to treatment programs, which are staffed by these social workers, rather than being sent to jail.

Table 1.5 illustrates the median income a graduate-prepared social worker might earn, depending on their role and position. Keep in mind, however, that lower salaries may be offset by more opportunities to learn quickly about community resources, as is often the case when working for a nonprofit agency.

Table 1.5 ■ Social Work Income by Role and Education						
In your principal position, what best describes your role?	BSW		MSW			
	Mean Income	Median Income (in thousands)	<i>n</i>	Mean Income	Median Income (in thousands)	<i>n</i>
Indirect social work	N/A	\$35–\$39	N/A	\$45,385	\$40–\$44	26
Direct work with individuals, families, or groups	\$29,392	\$30–\$34	37	\$44,412	\$40–\$44	633
Direct work with communities	\$43,333	\$35–\$39	6	\$45,588	\$40–\$44	17
A position for which you believe a social work education provides relevant preparation	N/A	\$30–\$34	N/A	\$40,278	\$35–\$39	9

Source: Council on Social Work Education (2020).

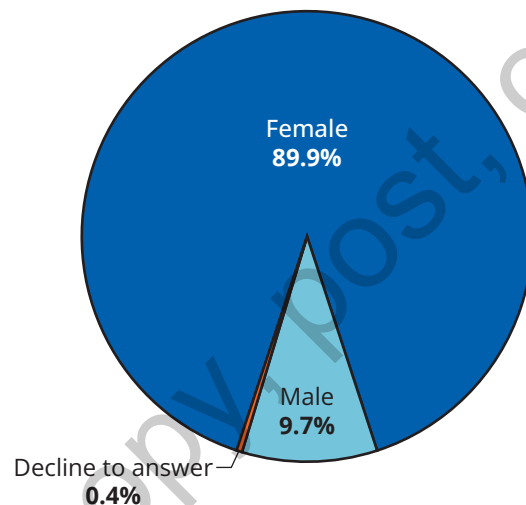
Note: Figures are for those working in positions as social workers, including positions not requiring a social work degree or license. Median income is from unweighted data.

MSW-degreed social workers will find interesting opportunities in coming years in the following specialties: aging, public welfare, child welfare, justice, corrections, school social work, health care, employment/occupational social work, developmental challenges, community organization, mental health/clinical social work, management/administration, international social work, research, politics, policy and planning, adoption and foster care agencies, private practice, employee assistance programs, advocacy and coalition groups, domestic violence agencies, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, nursing homes/skilled nursing homes, homelessness and hunger advocacy networks, women's shelters, long-term care facilities, military counseling offices, assisted-living facilities, senior centers, and social and human services centers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2025).

The pie chart shown in Figure 1.3 illustrates how many social workers identify as women versus how many identify as men. This striking difference reveals the disproportionate representation of women in the social work profession. The actual reasons for gender imbalances in social work are complex. As a profession, it has a lower status and salary range than some comparable occupations. Gender biases about caring roles being better suited to women may apply (Galley, 2014).

Figure 1.3 ■ Percentage of Social Workers by Gender, 2020

What sex were you assigned at birth?



Source: Council on Social Work Education (2020).

The social work profession will also offer ample opportunity for creativity and innovative solutions in the future. Developments in scientific knowledge, technologies, and the economy will continually shape our world, as will globalization, the changing natural environment, and a population that is growing older. Social workers' broad education and versatile skills will help ensure the flexibility needed in the world's changing landscape.

One appealing aspect of professional social work is that it reflects social and technological trends. These are some of the areas that promise to provide interesting challenges and opportunities for social workers in the next few years:

- **Teaching and learning:** Outstanding communication skills are more essential than ever. Advocating for the need for client access to, and instruction in the use of, digital technologies is essential. Streaming videos can inform clients about anger management, substance use interventions, or assistive devices to use at home. Online webinars can provide social work professionals with cutting-edge knowledge about mental health or health care reform.

- **Research:** Genetic counseling and neuroscience are burgeoning sciences that some social workers are embracing. **Cultural neuroscience** endeavors to understand how culture, beliefs, practices, and values get embedded within neurobiological systems through socialization. Its goal is to show how our brain is shaped by and responds to our sociocultural environment. Research that studies the meaning and nature of work is also vitally needed to inform social work practice. For example, one social work study comparing younger (ages 19 to 34) and older workers found that each group attached diverse meanings to the concept of “work” (Lelkes et al., 2021). In direct practice, social workers should ask which activities qualify as work and which sociocultural and situational factors influence the general public’s interpretations of work.
- **Services:** Social work has a tradition of charity and service. In the future, social workers will need to become expert navigators and literate interpreters of services that are becoming digitized and being offered as part of a virtual marketplace, so that they can work with clients to address their needs. Just as previous generations of social workers adopted cultural competency, social workers now and in the future will need to embrace technical literacy (Belluomini, 2013; McInroy, 2021). In addition, social work practitioners are increasingly offering e-therapy interventions.
- **Social work education:** Social media and technology are radically changing social work pedagogy. Some graduate programs are now offered completely online. Social work education has also become part of the global marketplace (Askeland & Payne, 2006; Garrett, 2009; Gasker, 2023; McInroy, 2021). Those who have the resources to produce and distribute social work literature digitally and through social media are able to disseminate their theoretical views and skills throughout the world. Online social work programs may be especially valuable for addressing the educational needs of rural and other remote geographical areas in need of social workers.

Current Trends

Lifestyle and Technological Change

Technology is very much a part of our daily lives. Social work practice has changed along with technology. It’s important to recognize the differences in how social work services are offered and how social workers engage with clients.

1. How will ever-changing technology likely influence your lifestyle and educational experience? What possible positive and negative consequences do you think technology has had on social work practice and policy? And how can reliance on technology for services and program implementation negatively affect economically challenged people and areas, especially persons of color?
2. What social work–related apps or e-therapy resources do you or your professors and internship supervisors know of or use on a regular basis? How helpful do you think these resources are to social workers or to people engaged in social work services?
3. If you had the opportunity to design a social work–related app or online service, what would it be, and who would it advantage and/or disadvantage?

Time to Think 1.4

If your friends or parents said to you, “Social work doesn’t pay well. Why don’t you major in nursing, psychology, or criminal justice?” how would you respond? How will social work prepare you to work with people and social problems differently than other professions would?

Summary

Social workers are professionals who help individuals, families, groups, agencies and organizations, and communities through planned change. They work with people across the lifespan and across socioeconomic levels. They often work with people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and who seek assistance with basic needs like food, housing, and health and mental health services. Social workers may also work within the local, state, or national political system, as when social workers serve as policy planners and program evaluators. Whatever the employment situation, social workers are advocates for and champions of economic and social justice.

Social workers can obtain employment in multiple settings, including traditional social service agencies as well as courts and correctional settings; schools; the military; offices and factories; hospitals; mental health agencies; child and family welfare agencies; long-term care settings; addiction treatment centers; homeless shelters; nonprofit advocacy programs; local, state, and federal government agencies; and legislative bodies. Social workers are found wherever services and policies intersect with the needs and wants of people.

No matter where social workers are employed, common skills and responsibilities exist across the profession:

- Providing services to support change, not only in the individual but also in their environment
- Having a knowledge and understanding of human relationships and the environment
- Improving the problem-solving, coping, and development capacities of all people
- Serving as a broker by connecting individuals with resources
- Engaging and communicating with diverse populations and groups of all sizes
- Creating and maintaining professional helping relationships
- Advocating for individual clients, larger causes impacting clients, and/or community change to solve identified problems

Employment prospects and opportunities to offer volunteer services for graduates with BSW or MSW degrees, who learn these skills through classroom learning and field education, offer a bright and meaningful future.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the values and beliefs of social workers? How do social workers put their values and beliefs into action?
2. Why is self-awareness and understanding so important for becoming a social worker?
3. Imagine that you meet a man who felt neglected as a child because his parents divorced and his father was an abusive alcoholic. As this man ages, he has choices. At one end of the spectrum, he may continue the cycle of addiction, drink heavily, and also become abusive. At the other end, he may choose never, ever to drink alcohol and become the most responsible person in all his relationships, always trying to please others. If you grew up in a family where alcohol was never around or was drunk only in moderation, how would you relate to and help this man?
4. What characteristics do you possess that make you behave ethically? Think of a time when perhaps you or someone you know did not act ethically. What was the rationale for the unethical behavior? Looking back, was that a good rationale? Why or why not?
5. What are the differences in where a BSW social worker and an MSW social worker might work and in how they might practice?

Exercises

1. What is important to you in a career? Interview a social worker, and then interview a sociologist, a psychologist, or another human service professional. Compare and contrast their roles and responsibilities. Ask about their level of education and how quickly they got a job working with people after graduation.
2. How would you respond to people (clients) who are economically disadvantaged, struggling with health and/or mental health, substance use, and/or experiencing a specific form of discrimination? Find out more about these population groups: Read articles or stories; watch a movie; listen to a podcast or watch news programs; or interview social workers who work with people who are oppressed and/or disadvantaged, who struggle with an addiction, or who have a psychological disorder. Then record your thoughts and feelings about working with people who are vulnerable and in need of services. For example, here are some of the questions you might explore in a few relevant movies:
 - a. *Losing Isaiah*: What was your reaction to this transracial adoption?
 - b. *Maria Full of Grace*: What do you think about how drug and sex trafficking was portrayed?
 - c. *Uncle Frank*: How much do you think attitudes toward gay men have changed in small, rural towns in southern areas of the United States?
 - d. *Beautiful Boy*: How much empathy do you feel for the meth user and his family?
3. What workplace features or career goals are most important to you? With which clients might you most like or dislike to work?
4. On the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website (<https://www.bls.gov/>), find the range of salaries for social workers in your local area or state. Compare salaries across practice settings, such as aging, child welfare, corrections, health, mental health, and school social work. Then compare the salaries for entry-level BSWs and advanced-practice MSWs.
5. Read one of Dr. Brené Brown's books (e.g., *Atlas of the Heart*, *Dare to Lead*, *Rising Strong* or *Braving the Wilderness*) and consider the importance of learning how to be both courageous and vulnerable.
6. Developmental psychologist (and first Black president of the American Psychological Association) Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark, are credited with enhancing understanding about gender and race by studying children's responses to doll selection. (To learn more about the study design, see CUNY Academic Commons, n.d.; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, n.d.) What do you think the results would be if this study were replicated today?

Key Terms

advocacy	intersectionality
advocate	level of practice
bachelor of social work (BSW)	life stage
Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)	master of social work (MSW)
cultural competence	NASW Code of Ethics
cultural neuroscience	National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
culture	norms
Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)	private practice
ethnicity	profession
evidence-based practice	race
field education	self-awareness
generalist practitioners	social work
human needs, rights, and values	social workers
	socioeconomic status (SES)

Chapter 2

The History of Social Work



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Learning Objectives

- 2.1 List several forces shaping the American social welfare system and social policy.
- 2.2 Describe the role of social welfare in early America.
- 2.3 Define the role of social welfare during the Progressive Era and World War I.
- 2.4 State the influence of the Great Depression and World War II on social welfare programs.
- 2.5 Highlight the impact America's War on Poverty had on social welfare.
- 2.6 Describe the influence of U.S. presidents on social welfare programs and policies.
- 2.7 Explain why social welfare policies that address people's immediate needs are often inadequate for promoting equity and social justice.

Jalen Coordinates Food Pantries

With a bachelor of social work (BSW) degree, Jalen is a licensed social worker who coordinates a network of food pantries in a rural Midwest county. Daily he works with county residents to both secure food donations and assist with food distribution. Over time, Jalen noticed that people are often unclear where pantries are located and when they are open. After organizing a meeting with pantry participants and food donors, Jalen realized that essential reliable pantry information was a pressing issue. With documented comments in hand, Jalen worked with participants and donors on a county pantry information handout. Included on the handout were pantry addresses, hours of operation, contact information, services offered, and eligibility requirements. The handout was distributed in schools, faith-based organizations, medical centers, social service agencies, and day care centers. Through collaborations, county residents petitioned their elected officials to expand the public transportation to the pantries on their days of operation.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight social work history, collaborations, and advocacy matters. Specifically, studying the individuals, landmark decisions, and political environments that comprise the history of social welfare and the development of the social work profession contributes to a liberal arts foundation that extends beyond the memorization of facts, dates, and events. You will discover that the profession's history introduces you to social welfare policy and the practice of social work and to U.S. politics, diverse and marginalized groups, social reform movements, leadership strengths and weaknesses, and critical thinking. Perhaps most important, you will begin to consider how history can guide your development as an advocate for clients and causes, someone who challenges social injustices.

The history of U.S. social welfare policy is a progression of dynamic events, leading incrementally to an expanded role for government in the human pursuit of the things needed to survive and even thrive. Examining the history of social work will help you consider two key points: (1) the influence of political, social, and economic forces on policy development and (2) the parallel development of social welfare policy and the social work profession.

When reading about Jalen's work in food pantries, consider when you have collaborated and advocated for change in your own life or in the lives of others. Are there currently small- and large-scale events in your life and the world around you when you feel collaboration and advocacy are needed? If so, take a moment to consider how advocacy and social change are intrinsically linked to you and many other people.

Social Welfare

A critical concept in the history of social work is **social welfare**, or the array of governmental programs, services, and institutions designed to maintain the stability and well-being of society (Stern, 2017). Social welfare requires both a common understanding and a formal arrangement between a government and its people. From this relationship, people have a sense of what they should receive for and contribute to their well-being. Social welfare reflects the beliefs and values of a nation. It involves the allocation of resources such as money, personnel, and expertise.

Take a moment to consider the services that citizens of the United States receive from the government. The list you generate might include education, transportation systems, national defense, and mental and health services. All these services support people's well-being, and all could be considered social welfare. Despite this broad perspective, social welfare issues are often hotly debated and central to local, state, and national politics. They are tied up with social trends, political ideologies, and notions of social control and social justice.

Social Welfare Policy

The services and programs made available to certain people for a specified period, based on established criteria, are the product of **social welfare policy**. Ever-changing social, economic, and political

environments influence policy development and implementation, so the services associated with social welfare policy are constantly changing. Depending on events, the role of government in improving people's lives also expands and contracts. For example, during the 1960s, when the United States experienced considerable public unrest associated with urban migration, urban violence, persistent poverty, discrimination, and an increasingly unpopular war, there was a significant expansion of support to people in need and an increase in the civil rights of a large spectrum of the nation's population.

In the United States, social welfare policies are generally intended to provide a **safety net** for citizens, services that protect people from spiraling downward economically or socially. Eligibility for safety net services depends on meeting specific criteria or **means testing**. Means testing assesses whether the individual or family possesses the means or financial resources to do without a particular kind of help. If not, the government will help for a designated period. Unfortunately, this assistance often produces only a temporary bounce upward and does little to improve the person's or family's security and overall status in life.

Decisions regarding the direction of social welfare policy in the United States and worldwide are always being made. Your conclusions on any given issue depend on your personal values, vision of society, and sense of fairness in the redistribution of resources. How you think about policy issues reflects your political, social, religious, and economic ideologies. It is also likely to reflect your biases and values. Here are some current examples of policy-related questions for you to consider:

- Should we assist people in need through direct cash transfers or through services, through a combination of the two, or through a new approach that guarantees a universal standard of living?
- Which programs should be funded by local revenues, which by states, and which by federal revenues?
- What is the role of the faith-based community in providing social services?
- Does race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status impact policy decision making?
- What social-economic factors, such as recessions, pandemics, social movements (e.g., protests and boycotts), and wars, influence policy creation and development?
- How do social welfare policies in the United States affect or influence the policies of other nations? How can the social welfare policies of other nations guide the United States?

For social workers, social welfare policy is extremely important. It defines the profession's clients, specifies what services will be made available to designated populations, describes how services will be delivered, outlines the duration of services, and indicates how intervention outcomes will be evaluated and measured.

In the United States, political ideology has a great deal of influence on how people feel about the social safety net. People with **conservative** political leanings tend to favor personal responsibility for one's own well-being over any form of government support or federally sponsored relief. The underlying premise is that people who are self-supporting and/or in the top echelon of society have worked hard, made smart choices, and earned their lot in life; similarly, people in economic distress have caused their own problems and should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps."

Conservative political platforms often take firm stances against taxation (federal income tax, Social Security taxes, inheritance taxes, state income taxes, and local levies), which is often the general revenue source for many social welfare programs. More specifically, many conservative politicians and



U.S. citizens can benefit from social welfare programs that maintain the well-being and stability of society.

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Soup kitchens offer sustenance to many clients served by social workers.

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their constituents are of the opinion that the nation's income tax system is counterproductive and undermines a free-enterprise, market-oriented economic system. Usually, conservatives oppose any form of graduated tax rates, which raise the percentage of taxes paid, or the tax rate, as a person's income increases. They tend to think this so-called progressive program of taxation and government intervention places an unfair burden on businesspeople and entrepreneurs, who create economic expansion, employment opportunities, and the promise of subsequent wealth.

Liberal politicians also support a capitalist, free-market form of government, but for the most part they have a different view of the role of the federal government in social welfare. Liberals typically support a more robust safety net for economically and socially disadvantaged people, one that attempts to address social issues through moderate or incremental forms of social intervention and change.

Generally, liberals support various types of checks and balances within government, as well as regulatory and protective policies to help ensure fair competition in the marketplace.

As for taxes, liberals usually want a tax structure that rewards the work of people rather than the profits to be made through financial investment. Liberal leaders also argue that the nation's tax code favors the wealthy through unique tax breaks and loopholes. As a result, middle-class workers and families are seen as often paying proportionately higher taxes than those from the upper class. Liberals generally want to help distribute more wealth, services, and resources to people toward the lower end of the nation's socioeconomic structure.

Radicalism in the United States can lean toward a conservative or liberal perspective. For example, radical conservatism is often referred to as the radical right or as right-wing. In general, this perspective supports limited government at all levels, few regulations related to business, minimal taxes, and a powerful national defense system (Graham, 2020). Important also is the idea that radical conservatism suggests that individuals should be responsible for their well-being. Thus, radical conservatism assumes that people should be able to address their personal needs in a self-sufficient manner without reliance on the government.

From a liberal posture, radicalism, or the so-called far left, is usually supportive of government regulations and services to enhance overall social and economic equality. In some situations, members of the far left advocate for far-reaching changes, such as universal health care and tuition-free college (Viser, 2019). Advocating for higher taxes for those in the upper economic brackets is often associated with the far left, as are policies that ensure a standard of living throughout the life cycle.

Spotlight on Advocacy

Senator Barbara Mikulski, who retired in 2016, was the first woman to serve in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. As a graduate of the School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore, Senator Mikulski spent her life committed to services for children and women.

The longest-serving woman in the history of Congress, the Baltimore native represented Maryland in the House of Representatives for 10 years, starting in 1977, and was first elected to the Senate in 1986. She began her career as an elected official on the Baltimore City Council, where she spent 5 years before being elected to Congress.

Her training as a social worker provided a foundation for her approach to both the political arena and public office. Specifically, Senator Mikulski advocated for the rights of clients and constituents, as seen in the voice and representation she gave them. Through her work as a social worker, Senator Mikulski recognized the life issues faced by communities and individuals reflect systemic and policy issues rather than individual deficits. Thus, Senator Mikulski viewed

the political arena as social work with power while maintaining a connection between needs and service (Johns Hopkins University, 2024).

1. What does Senator Mikulski's career tell you about possible political paths for social workers?
2. Is there a cause you feel strongly about? If so, what time, energy, and other resources are you willing to dedicate to see the outcome you desire?
3. What other advocates stand out in your mind, and why?

Time to Think 2.1

Read through the definitions of the conservative, liberal, and radical political perspectives again. Where do you consider your political leanings to be, and why? What are the influences that point you in a particular political direction? What factors (e.g., age, ability, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social-economic status, religion) contribute to your political position?

Social Control

The nation's social welfare system raises issues of **social control**, those policies and practices designed to regulate people and increase conformity and compliance in their behavior. Some people see social control as a motive embedded in social welfare policy (Stern, 2017; Trattner, 1999). They suggest that many of the social welfare policies of the 1960s provided people experiencing poverty with government housing, food stamps, and other kinds of relief in place of training and employment opportunities. Thus, reliance on the government increased while inequities in education and unemployment went unchecked (Stern, 2017; Trattner, 1999). Some would argue that these policies kept people socially controlled and regulated and separated from the rest of society, locked into unemployment, underemployment, and substandard living conditions (Harrington, 1962).

Social workers are positioned to build on individual and structural strengths while addressing inequality and connecting to larger-scale change. The involvement of social workers in the policy arena helps our society address individual needs and confront social control—and perhaps shift or redistribute economic and political power so that the people can better help themselves.

Social Justice

Social workers share the common goal of **social justice**: the endless effort to protect human rights, address socioeconomic inequality and oppression from discrimination, and provide for everyone's human needs, such as safety, housing, food, education, and health care, particularly for those people in greatest need. The goal of social justice is what motivates social workers to be advocates. As you will learn, there are many forms of advocacy; however, here we are concerned with the advocacy that social workers undertake to challenge the "what is" in society with the "what should be" (Cohen et al., 2001). Although this form of advocacy reflects the political, economic, and social environment in which it is conducted, some goals are consistent among social advocates across time and circumstance:

- *Fairness*: All citizens have the right to access resources and opportunities.
- *Equality*: All people are entitled to human rights without regard to race, gender, age, economic or educational status, sexual orientation, ability, or other distinguishing features.
- *Freedom*: People share the need for independent thought and a sense of security.
- *Service*: The most socially and economically disadvantaged people of any society deserve the most commitment.
- *Nonviolence*: A peaceful approach to collaboration, mediation, or negotiation is more respectful of others' rights than is any form of violence.

If you choose to become a social worker, you will recontextualize many of these goals of social advocacy in response to your personal and professional experiences. For example, if you work with children with special needs, your collaboration with parents and advocacy with the school board or elected community council might involve soliciting support for adaptive playground equipment or appropriate library resources that enhance growth and opportunities for all children.

The Role of Social Welfare in Early America

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Native people lived across the American continent in a range of environments with distinct cultures. From 1607 to 1754, the first English settlers began establishing communities in close proximity to Native Americans. The nation's initial conflicts were intrinsically linked with the desire for freedom and rights for both colonists and Native Americans. It is from the United States' historical attempts to address social and political issues that social welfare and the profession of social work emerged.

The history of social welfare in the United States is reflected in the emergence of the social work profession. Specifically, social and environmental issues confronted by various population groups in the United States (e.g., poverty, unemployment, discrimination, war, oppression, and the like) have helped shape the response of human services and social programs, as well as the nature of social work as a profession.

The history of social work and social welfare can be divided into a series of policy eras, designated by landmark policy decisions and initiatives. Considering history in this way integrates the development of social work with a series of social and political issues and environmental factors that have affected what the nation has been willing and able to do for its citizens' welfare. The advocacy of social workers has helped ensure a degree of social justice when the government has addressed social concerns.

Colonial America: 1607 to 1783

The early settlers who came to the United States carried with them the traditions, customs, and values of their countries of origin. Because most of the colonists were from England, they conceptualized and sought to address social problems such as poverty as they would have in England.

In colonial America, welfare assistance took the form of **mutual aid**; colonists relied on one another in times of need. It was the community's responsibility to aid when an individual experienced a hardship such as a disease or home fire. Relatives and neighbors responded with the necessary assistance until the crisis passed or was somehow resolved. As churches took root in the colonies, they too would aid people. Overall, the public attitude toward people experiencing hardship was respectful and benevolent, particularly because the harsh living conditions of the colonies placed all the colonists potentially in harm's way.

Although the initial systems of colonial assistance were informal and limited to settlers, the severe economic and environmental conditions experienced by the settlers prompted a more complex system of welfare assistance. The colonists turned to the principles outlined in the **Elizabethan Poor Laws**, which were instituted in England in 1601 (Bridges, 2017; Axinn & Stern, 2005). These laws were a response to social and economic forces associated with the breakdown of England's feudal system, the reduction of the labor force, and industrialization, which increased the need for healthy workers. Further, the laws stipulated that taxes would be levied to finance welfare assistance (Stern, 2017).

A concept underpinning the Elizabethan Poor Laws, and the poor laws of colonial America, was the distinction between the **deserving poor** and the **nondeserving poor** (Bridges, 2017; Hansan, 2011; Tice & Perkins, 2002). The deserving poor often faced debilitating physical conditions; consequently, through no fault of their own they could not provide for themselves. In contrast, the nondeserving poor were able-bodied vagrants or drunkards, judged as lazy and unwilling to work for a living. Thus, work and a person's capability or willingness to be self-sustaining through work became an integral part of the U.S. social welfare system (Stern, 2017).

Settlement laws were another feature of the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Designed to control the distribution of public assistance, the settlement laws were the domain of parishes (small units of government centered on a church) and required proof of residence for the receipt of assistance. They were implemented throughout the 13 colonies as a standard requirement for receiving welfare assistance and as a method for localities to monitor the cost of such assistance.

The colonists adopted other forms of assistance from the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Laws that defined how relief was provided to poor people. **Outdoor relief** aided the deserving poor, those people who were unable to work due to age, health conditions, or physical challenges (Bridges, 2017). Outdoor relief was provided in homes and communities; **indoor relief** aided people in institutions where the nondeserving poor were sent to work (Stern, 2017; Rothman, 1971).

The roots of the U.S. slavery system began with indentured servants who were brought from Britain as laborers. As colonial America began to develop and prosper, so did the demand for indentured servants, who were used for manual labor throughout the colonies. During the early 1600s approximately 300,000 European immigrants arrived in colonial America as indentured servants. Some indentured servants agreed to work for at least 7 years in return for their passage to America. However, others were in debt or were deemed criminals and were forced to work as indentured servants to pay for their debts or crimes (Morgan, 2001).

The cost of indentured servants escalated with demand, and servants were increasingly difficult to find. As early as 1619, in response to the growing need for labor, the first enslaved African people were brought to the colonies (Morgan, 2001). Thus, from the onset, enslavement in colonial America was integrally linked to profit. Because tobacco and other crops required physical labor to plant and harvest, using enslaved people as both planters and harvesters translated to high profit yields at low costs.

Time to Think 2.2

After reading the definitions of outdoor and indoor relief, consider examples of those service perspectives today. For example, what perspective does the Meals on Wheels program represent? What about mental health or long-term care facilities? What are the influences of the Elizabethan Poor Laws and colonial America on current issues in social policies and services?

Nineteenth-Century America: 1784 to 1890

During the 1800s, the U.S. population expanded westward in search of gold, silver, fur trapping, and cheap land. This significant migration was supported by the idea of Manifest Destiny, or the duty to spread American values and culture across the country to the Pacific Ocean. Although Native people had lived in North America for thousands of years, the settlers often saw them as impediments to progress. Consequently, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 took land from Native people, relocating them to new and often unfamiliar territories.

For the settlers, mutual aid remained and expanded as the main source of help to those in need. An example of this expansion is the orphan trains that ran from about 1853 to the early 1900s, transporting more than 120,000 children, who were often abandoned and alone, from urban centers to 45 states across the country, as well as to Canada and Mexico. This controversial and unusual social experiment marked the beginning of the foster care concept in the United States.

The 1800s also saw the rise of advocacy on behalf of people who had recently immigrated to the United States or who were challenged because of physical or mental conditions. Such people often faced unjust, inhumane, and harsh treatment. Early advocates often tried to change the living conditions and injustices that were created by local and governmental policies, ordinances, and rules. For example, Dorothea Dix was a social activist who lobbied state and federal governments in the mid-1800s to create asylums for those who had mental health challenges, especially those who had no other homes (Chu et al., 2018).

Advocacy also occurred as social workers became politically active and promoted legislation to protect children from oppressive labor practices and adolescents from severely punitive juvenile court systems. Activism by social workers eventually extended to the advancement of the rights of children, workers, women, older adults, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Advocacy measures did not often apply to enslaved people. In 1808, under the terms of the Constitution, the importation of enslaved people to the United States ended. However, what emerged was a domestic trading industry of enslaved people built on the sale of children and kidnapping of free Black Americans. When enslaved people escaped from this system, Southern enslavers could not count on Northern law enforcement to assist them. The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 were passed to require the return of escaped enslaved people to their owners, even if they were in a free state, and levied punishments for interfering in their capture. The Fugitive Slave Acts were among the most controversial laws of the early 19th century.

The life situation of Black Americans was highlighted in the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case of 1857, popularly known as the Dred Scott case. Scott claimed that he, his wife, and his two daughters should be granted freedom because they had lived for 4 years in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where enslavement was illegal.

The United States Supreme Court decided 7–2 against Scott, finding that neither he nor any other person of African ancestry could become citizens of the United States. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney had hoped the case would settle issues related to enslavement and Congressional authority. However, what occurred was public outrage, tensions between the Northern and Southern states, and the onset of the U.S. Civil War. The Dred Scott decision was eventually nullified by President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

The Progressive Era and World War I

As the nation moved into a new century, immigrants from around the world came to the United States in search of opportunities and to build communities in the developing cities across the country. Immigrants also fled their countries of origin because of political strife and war. Eventually, the international turmoil resulted in the United States' involvement in World War I.

The Progressive Era: 1890 to 1920

By the end of the 1800s, the nation was rapidly urbanizing. There was an enormous influx of immigrants, and the economy was shifting from being agriculture and resource based to being industry based. These massive social disruptions led to the economic crisis of the 1890s. There was growing awareness in the United States of the value of social reform.

For Native people and immigrants from China or Mexico, this period was marked by governmental efforts to assimilate them into “white society” through language and religious conversions, boarding schools for children, and land grants with the hope they would become farmers (Holm, 2005). Such efforts largely failed as diverse populations maintained their unique identity, customs, and traditions.

Some of the reformers of this era astutely recognized that documentation of human need through written records was a vital component of advocacy for new policies, practices, and laws. They further realized that the public and government decision makers could be influenced by numbers, categorizations, and qualitative accounts and descriptions of social phenomena. Importantly, they laid the foundation in social work practice for modern data-collection systems, comprehensive community needs assessments, and precise descriptions of human conditions.

At the same time, two new social welfare movements—the Charity Organization Society and the settlement movement—emerged for dealing with dependency and issues of need (Hansan,

2013; Reisch, 1998). Each offered a significant contribution to the development of the social work profession.

The **Charity Organization Society (COS)** was imported from England to the United States in 1877. The COS focused on the individual factors related to poverty, such as alcoholism, work habits, and money management. In general, the COS asked a family requesting relief to complete an application, which was investigated to ensure a level of need. Then a **friendly visitor**, a volunteer committed to helping COS clients, was assigned to the family and asked to conduct regular home visits. Friendly visitors would attempt to address individual character flaws and encourage clients to gain independence and live moral lives (Hansan, 2013; Chamber, 1986). The direct exchange of cash was strictly avoided.

Considering the growing need for a trained staff, charity organizations developed the paid position of “agent” to visit indigent persons and families and to investigate applications for charity. These agents were the forerunners of professional social workers (Hansan, 2013; Chamber, 1986). Mary Richmond of the Baltimore and Philadelphia COS and Edward T. Devine of the New York COS were early leaders in training agents. In 1898, Devine established and directed the New York School of Philanthropy, which eventually became the Columbia School of Social Work, the first school of social work in the United States.

The **settlement movement** turned attention to the environmental factors associated with poverty. In 1889, Jane Addams, along with Ellen Gates Starr, founded Hull House in a poor Chicago neighborhood where immigrants often lived in overcrowded conditions. Hull House was not the first settlement house in the United States; however, it pioneered advocacy roles in social welfare. For example, its staff collected information about Hull House’s clients and the residents of surrounding neighborhoods and used this information to influence legislation and social policy (Stern, 2017; Dolgoff et al., 1993, p. 278). In response to the poverty experienced throughout the area, Hull House offered day care for children, a club for working women, lectures, and cultural groups (Stern, 2017; Axinn & Stern, 2005).

Included in the settlement movement were people who advocated for the rights of Black Americans, such as Lillian Wald, who addressed racial integration as director of the Henry Street Settlement in New York City, and Mary White Ovington, a settlement house worker. In 1908, after race riots in Springfield, Illinois, Ovington joined with Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and organized other progressives and key Black leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. This organization provided Black Americans a movement for fighting segregation in a mobilized and organized fashion (Berg-Weger et al., 2020; Blau & Abramovitz, 2004).

Ida Wells-Barnett, editor of *Free Speech and Headlight*, a Black newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee, helped with the development of Black women’s clubs. In 1896, she assisted in establishing the National Association of Colored Women and became an early member of the NAACP. Wells-Barnett used her journalistic expertise to advocate against lynching and white supremacy. As an early suffragist, Wells-Barnett promoted the right to vote through fiery rhetoric and community organizing efforts.

As a result of Wells-Barnett’s efforts, settlement houses and their staff, along with other advocates, contributed community organization, social action, and social group work to the nascent social work profession. However, although Addams, Wald, Ovington, and many others in the settlement movement recognized the existence of class conflict as a reality in the U.S. economic system, they did not build a mass political organization. Consequently, they did not effectively confront social class differences on a national level and failed to challenge the overall distribution of the nation’s



Jane Addams founded Hull House, a settlement house in an economically disadvantaged Chicago neighborhood, in 1889.

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W. E. B. Du Bois established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

National Portrait Gallery, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



Ida Wells-Barnett, editor of *Free Speech and Headlight*
 Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

resources (Galper, 1975). Instead, settlement house workers supported labor unions, lobbied city officials for sanitation and housing reforms, and fought discrimination in employment practices.

With the rare exception, those involved in the social movements of the Progressive Era were not attuned to the needs of racially diverse populations, especially Black Americans (Berg-Weger et al., 2020; Blau & Abramovitz, 2004). Most reformers took the second-class citizenship of Black Americans for granted and did little to challenge racial barriers and assumptions.

With the social movements of the Progressive Era came the notion of a helping profession oriented toward social action—in other words, social work. In 1917, Mary Richmond wrote the first social work textbook, *Social Diagnosis*, which introduced a methodology and common body of knowledge for the practice of social work. Importantly, Richmond embraced assessment and understanding of human relations, social situations and surroundings, neighborhood conditions, and economic realities. Richmond's second book, *What Is Social Case Work?* (1922), used six case examples from industrialized urban areas to illustrate her definition of social case work. Thus, the case method of working with individuals and families provided an orderly process of practice with individuals, with an emphasis on documenting both needs and social conditions to advocate for social change and reform.

World War I: 1914 to 1918

The political environment of the United States in the years before and following World War I supported the development of social work as a profession but marked a drastic change in its focus. The 1917 Russian Revolution caused a heightened fear of communism, “radicals” were under attack in the United States, and social workers sometimes retreated from reform to avoid the political arena and persecution. This was recognized at the 1928 Milford Conference, an annual meeting of social work leaders. It was here that Porter Lee, the director of the New York School of Social Work, reported that social workers had shifted their professional attention from **cause to function**—from a concern with politics to a concern with the efficient day-to-day administration of a social welfare bureaucracy (Jarvis, 2006; Blau & Abramovitz, 2004, p. 249).

The turn toward the “function” of social work gave rise to an expansion of practice settings for the profession, to include private family welfare agencies (as most charity organizations were then called), hospitals, schools, mental health facilities, guidance centers, and children's aid societies. The American National Red Cross employed social workers to provide case work services to military families and disaster victims in cities, small towns, and rural areas.

Throughout this timeframe, the United States remained a segregated society. Nevertheless, there were many Black Americans willing to join the nation's military. As the United States entered the war in Europe, Black Americans were still being turned away from military service. It is important to note that throughout this time, segregation within the social work profession continued. The National Urban League was developed by Black Americans in response to their exclusion from much of mainstream social work services and settings.

Changes in the development of social work were also seen in the number of schools joining the American Association of Schools of Social Work, founded in 1919. The association standardized curricula and promoted a master's degree in social work. Both undergraduate and graduate programs became members of the association (Ginsberg, 2001; National Association of Social Workers, 2024).

The Great Depression and World War II

The United States went through a significant transformation during the Great Depression and World War II. During the Depression, the nation was on the brink of economic disaster, with approximately 25% of the total workforce unemployed. However, more than 50% of Black Americans were unemployed. In response to the economic and social situation racial tensions escalated, resulting in violence

and an increase in lynchings, especially in the Southern states (Library of Congress, n.d.). The nation's overall situation changed after World War II, when the United States emerged as an international super-power thanks to its military strength, booming industrial base, and diplomatic presence. The service and achievements of Black Americans in the war highlighted the need for civil rights nationwide.

The Great Depression: 1929 to Early 1940s

The stock market crash of 1929, followed by a far-reaching economic depression, brought the United States to the brink of economic disaster. Social service agencies were unprepared to address the mounting needs of people like Black Americans who had increasingly high unemployment rates and were the victims of racial violence.

In time, after listening to the narratives of their clients, social workers developed a growing appreciation for the social and economic factors associated with dependency and need (Stern 2017; Axinn & Stern, 1988). Thus, social workers rekindled the “cause” orientation that had been abandoned in the 1920s and lobbied the government to provide an adequate standard of living for all people in the United States (Stern, 2017; Axinn & Stern, 2005; Trattner, 1999).

In 1932, the governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected the nation's 32nd president. He called for bold government action and instituted a large federal relief program for people in need. Most social workers endorsed President Roosevelt's New Deal, which included unemployment insurance and a social security system to deal with the financial insecurity experienced by older persons, dependent children, and individuals with various physical conditions. Additionally, Harry Hopkins, a social worker, was appointed head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. This was the first federal program to provide relief to the nation's citizens on a major scale since the years following the Civil War (Axinn & Stern, 2005; Trattner, 1999).

Black Americans suffered significant economic despair, often being displaced from unskilled jobs usually overlooked by white workers before the Great Depression. Unemployment rates for Black workers reached 50% or more, compared to 30% for white workers. Further, Black wages were approximately 30% below those of white workers, who themselves were struggling at subsistence level (Stern, 2017; Sustar, 2012).

The New Deal provided additional employment opportunities for social workers responsible for state and local public relief. The relief funds came from a combination of local and federal agencies. Unfortunately, the relief measures neglected to address racial discrimination; consequently, people of color experienced more economic hardship than other people in the United States (Library of Congress, n.d.).



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act on August 14, 1935.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

The Rank-and-File Movement

In the 1930s, progressive social workers organized the rank-and-file movement, including ordinary or blue-collar workers, and began analyzing and criticizing aspects of the New Deal (American Liberty League, 1935). For social workers, the rank-and-file movement highlighted the economic crisis of the 1930s and the subsequent need for union organizing. Social workers themselves realized they suffered as workers; they earned very low wages, faced massive caseloads, and had living standards that were barely better than those of their own clients. Consequently, large numbers of progressive social workers joined the rank-and-file movement to build labor unions at relief agencies. Additionally, they organized study groups on capitalism and socialism, established a newspaper called *Social Work Today*, and formed labor unions at relief agencies all over the country. Some core leaders of the movement joined socialist and communist groups and connected their efforts as social workers to a broader movement of workers to fight for a more just economic system.

The relief programs of the New Deal helped Roosevelt connect with Black Americans. However, fearing alienation of the Southern states, he did not aggressively promote civil rights. More sympathetic to Black Americans and their causes, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt helped facilitate Marian Anderson's

performance at the Lincoln Memorial after the singer was denied the right to perform at Constitution Hall because of her race.

The Great Depression and the New Deal had a lasting effect on the nation's social welfare system, most notably, enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935. Whatever faults may be found in the legislation, the Social Security Act widely expanded welfare activities and advanced services and programs for people in need. The fact that it provided cash benefits to recipients was a major step toward enhancing human dignity and personal freedom (Stern, 2017; Axinn & Stern, 1988; Trattner, 1999).

World War II: 1939 to 1945

World War II placed the United States squarely on the global scene and provided near full employment for most people in the United States. So, during this time, issues of poverty were not on the national agenda or in the forefront of social work. Still, throughout the war, social workers were involved in services to the armed forces and their families. In addition, the gains in jobs and income did not apply evenly across races, although President Roosevelt did issue Executive Order 8802 prohibiting discrimination in the defense industries, a significant overall advancement toward civil rights in the workplace (National Archives, 2022; Skocpol, 1995; Trattner, 1999).

During the war President Roosevelt signed legislation creating the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), allowing up to 150,000 women to enlist in military service. The decision to include Black women in the WAAC reflects the lobbying efforts by Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of the National Council for Negro Women, and a relentless advocate for the rights of Black women (Smith, 2022).

World War II and the prosperity that followed victory changed the nation's political climate. Further, the Great Depression and the New Deal had lasting effects on the social work profession. There were new jobs for social workers, a deeper understanding of human needs in urban and rural areas, and a renewed interest in reform efforts. Private and public welfare agencies acknowledged the social work profession as both a "cause" and a "function" within various fields of practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was formed in 1955, helping unite the profession through guidelines and a code of ethics that defined roles and responsibilities associated with social work practice.

America's War on Poverty: 1960 to 1967

The 1960s were a time of social unrest and political change in the United States. With the Vietnam War escalating, students and like-minded individuals protested the war across the country. Other movements formed to protest the lack of rights for women, people with physical and mental challenges, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color. It was the civil rights movement that educated people in the United States on the extent of prejudice and discrimination in society and its costs. Books such as *The Other America* by Michael Harrington (1962) made the issue of poverty a public concern and a rallying point for citizen protests.

President John F. Kennedy advocated for equality through the civil rights movement. He demonstrated this commitment by appointing Black Americans to his administration and by appointing Thurgood Marshall to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York. In 1963, Kennedy delivered a televised address in which he outlined comprehensive plans for new civil rights legislation. Included in the plans was equal access to voting and public facilities plus support to desegregate schools. Sadly, on November 22, 1963 President Kennedy was assassinated before many of his plans were enacted.

When Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as president, he advanced the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in honor of President Kennedy's memory. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was also passed during the Johnson administration. These two laws abolished Jim Crow laws and addressed racist immigration restrictions.

President Kennedy's New Frontier and President Johnson's Great Society programs were federal responses to issues of socioeconomic disparity and oppression. Both administrations spoke of poverty and instituted a variety of new social welfare initiatives, including Head Start, a program providing preschool education for disadvantaged children; Medicaid, health care for people who were poor; Medicare, health care for older persons; and the Food Stamp program, a food purchasing program for people with low incomes.

As programs from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were established, a greater number of baccalaureate-level social workers was needed to fill the increasing demand for trained staff. The NASW and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) began accepting the baccalaureate in social work (BSW) as the entry-level professional degree in the field.

The war in Vietnam escalated under President Johnson. According to Johnson, the goal of the nation's involvement in Vietnam was not to win the war but for U.S. troops to support defenses until South Vietnam could take over. By entering the Vietnam War without a clearly stated goal to win, Johnson set the stage for future public and troop disappointment when the United States found itself in a stalemate with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong (Rosenberg, 2021). Tired of civil turmoil and the Vietnam War, voters embraced the conservative ideals and concern with civil order espoused by Republican President Richard Nixon (1969–1974). President Nixon was forced to resign due to his participation in the cover-up of the Watergate scandal, a breaking-and-entering scheme at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC. Vice President Gerald Ford became president (1974–1976) and eventually lost his election bid to one-term Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

Although President Carter (1977–1981) promoted social programs and showed compassion for people who were disenfranchised in the United States, his administration was marred by high inflation rates, spiraling gas prices, and an international crisis involving the taking of U.S. hostages in Iran. These events contributed to President Carter's political demise and failure to gain reelection, while setting the stage for the election of President Ronald Reagan.

It is important to consider some actions President Carter took to address racial discrimination. Namely, in 1980 he introduced the Black College Initiative (Executive Order 12232), giving historically Black colleges and universities additional federal support (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). He also tried to close the wealth gap between white people and people of color by developing financial initiatives for businesses owned by people of color. Finally, President Carter named Black Americans to his cabinet. Wade H. McCree served as solicitor general, Clifford L. Alexander was the first Black secretary of the army, Mary Berry was the top official in Washington on educational matters prior to the establishment of the Department of Education, Eleanor Holmes Norton chaired the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Franklin Delano Raines served on the White House staff (Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, n.d.).

Presidential Actions: 1981 to 2001

In 1980, the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, beat the incumbent President Carter with a conservative platform that emphasized individual responsibility for one's problems rather than the reform of existing systems for social welfare. Reagan called for a smaller federal government, a safety net for only those who were deemed truly in need, and a lifetime limit on social services. He also embraced **trickle-down economics** (a version of classical economic theory also known as supply-side economics). The underlying idea was that reducing the tax obligations of the wealthy would stimulate them to spend more on the consumption of goods and services. In theory, the prosperity of the wealthy would “trickle down” to the middle class and people who were in need via the creation of new industries and jobs. There was, however, nothing to prevent the wealthy from simply holding on to their profits, purchasing existing enterprises, or investing in enterprises overseas.

President Reagan's administration was largely successful in implementing his vision. It shrank government and social welfare programs and services at the federal level through budget cuts and the implementation of means-tested programs and services. It also curtailed programs sanctioned and funded by the Social Security Act, such as Medicaid, food stamps, loans for higher education, and legal assistance for people. To offset these federal reductions and maintain some programs and services, many states and communities increased taxation.

After President Reagan's two terms in office, the 1988 election of his vice president, George H. W. Bush, to the presidency continued Reagan's conservative approach. With a focus on international affairs, President Bush tended to shift responsibility for the social programs sector from the public to the private. He promoted a “thousand points of light” campaign, in which communities would develop and often privately fund services and programs to address local needs. However, impoverished rural and urban communities had few resources to dedicate to such points of light.

Pushback against the nation's conservative era came by way of the election of William Jefferson Clinton. President Clinton (1993–2001) was the first Democratic president since Franklin D. Roosevelt to win a second term of office. In revamping the welfare system, Clinton engaged in political compromise. One result was the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which reversed six decades of federal policy guaranteeing at least a minimum level of financial assistance, or a safety net, for people with little or no financial security.

In 1994 President Clinton introduced the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, a lengthy bill that provided for 100,000 new police officers and \$9.7 billion in prison funding (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). Additionally, its provisions implemented a “three-strikes” mandatory life sentence for repeat offenders and an expansion of death penalty–eligible offenses. It also dedicated funds for prevention programs; however, the bulk of the funds were dedicated to programs considered punitive rather than rehabilitative or preventative.

Partisan Gridlock: 2000 to the Present

After a two-term Clinton presidency, Republican George W. Bush won the 2000 election. It was one of the closest and most controversial presidential elections in history and was ultimately decided in the Supreme Court. A prior governor of Texas, President Bush described his political philosophy as “compassionate conservatism,” a view that combined traditional Republican economic policies with concern for the underprivileged. His administration targeted education and volunteerism within faith-based and community organizations as a way of providing social services to those in need.

However, it was not domestic issues that marked the Bush administration. On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, by flying passenger jets into them. A fourth suicide flight, on the route to the White House or the Capitol building, was thwarted by its passengers. All in all, some 3,000 people died.

The event, now referred to as 9/11, defined Bush's tenure. He declared a “war on terror” and launched two wars in the Middle East. He also established the Department of Homeland Security, a vast bureaucracy charged with preventing any attack on the United States in the future. At the same time, President Bush maintained his pledge to reduce taxes.

The result was a huge national debt, an economic recession, and a national and worldwide credit crisis. Therefore, during his eight years in office many of President Bush's social initiatives were dwarfed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism, a faltering economy, and the global war on terror.

The 2008 election was remarkable for the victory of Democrat Barack Obama, the first Black president. During the campaign, Obama had proposed a platform of change and reform in Washington, with domestic policy and the economy as central themes. In the midst of a downward

spiral in the national economy, which became known as the Great Recession, he had several serious domestic and international issues to address: the transgressions of Wall Street (the financial district of the United States) and the damage to the world economy; burgeoning, and suspect, foreclosures on U.S. homeowners; a dysfunctional and unfair health care system; costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; increasing dissatisfaction with immigration policy; and increasing signs of global climate change.

The Obama administration's signature social welfare policy was the Affordable Care Act (ACA), signed into law on March 23, 2010. A controversial piece of social welfare policy because it expanded the role of the federal government, the ACA enacted comprehensive reforms to improve access to affordable health coverage and to alter insurance company practices. Ideally, the ACA would decrease the nation's health care costs and make insurance companies more accountable for how premiums are spent.

The ACA primarily impacted health care coverage by establishing health exchanges, which went into effect in 2014, and by expanding Medicaid. In each case, social workers would help people navigate the new health care systems to ensure that they would receive proper coverage and benefits. Further,



A service member greets his family after coming home.

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the expanded health care provisions addressed mental or behavioral health, which represents another significant service area where social workers play a vital role.

Donald J. Trump shattered expectations on November 9, 2016, with an election-night victory over Hillary Clinton that revealed deep antiestablishment anger among some U.S. voters. President Trump achieved one of the most improbable political victories in modern U.S. history, despite a series of controversies, extreme policies that drew criticism from both Republicans and Democrats, and a lack of conventional political experience.

Why did Trump win the election? It appears key groups of voters overlooked his personal character and political shortcomings and instead embraced him as an agent of change against corrupt government officials, who seemed to pay little attention to the middle class. Additionally, the Clinton campaign appeared to focus on traditional urban issues and problems, with little attention given to the working class and the ongoing economic difficulties of rural America. Further, Trump was also a proven and engaging businessperson unentrenched in Washington politics.

To keep his campaign promises, President Trump highlighted several key issues in his administrative agenda that changed policy and budgetary allocations, including rebuilding the military; safeguarding Second Amendment protections regarding gun rights; and pulling the United States out of environmental protection efforts and accords (e.g., withdrawal from the Paris Agreement).

Initially, one of President Trump's biggest challenges involved the ACA, which he vowed to repeal and replace. When he took office, approximately half the population was covered by employer-sponsored health insurance, with the other half covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and individual private insurance (Miller, 2016). However, two key features from the ACA remained. The first was the availability of health insurance for people who have preexisting conditions, such as diabetes and cancer. Further, the current ACA allows children 26 years of age or younger to remain on their parents' health insurance.

The political divide between the Democrats and Republicans, often referenced as a blue versus red division in the United States, was highlighted on December 18, 2019, when the Democratically controlled House of Representatives approved articles of impeachment charging President Trump with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Because the framers of the Constitution intentionally made it difficult for Congress to remove a sitting president, only two other presidents had previously been impeached: Andrew Jackson (in 1868) and Bill Clinton (in 1998). Although President Trump was acquitted by the Senate, the impeachment process underscored the deep political party divide and set the stage for a rousing 2020 presidential election.

The year 2020 was a formidable one for the United States. It marked the year when President Trump and Vice President Pence ran for reelection against former Vice President Joe Biden and California Senator Kamala Harris. It was also the year when COVID-19 caused a worldwide pandemic, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and millions of deaths worldwide. COVID-19 and the nation's response to the pandemic were especially critical to the presidential campaign, as were the nationwide civil unrest associated with the killings of numerous Black Americans, the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court following the death of Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and the future of the ACA.

Due primarily to the pandemic, a record number of ballots were cast early and by mail. President Trump and others contended the possibility of voter fraud. The possibility became a perceived reality to Trump when Biden and Harris were declared winners in November 2020. However, Trump refused to accept the election results. On January 6, 2021, Trump spoke to a huge crowd in Washington, DC. Some of those in attendance stormed the U.S. Capitol, leading to the deaths of five people and leaving a wake of destruction.

Joe Biden, the 46th president, and Kamala Harris, the first woman of color to be vice president, were inaugurated on January 20, 2021. President Biden began immediately signing executive orders to dismantle some of the Trump administration's policies. These orders included banning discrimination because of gender identity or sexual orientation; pausing federal student loan payments; rejoining and committing to the Paris Agreement on climate control; and reexamine policies regarding the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to help ensure coverage for preexisting conditions.

The presidential election of 2024 was dramatic and historical. Why? That is something you can mull over to reach your own conclusions. When thinking through the 2024 election consider the expressed public concern regarding President Biden's age, physical and mental health, and overall

fitness for office. Also keep in mind the rising wave of national support for Republican candidate Donald Trump who survived the July 13, 2024, assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Whatever conclusions you reach about the election, it's important to note that on July 21, 2024, President Biden withdrew his presidential candidacy, approximately 107 days before Election Day. In part, this decision was reached due to perceptions regarding Biden's unfavorable debate with Donald Trump in which Biden seemed to lose his train of thought. Biden's decision to withdraw from the election was supported by Democrats in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, along with financial campaign contributors.

Biden's reelection departure came approximately one month ahead of the Democratic convention and was followed by his endorsement for Vice President Kamala Harris as the party's nominee. Thus, without an open nomination process, Harris became the presidential candidate with Minnesota Governor Tim Walz selected as her running mate.

Donald Trump, along with vice president nominee James David (JD) Vance, junior senator from Ohio, defeated the Harris/Walz ticket to become the 47th president of the United States. During the inaugural address on January 20, 2025, Trump emphasized his commitment to protect the nation's borders, enhance prosperity for workers, and reinforce old alliances and new ones.

Time to Think 2.3

As you think about the presidential election process and its results, what are your thoughts about the United States? Why are you registered to vote? If you're not registered, why not? What issues, concerns, and/or goals influence your voting decisions? As a social worker, which cabinet-level department seems especially relevant to your professional interests?

The Limitations of Social Welfare

Although social reforms have enriched the lives of millions of people in the United States (Jannson, 1999), they sometimes fail to meet stated or ideal goals (Berg-Weger et al., 2020). Consider how the notion of the "deserving poor" has affected the provision of social welfare. Our belief in supporting children and older people has characterized U.S. society since colonial times. This fact sends a strong social signal that families should be responsible for their members across the life cycle.

Most of the social services that target young and old age categories are crisis interventions rather than preventions. For instance, policies such as the Social Security Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provide a safety net for children and older adults. However, the basic needs of food, housing, health care, and clothing are met in a modest fashion under the guise of cost containment. In such an environment, clients live with uncertainty, and the practice of social work is restricted.

Although the United States is considered a rich country, many people are working hard every day but living from paycheck to paycheck. Far too many people in the United States live in poverty, relying on social programs to help address their most basic needs. Ideally, changes in social policy would give these underprivileged groups greater access to jobs that pay a **living wage** and equip them with the tools needed to raise their status in society, such as a good education. However, the nation's social welfare system does little to move lower and working classes from their current socioeconomic class.

Tellingly, some rural and urban communities experience persistent poverty and social inequality. In the United States, these groups are often the victims of racism. There are no policy examples and few social service programs that draw from and honor the cultural backgrounds and personal experiences of people of color. How can the effects of racism be challenged by the profession of social work? The history of social welfare policy suggests the need to address the root causes of social, economic, and political inequality. The 1963 March on Washington, followed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, demonstrated that organizing people and taking united action can change the course of a nation.

For a more recent example of how movements for social justice can change society, consider the evolution of issues of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. History illustrates a long, hard struggle for women and LGBTQ+ individuals striving for equality in all spheres of life in the United States.

Individually and collectively, groups of people dedicated to these causes have been actively involved in civil rights. Through resilience and resourcefulness, this broad-based population has tackled barriers to its own growth, rights, recognition, and participation in society. Subsequently, political institutions, U.S. corporations, families, some progressive faith organizations, and other major U.S. entities have worked to challenge and change power arrangements to ensure a greater degree of gender-based equality and rights.

Time to Think 2.4

What social issues concern you? Do you have student loans or pay taxes? What are your concerns about the environment, racial discrimination and oppression, affordable health care, voting rights, military engagement, immigration, legalization of marijuana, economic inequality, or LGBTQ+ rights? How could advocacy actions and collaborations support your effort for change?

Summary

The response to societal issues historically reflects economic ups and downs, wars, political shifts from conservative to liberal and radical perspectives, and attitudes toward individual responsibilities. All these factors have influenced the development of the social welfare system. Approaches to social welfare have changed over the past few centuries of life in the United States, and the social work profession has evolved in tandem. However, despite improvements in many realms of life, the problems to which social welfare responds have remained, specifically those that intersect economic disparities and social inequality.

As you come to understand the role of social work in the context of policy and practice, you will begin to learn how the profession's core values influence advocacy strategies to assist those in need. Consider how the social work profession is diverse, challenging, and one of the few careers that enables you to stand up for social justice.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about your political leanings and beliefs and where they came from throughout your lifetime. Do they align with your family's beliefs? Is this an issue? Why or why not? What experiences formed your opinions on social welfare services and social work? How do your family members and friends align with a social movement such as Greenpeace, and why?
2. As you read through the history of the development of social work, what period most captured your attention? What is it about this time that piques your interest?
3. Define the current political scene, environmental conditions, human needs, and social justice issues in the United States or your country of origin. How have these factors contributed to debate on a policy issue and a specific social welfare policy?
4. Discuss the issues and actions you think have been the most effective in helping those in need.

Exercises

1. Learn more about various political parties and their stances on social welfare by going to their websites. In addition to the Democratic and Republican parties, seek information about the Libertarian Party, the Green Party, the Progressive Party, the Constitution Party, or others that run candidates in your locale. Focusing on the issue of social welfare, locate the parties on a spectrum from most liberal to most conservative.
2. Read an editorial from one of the nation's leading newspapers or news websites. What political perspective does the editorial reflect, and how did you reach this conclusion?

- 3. Role-play a situation in which you must ask for public assistance. How did you feel about being in need and asking for help?
- 4. Create a policy timeline using the periods of the Elizabethan Poor Laws, colonial America, the Progressive Era, the Great Depression, the War on Poverty, the Great Society, Reaganomics, the period of reforming the welfare state, the Obama presidency, and the Trump administration. Select one landmark event from each period and read about the relevant political situation, environmental factors, human needs, and social justice issues of the time.
- 5. Choose a social welfare service available in your community. Gather the history of this agency. In what ways do its history and development align with what you read in this chapter?

Key Terms

cause to function	nondeserving poor
Charity Organization Society (COS)	outdoor relief
conservative	radicalism
deserving poor	safety net
Elizabethan Poor Laws	settlement laws
friendly visitor	settlement movement
indoor relief	social control
liberal	social justice
living wage	social welfare
means testing	social welfare policy
mutual aid	trickle-down economics