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A Dream Deferred: How Social Work Education Lost Its Way and What Can Be Done

David Stoesz, Howard Jacob Karger, Terry E. Carrillo

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From its inception in the late nineteenth century, social work has struggled to carry out the complex, sometimes contradictory, functions associated with reducing suffering, enhancing social order, and social reform. Since then, social programs like the implementation of welfare and the expansion of the service economy—which should have augured well for American social work—instead led to a continued loss of credibility with the public and within the academy.

A Dream Deferred chronicles this decline of social work, attributing it to the poor quality of professional education during the past half-century. The incongruity between social work's promise and its performance warrants a critical review of professional education. For the past half-century, the fortunes of social work have been controlled by the Council of Social Work Education, which oversees accreditation of the nation's schools of social work. Stoesz, Karger, and Carrilio argue that the lack of scholarship of the Board of Directors compromises this accreditation policy. Similarly, the quality of professional literature suffers from the weak scholarship of editors and referees. The caliber of deans and directors of social work educational programs is low and graduate students are ill-prepared to commence studies in social work. Further complicating this debate, the substitution of ideology for academic rigor makes social work vulnerable to its critics.

The authors state that, since CSWE is unlikely to reform social work education, schools of social work should be free to obtain accreditation independently, and they propose criteria for independent accreditation. *A Dream Deferred* builds on the past, presents a bracing critique of the present, and proposes recommendations for a better future that cannot be ignored or dismissed.

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