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# Reconsidering the Social Work Education Continuum: Social Work Education at Community Colleges in the United States

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Reconsidering the Social Work Education Continuum:  
Social Work Education at Community Colleges in the United States

by

Rex J. Rempel

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of Saint Thomas  
School of Social Work

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### Abstract

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) will soon revise the social work education continuum by welcoming practice doctoral programs into membership, leaving community colleges as the only excluded level of higher education in social work. The three connected products in this banded dissertation use critical pedagogy and post-positivist perspectives to explore how and why social work education evolved independently at community colleges, one of the largest, most diverse, and most affordable educational systems in the United States.

Product One employs qualitative historical research to identify the forces which led community colleges and CSWE down separate paths between 1950 and 1975, despite consideration of expansion to include associate degrees in social work. Archived records indicate that differing goals, distrust, identity issues, inattentiveness, and class differences inhibited any on-going relationship between the developing two-year college system and social work's professional organizations.

Product Two examines the claims of some community colleges that they teach social work. It reveals the existence of Associate in Social Work (ASW) programs at 57 colleges in 24 states and then compares them to accepted standards for social work education to examine whether their programs' offerings could be recognized as social work education. One-third of ASW program directors completed surveys. Their responses indicate voluntary adherence to 41% of select CSWE standards for Baccalaureate Social Work (BSW) programs. This quantitative, empirical research documents likenesses between some ASW programs and widely-accepted methods of social work education.

Product Three is a presentation delivered at a national conference, the Council for the Study of Community Colleges conference in April 2018, applying ideas from social work education history to the needs of community colleges generally. This presentation suggested that pathways for upward transfer depend on advocates for professional and technical education organizing their efforts, building relationships with powerful gatekeepers, publishing research, and addressing their schools' actual and perceived weaknesses.

This banded dissertation suggests the possibilities of social work education at community colleges in the United States, belying the long-held belief in a three-level continuum of social work education. ASW programs operate in nearly half the country, and though they could have become part of CSWE, they currently operate autonomously from professional social work organizations. Stakeholders now have the opportunity to evaluate ASW programs and establish mutually beneficial relationships, if they so choose.

Keywords: CSWE, social work education, community colleges, associate degree, continuum

### Dedication

This dissertation, my education, and my growth in recent years are the products of a caring community. I am incredibly grateful for the wonderful women and men of St. Thomas'/St. Kate's DSW cohort 3; drop by drop you have filled my heart. Most importantly, I owe everything to Lenae and Sam. You made this possible. You bless me daily with your love, humor, patience, goodness, prayers, and affection. I love you. I look forward to spending more time with you and supporting you in your next endeavors.

### Acknowledgments

I appreciate the wisdom and unflagging encouragement of our faculty. Jessica Toft, you inspired a research agenda by introducing me to the Social Welfare History Archives and believing that my questions were worthy of scholarly attention. Robin Whitebird, your firm guiding hand and open ears as an advisor and mentor have been great gifts. My reviewers Rachael Richter and Jean Roberson are invaluable friends. Finally, I must recognize E. Allan Brawley as the researcher who virtually established scholarly inquiry into pre-social work studies at community colleges in the United States. My work is possible because of the foundations he built.

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Reconsidering the Social Work Education Continuum:  
Social Work Education at Community Colleges in the United States

The shape and extent of social work education in the United States was never a pre-determined certainty but evolved over the past century. Economic factors, politics, historical events, and stakeholders' personalities can alter a discipline's direction. Subject to internal and external influences, social work education systems have varied by time and nation. Such systems are intricate ventures, the products of schools, governments, and professional organizations; they respond to community needs and student interests, to accrediting bodies and cultures. Social work education in the United States is no exception, as demonstrated by its relationship with community colleges.

Currently, social work publications, practice groups, and professional organizations alike define social work education in the United States as baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral education in preparation for professional roles (Frumppkin & Lloyd, 1995; Hoffman, 2013; Shank, 1993). Though social workers debated the appropriateness of baccalaureate social work education well into the 1980s (Brennen, 1984; Leighninger, 2000), this three-level definition has been stable and widely accepted since, with baccalaureate and masters degrees offered in the United States under the auspices of Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation.

Some leaders within CSWE, however, once saw two-year colleges also as part of the continuum of social work education (CSWE, 1972; Pins, 1971). Employers and government agencies encouraged the development of pre-baccalaureate social work technicians (McPheeters & Ryan, 1971; Olson, 1966). Many community colleges declared an interest in adding social work education to their degree offerings (McPheeters & Ryan, 1971). *Social Work*, the official journal of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), called directly for the

integration of associate degrees into the continuum of social work education and possibly into CSWE membership (Briar, 1974).

Like social work education, the community (or junior) college system dates back to the start of the twentieth-century and expanded dramatically after 1950 (Drury, 2003). Like social work, community colleges have focused on meeting community needs, prioritizing those of the poor and other minoritized people. Community colleges today educate 41% of all college students in the nation (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017b), often in unexpected ways. Increasingly, community colleges offer transfer degrees, attract students intent on further higher education, and develop their own baccalaureate degrees (Neault & Piland, 2014). Moreover, as many as one-fifth of American and Canadian Baccalaureate Social Work (BSW) students may start at community colleges (Coleman, Calhoun, & Rogers, 2004; Magee, 1979; Nutter & Zapf, 1990).

Some observers once believed that at least some community colleges taught social work and did so competently (Bernard, 1978; Departmental Task Force, 1965; Pins, 1971). CSWE has never admitted or accredited associate degree programs, however, and has had no formal contact with them since 1972 (Brawley, 1980). No one has shown why. In fact, since 1978 the peer-reviewed literature has been silent about social work education at community colleges in the United States other than to reference it as a bygone suggestion. This silence belies a contradiction. Dozens of community colleges currently market associate degrees under the names social work, social welfare, or pre-social work. All operate outside the purview of CSWE. These community college programs contradict the discipline's established definition and the expectations of both social work professionals and education groups. How did these visions of social work education evolve into separate systems? Is our consensus description of social work

education flawed? Alternatively, are community colleges committing fraud? These contradictions call for exploration.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A synthesis of post-positivist and critical lenses, in concert with the guiding values of social work, drove this banded dissertation. Each is a particularly appropriate lens for evaluation of education systems. All are mutually compatible.

Post-positivist worldviews posit the existence of verifiable realities, such as measurable differences in access, resources, content, academic abilities, and outcomes. This research sought fixed truths about the community colleges' curricula, faculty, students, and efficacy. Post-positivist empirical research, both qualitative and quantitative, facilitates a structured, systematic review in pursuit of objective findings. Its deductive logic can lead to definitive conclusions while acknowledging sources of bias and limitations (Trochim, 2006).

Critical stances bring a skeptical attitude toward the status quo and its power structures. Critical pedagogy's exemplar, theorist and activist Paulo Freire, sought explicitly to improve education as a means to build just societies, empower the disenfranchised, and lift up the poor. Freire (1970) called for *conscientization*, consciousness raising and the unequivocal recognition of contradictions. The contradiction explored here is the discrepancy between the consensus definition of social work education and the existence of Associate in Social Work programs. Overtly political, critical pedagogy affirms the reality of oppression and poses difficult questions about decision-making processes—such as those of CSWE—and their impacts. The goal is the tangible improvement of real-world institutions. While rooted in the historical realities of twentieth-century Brazil, a critical approach remains fitting for various educational systems (hooks, 1994).

Additionally, this research applied social work's professional standards to social work education. As a profession, social work aims for partnerships with marginalized people and service to the most vulnerable members of society, for the sake of individual and community transformation. Social work ethics encourage social and political action to challenge injustices and end oppression. Social workers profess commitments to competency, diversity, equity, social justice, and appreciation for the strengths of all (NASW, 2017). Intent on improving the quality of social work education, CSWE (2015) itself embraces evaluation. Social work practice and educational standards demand that social workers assess and appraise systems and their own practices. Judging social work education by social work standards is fitting.

These lenses—post-positivism, critical pedagogy, and the standards of professional social work organizations—complement one another. Each supports research in search of truth. Post-positivism and social work trust the scientific method (CSWE, 2015; Trochim, 2016). Post-positivists and critical pedagogists embrace both qualitative and quantitative research (Ryan, 2006; Reisch, 2013). Critical pedagogy and social work alike aim to enhance the human condition, particularly that of the impoverished (CSWE, 2015; Freire, 1970). Either will name oppression when found. Both welcome social change, seeing political work as a necessity (CSWE, 2015; Freire, 1970). Both see education as a means to critical consciousness.

Two-year colleges differ significantly from traditional liberal arts colleges and research universities in their missions, faculty, curricula, and student bodies. If education should liberate the poor and address social injustices, it becomes appropriate to investigate whether social work education has aligned itself with elite institutions or upheld barriers to professional inclusion as social workers. Likewise, scholars can seek the truth as to whether community colleges have worked for their liberation or enabled their own exclusion. As seen in Product One, between

1950 and 1975 stakeholders debated whether community colleges could and should be empowered as social work educators. The upcoming expansion of CSWE (2017) to include some doctoral programs, rising tuition costs, and the discovery of ASW programs may renew that debate. I advocate for data-driven decision making, in line with social work's mission. Such consideration of social work education in community colleges in the United States, through these linked products, represents scholarship in Boyer's (2016) comprehensive understanding of the term: discovery, application, education, and service. Whether the results support current practices or suggest alterations, they shall expand our understanding of the practice of social work education in the United States.

### **Summary of Scholarship Products**

This Banded Dissertation is composed of three scholarly products. Product One of this banded dissertation explores why the United States' social work education system evolved as it did between 1950 and 1975. This qualitative historical research compares primary source materials in the Social Welfare History Archives with published accounts to determine why the Council on Social Work Education named baccalaureate programs, rather than associate degrees, the first level of accredited social work education. Archived materials demonstrate community colleges' interest. CSWE, meanwhile, sponsored workshops and wrote guidelines for two-year programs. A few times its leaders spoke of a burgeoning four-level continuum, from associate to doctoral degrees. Nevertheless, neither community colleges nor CSWE made any formal efforts at partnership. By the mid-1970s both accepted futures independent of one another. Unpublished meeting summaries, personal notes, and private correspondence written by dignitaries such as Katherine Kendall, Arnulf Pins, and Alice Taylor point to CSWE's rationale. Findings from this research indicate that suspicion of vocationalism, differences in identity, economic influences,

and distrust of unfamiliar community college systems were key factors in CSWE's movement away from community colleges and its self-imposed limitation of accreditation to BSW and MSW programs.

The survey research presented in Product Two demonstrates the existence of social work education at community colleges in the United States, outside CSWE oversight. Research and communication with college personnel produced a catalog of 57 community colleges across the country offering Associate in Social Work (ASW) degrees, nearly two-thirds the combined number of research and practice doctoral programs. Having substantiated their existence for the first time in scholarly literature, I proceeded to inquire about their nature. One-third of ASW program directors completed an online survey. Respondents indicated meeting 41% of select objective 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) for BSW programs. ASW programs begin to resemble BSW programs in structure and intent, despite serving a different educational level and not being responsible for EPAS fulfillment. While much about these programs remains unknown, this quantitative survey data facilitates an initial scholarly examination of a heretofore invisible system of social work education.

The final component of this dissertation, Product Three, applies the findings of the first two products for educators beyond social work: researchers, faculty, and college administrators at the 60<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges. Combining storytelling, quantitative data, archival evidence, and visual aids, this April 2018 presentation of original scholarship argued that people or institutions seeking to advance applied associate degrees of any type should attend to their relationships with four-year colleges and universities, organize for the sake of political advocacy, and publish scholarly research about the efficacy of their programs.

### Discussion

I believe that this dissertation presents the first in-depth consideration of, and the first empirical research into, the relationship between social work and community colleges in at least a generation. It provides insight into the decision-making of the discipline's accrediting body, making use of private documents and internal communication unavailable to the public at the time of events. Further, this work reveals the existence of an additional level of social work education, the Associate in Social Work, thereby demonstrating inadequacies in the consensus definition of social work education. Social work education in the United States is broader than commonly believed and unmistakably broader than CSWE's membership.

Private correspondence, symposium notes, meeting minutes and other primary source data discovered in archived records—confirming suppositions in the secondary literature—verify that CSWE aligned itself with older, more prestigious systems in search of professional status and higher wages for social workers. New forms of social work education were explored. With support from the federal government, employers tried out new job titles and universities tested new types of training (Alman, 1965; Cox, 1963; CSWE, 1969a, 1970b; Purvine, 1970; Smith, 1958; Witte, 1963). More than 150 community colleges expressed interest in teaching social work (CSWE, 1969b; Greenberg, 1966; Kendall, 1963, Smith, 1958; Stellman, 1965). CSWE held workshops and wrote guidelines for two-year programs. Nevertheless, CSWE never appeared to consider partnerships with community colleges seriously. Except for a few years in the early 1970s, community colleges were never important to CSWE. The archival evidence reviewed in this dissertation demonstrates why this may have been the case.

Professional social work groups in the mid-to-late twentieth century focused on the protection of social work jobs and the success of already existent educational programs, more so



than on the educational barriers of the poor and minorities. To improve social status and wages, social work leaders long emphasized professionalizing its workforce (Bartlett, 1949; Kendall, 1950; Leighninger, 2000; Taylor, 1951). Improvement of the discipline would occur top-down, pushing for higher educational levels for social workers, firmly establishing graduate degrees as the norm (Bartlett, 1949; Taylor, 1951; Kendall, 1950).

Many within and outside CSWE saw it as a slow-moving organization in its first decades, resistant to change (Kendall, 2002; Shank, 1993). CSWE was careful, deliberate about expansion to include undergraduate studies. They would not rush (Gore, 1969; Kendall, 1956, 2002). Many CSWE leaders and members hoping to raise the profession's standing resisted any undergraduate social work education, for decades (Shank, 1993). Debate over and development of BSW standards and curricula busied the organization throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Kendall, 2002; Schindler & Brawley, 1993; Shank, 1993). A relatively small organization, CSWE may have been too busy, too preoccupied with BSW programs and professional continuing education to consider even broader expansion seriously. The addition of community colleges could have required further years or decades of work.

As shown by the archival evidence, many social work leaders struggled to trust community colleges. Their lack of familiarity with community colleges' triggered concerns (Gore, 1969; Purvine, 1970), as did technical education (CSWE, 1969a; Harper, 1951; Kendall, 1950). Some in social work questioned the quality of community college programs and their students (Gore, 1969). An assortment of stakeholders doubted the ability of paraprofessionals or anyone without an advanced degree to serve competently (Alman, 1965; Dillick, 1965; Levinson & Schiller, 1965; Riessman, 1963).

These concerns supported the perpetuation of social work's existing cultural identity. Social work education leaders had long voiced distaste for vocational education (Austin, 1997; CSWE, 1967; Hollis & Taylor, 1951). Instead, social work education leaders emphasized the importance of a liberal arts education (Harper, 1951; Houk, 1966; Kendall, 1956, 1963), reaffirming the well-respected college systems it already knew well. Community colleges' student populations differed greatly from those of CSWE members schools, often populated by prosperous Whites (Levinson & Schiller, 1965; Riessman, 1963). Whereas CSWE actively promoted gatekeeping (Austin, 1997; Shank, 1993; Stuart, Leighninger, & Donahue, 1993) and its member programs practiced selective admissions, community colleges welcomed all students (Brawley & Schindler, 1972), creating a non-professional, all-comers environment that differed significantly from the professional image CSWE sought to portray. Social work remained closely tied to the private, research-based, clinically-oriented, graduate social work programs which exerted decades of mid-twentieth century dominance over public, local, undergraduate, generalist education for the masses (Austin, 1997).

For all these reasons CSWE limited its twentieth-century expansion to the inclusion of baccalaureate programs. No external pressures decreed otherwise. The need to expand social work education expired with the contraction of the social work job market in the 1970s (Schindler & Brawley, 1993). Social movements towards radical democratization and societal reordering—which could have created pressure for diversification of social work education—also died away by the 1980s (Brennen, 1984). Community colleges themselves do not seem to have pushed for CSWE membership. CSWE records show no evidence of self-advocacy by community college leaders. Rather, community colleges tended to hire non-social workers to

teach what they termed *Human Services* (Brennen, 1984; Brawley, 1975, 1981; CSWE, 1970a; Schindler & Brawley, 1993).

Surviving documents suggest that few people within CSWE intended anything more towards community colleges than an advisory role (CSWE, 1969a; Kendall, 1963). Those Human Services programs would serve as a proxy for social work education at community colleges, without requiring CSWE involvement (Berg-Weger, Birkenmaier, Tebb, & Rosenthal, 1999; Brennen, 1984; Brawley, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982; McPheeters & King, 1971; Romney, 1972). Consequently, the idea of social work education at community colleges hardly went past consideration (Brawley, 1980; Brennen, 1984; Kendall, 2002). The documents held in the Social Welfare History Archives validate—and expand upon—some of the speculations made as passing comments in previous literature, providing an evidence-base for earlier conjecture as well as new rationale for the actions and inaction between 1950 and 1975. In the end, many forces shaped the parallel evolution of ASW programs and CSWE.

Community colleges social work programs did develop in the United States, nonetheless. Dozens of ASW programs exist. They are found from Miami, Florida to Seattle, Washington, from Portland, Maine to San Diego, California. In contrast to prior claims in the literature which dismissed them outright, this new research reveals that ASW programs are common, if operating in isolation and not standardized. Student populations at community colleges offering ASW degrees range from less than 2,000 to over 30,000, with anywhere from 9% to 95% minority enrollment. The colleges range from 28 to 120 years old and charge local students from \$2,000 to \$8,000 for one year of full-time tuition.

Product Two of this dissertation begins an examination of such ASW programs. The majority of ASW program directors surveyed in 2018 reported meeting CSWE's baccalaureate

standards for mission statements, defined goals, faculty education, faculty experience, faculty-student ratios, program director appointments, and assessment plans. Fewer than a third indicated meeting BSW standards for field education hours, field education director criteria, admission requirements, credit for life experience, or professional advising. Fieldwork requirements at responding ASW programs vary from none to 420 hours. While only one school indicated teaching to all nine competencies mandated by CSWE, 74% of schools said they taught to at least six of those competencies. The median ASW program self-reportedly meets 43% of the BSW EPAS standards investigated, with individual ASW programs' adherence varying from 0% to 83%. These results suggest that many ASW programs may authentically teach social work.

These findings extend and expand prior research on social work history. They build upon the literature of the past two decades which made only vague references to community college programs without identifying whether they teach social work or merely related subjects. The studies presented in this dissertation reflect the first published scholarly investigation into why community colleges and CSWE chose not to enter into any partnerships. They show general agreement with the prior considerations of the fit between community college programs and CSWE expectations, though prior research considered community college programs operating in the 1960s and 1970s under several titles other than social work, rather than contemporary Associate in Social Work programs. Some ASW programs appear to operate significantly like CSWE-accredited schools, but their variety is great. This initial evidence presented here warrants further examination of these programs.

### **Implications for Social Work Education**

Along with its reconsideration of accreditation of practice doctorates as a terminal degree in social work, the social work education system should reevaluate the beginning of its

educational continuum. *The Encyclopedia of Social Work* and other texts may be due for revision. Social work educators who acknowledge these findings may wish to reconsider their three-level definition of social work's educational continuum based on this historical evidence. Organizations such as CSWE and NASW could publicly recognize that dozens of colleges across the United States offer Associate in Social Work degrees. The value, consistency, and character of these associate degrees remain undetermined, but their existence—and thus a larger shape for social work education—can no longer be overlooked.

Implications arise for BSW programs in particular. BSW programs in the Midwest and South, where most ASW programs are found, may benefit from forming or strengthening relationships with local ASW programs. They can facilitate upward transfer and address issues of unequal access to social work education by ensuring clear pathways for community college students, many of whom express interest in enrolling in baccalaureate studies but face systematic barriers (AACC, 2015). Doing so would be consistent with professional social work values.

Community colleges themselves have responsibilities to ensure the quality of the education they provide. Virtually all educational systems and disciplines have found benefits in professional associations. Organizing may facilitate isolated ASW programs' assessment, identification of strengths and weaknesses, and selection of improvement strategies. Doing so could strengthen their reputation, confirm their appropriateness as preparation for BSW studies, and aid any future conversations with bodies such as the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors or the Council on Social Work Education.

Advocates for equity and increased diversity in social work education and practice can find partners in community colleges. Possibly one-quarter of community college students are immigrants or the children of immigrants (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco,

2011). Fewer than half of community college students identify as white (AACC, 2017a). Disciplines throughout the health sciences are beginning to consider the ramifications of this. Talamantes et al. (2014), for example, discovered that about one-third of medical school students previously studied in a community college. These students were more likely than other medical students to be people of color, to be first-generation college students, and to state intentions to practice in an underserved community, and yet were less likely to gain admission (Talamantes et al., 2014). People intent on expanding the pathways to social work for members of minoritized groups may wish to consider whether attitudinal or class issues create unnecessary barriers to inclusion.

The challenges to professional and technical colleges have already been evident, including students' barriers to upward transfer into baccalaureate programs (LaSota & Zumeta, 2016; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017; Neault & Piland, 2014). Their leaders can learn from this history. Nothing is given. Integration with other higher education systems requires a concerted effort, unity, organization, and self-advocacy.

Finally, individuals who are interested in social work and have yet to earn a college degree have more options than previously recognized. People wishing to begin their studies sooner, those unable to relocate to enroll in a BSW program, and those impeded by the increasing costs of higher education can pursue an Associate in Social Work degree.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Critical pedagogy frameworks can enhance future research. When applied to archival evidence of social work's challenges in the 1960s and 1970s, it uncovered evidence of an educational system's attention to self-interest and alignment with powerful institutions. It demonstrated the isolation and exclusion of historically marginalized groups and higher

education's least influential participants. It pointed out possible discrepancies between social work's values and its structures. Further research can likewise enhance our awareness through the application of critical paradigms.

The research presented in this dissertation merely opens the conversation on the subject of social work education in American community colleges. Findings derived from the first interpretations of archival content should be tested for accuracy. Scholars may find other valid readings of the evidence, particularly if scrutinizing additional records of historical events.

Now that the existence of ASW programs and their resemblance to recognized social work education has been shown, it remains to explore their nature more fully. Much remains unknown about social work education at community colleges in the United States, including most aspects of its character, outcomes, and quality. As well, it is unclear why stakeholders in community colleges operated as they have. Scholars can determine the size and demographics of ASW student bodies and trends in the number of ASW programs or students. The composition of these programs is yet unknown. What do they teach? Who teaches in these programs? Who enrolls? How closely do ASW curricula resemble the first two years of BSW education or Associate in Human Services studies? Quantitative research, meanwhile, can be enhanced through qualitative studies into the experiences of ASW students and faculty members.

ASW program outcomes, in particular, may interest social work educators. What are the retention and graduation rates? What types of employment or baccalaureate programs do their graduates enter? How many are employed? What percentage continue on to baccalaureate education? Do BSW programs admit most ASW graduates? Do their graduates succeed in baccalaureate programs? What are their grades and graduation rates after upward transfer? How

do their grades compare to other baccalaureate students? How many earn a BSW or another baccalaureate degree? None of this data is currently available to the public.

Finally, many questions remain about the quality of social work education in community colleges. What are their strengths and weaknesses? Further research can clarify how well-prepared community college students are for BSW studies. Such information can facilitate consideration of more central questions, such as whether community college programs benefit social work. Some stakeholders may wish to quickly judge whether Associate in Social Work programs should be encouraged or disbanded, organized or left to operate independent of one another, accredited or disavowed. Ultimately stakeholders may need to determine whether ASW programs improve or degrade the quality and quantity of social work education, but little information is now available. The advantages and disadvantages of an earlier start to social work education remain unclear. Many strands must be added to this initial research to generate an adequate understanding of the Associate in Social Work. Social work educators and practitioners will then be equipped to consider the proper role for community colleges in social work education and the most sensible composition of the social work education continuum moving forward.

### **Conclusions**

This research highlights the values and concerns of CSWE in a prior generation, as well as the consequences of its decisions. This work draws attention to differences between outsiders' suppositions and community college programming. Throughout, it makes evident that social work education is a human process, conducted by human institutions. It proceeds from human hopes, fears, passions, prejudices, concerns, preferences, priorities, misunderstandings, intentions, and limitations. That is why ongoing evaluation of social work education is necessary,



testing not only its outcomes but also social work education's value-adherence, in all formats and at all levels. Hopefully, this research broadens views of social work education and sparks the conceptualization of new opportunities. The discipline's possibilities for its structure, students, content, and locale are many. It behooves social work to periodically revisit its alternatives and options, as social work education continues to evolve during its second century. There may be many ways to accomplish its invaluable goals.

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The Forgotten History of CSWE's Shift Away from Community Colleges

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Characterizing Social Work Education at Community Colleges in the United States

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Factors Leading to the Exclusion of Community Colleges from CSWE:  
Lessons in the History of Community Colleges and Social Work Education

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### Abstract

Despite community colleges' expressed interest in offering social work education they were never able to gain approval from the discipline's accrediting body. Archival evidence, analyzed through a critical pedagogy framework, suggests that social work leaders' desire to project a professional image, wariness of vocational education, distrust of paraprofessionals, and a lack of external pressure impeded the acceptance and accreditation of Associate in Social Work degrees by the Council on Social Work Education. This history offers lessons for all community college programs: community colleges must create access for upward transfer; doing so requires organization, advocacy, and connections with gatekeepers; and, stakeholders must take responsibility for conducting original research and publishing results to address others' concerns and highlight their programs' advantages.

*Keywords:* CSWE, social work education, community colleges, associate degree, accreditation, archival

Following are the slides used for a paper presentation at the 60th annual conference of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges, on April 28, 2018, in Dallas, Texas. That gathering provided the first occasion to share the research into social work education at community colleges detailed in Products One and Two, thereby becoming the first scholarly venue for this topic in decades. Conference attendees were the first to hear results of new qualitative historical research and its synthesis with secondary published accounts: (1) to protect wages and status, CSWE sought to “professionalize” its workforce in the mid-twentieth century; (2) social work leaders and governmental bodies alike demonstrated ambivalence about the skills and employability of people living in poverty; and, (3) community colleges failed to organize or align themselves with social work.

The brief time allotted for this presentation (15 to 20 minutes) necessitated a narrow scope, with a careful focus on audience members’ potential applications for the findings. Despite the importance of ground-breaking information about social work education—including the existence of 57 contemporary social work associate degree programs—attendees sought useful lessons for their concerns, unrelated to social work. This need dictated a focus on universal lessons for all professional and technical degree programs; the ASW provided a case study for all community college interests.

For the sake of audience engagement, as the first presentation on the conference’s final day, most historical information was conveyed through storytelling, using handheld objects and visual images more so than on-screen text or numerical results. Consequently, the purpose of some slides may not be self-evident. Images such as those of historical and contemporary student bodies were used to evoke consideration of issues and highlight themes when shown during the discussion of my research findings. Attendee feedback would later validate these decisions.



# Lessons in the history of community colleges and social work education

*Rex Rempel, MSW, LICSW*



## 20<sup>th</sup> century social work



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## The split

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ASSOCIATION OF  
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COLLEGES

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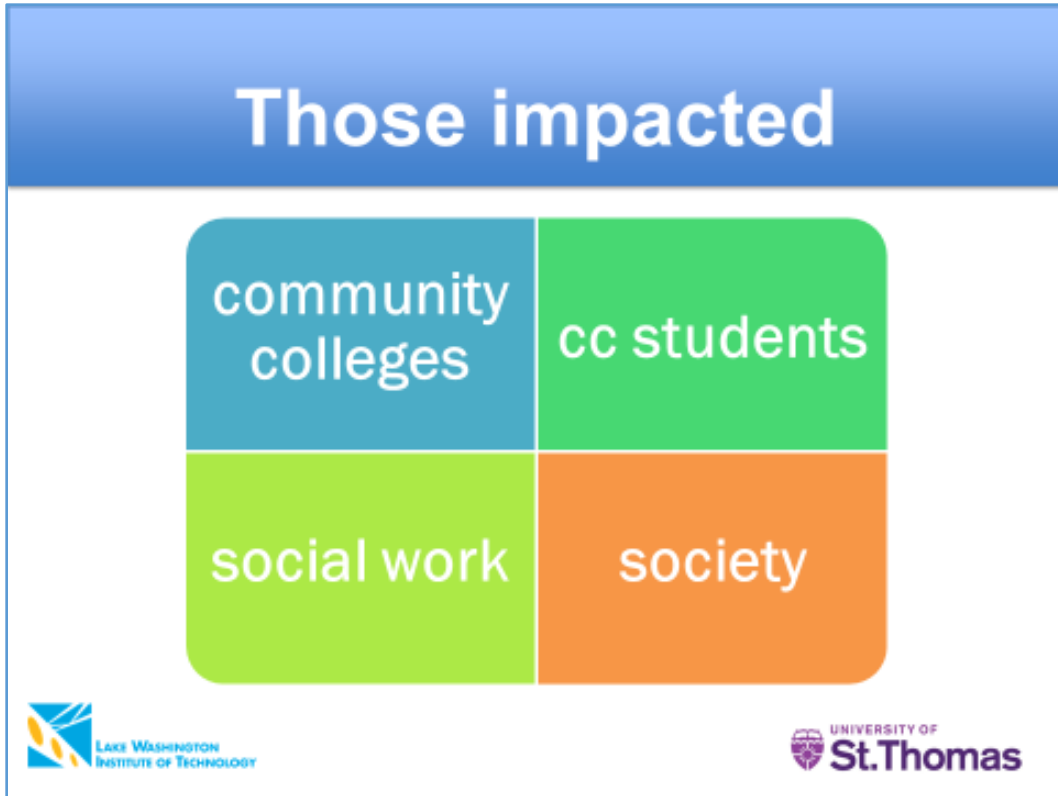
## My research

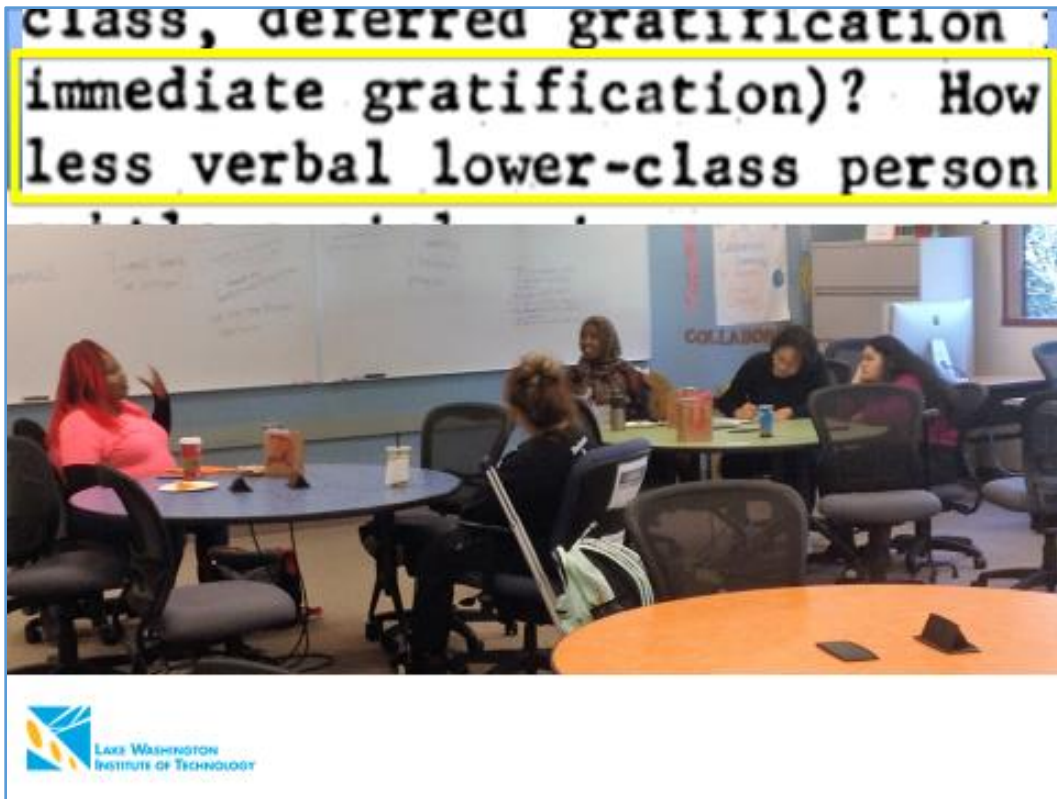
**Why** did CSWE choose  
**not** to admit  
**community colleges**  
and accredit associates  
degrees **in social work?**

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St.Thomas







## The split

<p><u>Human services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community colleges</li> <li>Open admission</li> <li>Poor, minority, disadvantaged</li> <li>Paraprofessionals</li> <li>Direct service</li> <li>Any degree level</li> </ul>		<p><u>Social work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities</li> <li>Competitive admsn.</li> <li>White, middle-class</li> <li>Professionals</li> <li>Clinical</li> <li>MSW or BSW</li> </ul>
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# Accredited social work ed

PhD / DSW

MSW

Bachelors in Social Work

Associates in Social Work

CSWE  
COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Lake Washington Institute of Technology

UNIVERSITY OF St. Thomas

# Lessons for cc

***External pathways deserve our attention, too***

Lake Washington Institute of Technology

UNIVERSITY OF St. Thomas

## Lessons for cc

**Inclusion may  
require organization  
and advocacy**



## Lessons for cc

**It is *our* responsibility  
to join the conversation  
and tell our story**



