

ADVOCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The early history of the social work profession is replete with examples of activists who viewed themselves as reformers, directing the attention of the public toward social injustice and seeking to rectify societal wrongs. As social work sought to increase its standing as a profession however, it began to lessen its emphasis on its advocacy role believing that such a de-emphasis was a necessary concession for increased professional status. In moving into the 21st Century, we at the Mandel School believe that such concessions are unnecessary and contrary to the best practice principles of our profession. Instead we believe that the truly professional social worker must come to value *advocating for social justice* as one of her /his primary responsibilities and must possess the tools and knowledge necessary to identify specific, achievable ways that positive change toward social justice can best occur.

Valuing *advocating for social justice* involves first understanding the many ways in which "social justice" can be defined depending upon the economic, social and political ideologies of those who do the defining. From that understanding then comes the ability to understand the implications of policies developed according to the various perspectives.

Valuing *advocating for social justice* also involves a deep sensitivity to the needs of all people but most especially to the needs of the poor, oppressed and disenfranchised. It embraces a global perspective, believing that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. We believe that a vital aspect of the social worker's education, both in graduate school and beyond, is immersion in the values of social justice, equality and empowerment.

In addition to development of core values, it is also necessary that social workers possess knowledge and skills related to advocacy. These assure that they can understand the continuum of ideologies through which social policies and institutions have evolved, that they can understand the dynamics and consequences of social and economic injustice and that they can effectively develop and work within a definition of social justice.

Social workers must understand the major economic, political and social forces that have shaped the development of social policy both in the United States and globally. This historical knowledge must be matched with the ability to analyze current trends to determine forces that are likely to influence change efforts. Social workers must know and understand how policy is developed at the local, state and national levels. They must be able to identify the key policies that influence their own practice settings, be able to analyze them and be able to assess the impact that those policies have on the individuals, families, groups and communities with whom they work.

Social workers must have the ability to work collaboratively to marshal resources needed to advocate for social justice, to empower their clients and communities, to work with them collaboratively as members of a team and to enlist the support of those in positions of power. They are required to know a range of advocacy strategies that further the achievement of individual and collective social and economic justice.

We believe that this ability is best developed in a setting which emphasizes cooperative learning, that provides students and faculty the opportunity to take part in social action movements and that models active involvement of all members of the learning community in efforts to advocate for social justice.

The ability *Advocating for Social Justice* has been broken down into knowledge, skills and values to be learned at the foundation and the advanced levels of the master's curriculum.

Foundation Level

Knowledge: knows the history, mission and philosophy of the social work profession, the history and current patterns of provision of social welfare services, the role of social policy in helping or deterring people in the maintenance or attainment of optimal health and well-being, and the effect of policy on social work practice. Knows a range of ideologies that have been used to define social justice and understands the types of social programs that evolve from each of these ideologies; knows how laws and policies are developed at the federal, state and local levels; knows about key social policies affecting the poor, oppressed and disenfranchised; understands how policy at the macro level impacts all aspects of practice. Understands how to interpret a selected policy, how to determine its impact and how to explain that policy to clients and to the community.

Skills: able to analyze a selected social policy to determine its impact - intended and unintended; able to use individual client needs or issues to identify social policy needs.

Values: Is committed to using knowledge and skills to improve the lives of individuals and the community; values the rights of individuals and all of their differences and diversities; values the concepts of social justice and equality; is sensitive to people's needs; has a broad perspective; has a world view.

Possible Assessment Activities: articulates a range of ideologies that have been used to define the concept of social justice; articulates a historical perspective on the development of a particular social policy; analyzes a particular social problem and develops a proposed plan for social change; analyzes a selected social policy and determines its impact on specific individuals, families, groups and communities; assesses the degree to which particular social and economic policies enhance various concepts of social justice and equality; researches, develops and can defend her/his own definition of a "poverty line".

Advanced Level

Knowledge: Has knowledge in a substantive area of social welfare policy; knows how to effectively advocate for clients on a range of levels; knows specifics of social policies in at least one area of specialization.

Skills: Able to engage in advocacy, empowerment and social change activities; can cope effectively with change by anticipating, shaping and adapting to change.

Values: Values being a change agent and advocate; displays a commitment to social justice, a vision of community and global connectedness and an identification with the purposes and ethics of the social work profession. Advocates for vulnerable populations regardless of the practice setting.

Possible Assessment Activities: Participates in a "citizen advocacy" project designed to combat social and economic injustice; engages in lobbying, organizing and /or legislative change efforts; empowers individuals, groups or communities to advocate for social change; participates in an advocacy project in the field placement setting.