

**Fall 2025 Editorial:
Advancing Social Work Education and Practice in a Complex World**

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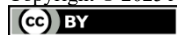
We take this opportunity to thank the 160 reviewers from 105 universities and institutions, 7 countries, 42 states and territories, who completed 227 reviews of 106 submissions in 2025 and along with the authors, editors, and board, make *Advances in Social Work* possible.

This issue contains 18 articles by 48 authors, representing both national and international perspectives. While many contributions are empirical, employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, there are also pieces with scoping or systematic literature review designs, and conceptual and theoretical papers that critically examine social work education, pedagogy, and the profession's guiding frameworks. Collectively, the articles address how social work prepares students and practitioners for contemporary challenges through innovative teaching strategies, anti-racist and decolonial approaches, and strengthened research literacy. Taken together, these contributions reflect a field actively grappling with how to align education, practice, and scholarship with social work's ethical commitments to equity, justice, and accountability.

Barnett, Bullara, and Hohman examine innovative approaches to skills-based learning in social work education through a case study of an asynchronous Motivational Interviewing (MI) training integrated into a community mental health course. Using the MI Companion, students engaged in structured, deliberate practice supported by artificial intelligence-assisted feedback grounded in the MITI 4.2.1 coding system. Their findings point to measurable improvements in students' skills. In a similar contribution, **McInroy, Kirsch, Beer, Katie, Hechmer, and Holston** focus on synchronous online simulation as an experiential learning strategy. Drawing on multiple data sources, they explore MSW students' experiences conducting assessments and documenting in a simulated practice context with a client who may be experiencing opioid use disorder. In another case study, **Liechty and Parker** turn attention to leadership development in social work education, describing a project-based seminar in which students and faculty collaboratively designed and implemented a large-scale health policy and practice conference. By positioning students as co-designers and leaders, the authors demonstrate how experiential, participatory pedagogy can cultivate leadership capacity while producing meaningful real-world outcomes. Extending a focus on applied learning beyond the classroom, **Villarreal Sosa, Hanafy, Hopson, and Bohun** present a case study of the Culturally Informed Responses to Grief and Loss Professional Development Program, which equips school-based social workers and related professionals with culturally responsive and anti-racist approaches to supporting minoritized students. The authors illustrate both the feasibility and necessity of professional development that centers anti-oppressive practice and confronts White fragility.

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The responsibility of social work education to prepare students to engage with homelessness is addressed by *Aykanian, Atteberry-Ash, Williams, and Mammah*. Through a content analysis of undergraduate and graduate course syllabi focused on homelessness, the authors identify how programs frame course objectives, topics, and levels of intervention. Their findings reveal an emphasis on service delivery and policy contexts, yet there is a notable lack of sustained attention to race, racism, oppression, and social justice. Similarly concerned with curricular approaches to social justice, *Bagley* examines how Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) operationalize the teaching of social justice in social work education. Challenging dominant narratives that often marginalize BIPOC perspectives, this preliminary study highlights the ways MSIs infuse social justice throughout their curricula and the value of centering marginalized voices in this work. *Bagley* makes a compelling case for learning from MSI contexts to move beyond abstract commitments to social justice toward more concrete, transformative pedagogical practices.

Conducting qualitative research on social work practice, *Berthold, Hall-Faul, Mortley, Mbewe, Harding, and Libal* address the intersection of social work education, refugee resettlement, and community-based practice through an analysis of the emerging community sponsorship model. Drawing on interviews with volunteers, resettlement staff, and health providers, the authors illustrate how community sponsors navigate housing, employment, education, health care, and social service systems alongside newly arrived refugees. The study highlights both the promise and limits of this model, particularly amid chronic understaffing of resettlement organizations and increasingly hostile immigration policies. Turning to the professional development of new social workers, the qualitative research study by *Branson, Marquez, Branson, and Bradley* examines concerns about declining professionalism and soft skills among recent graduates entering the workforce. Drawing on thematic analysis of data from leaders across multiple large social service agencies, the authors identify perceived gaps in professional behavior, boundaries, commitment to service, and interpersonal competencies. They situate these concerns within broader contextual factors, including the influence of social media, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and challenges related to self-care.

Hardesty identifies a tension within social work between commitments to social justice and the discipline's reliance on scientific empiricism, situating this debate within contemporary critiques of so-called "woke" ideology. The article examines the intersections of knowledge, spirituality, and moral authority, arguing that "Secular Social Justice Religiosity" functions as a secular attempt to meet human needs for meaning and transcendence left unmet by liberal rationalism. *Hardesty* calls on the profession to critically examine the philosophical frameworks guiding its knowledge production and justice claims. In another conceptual paper centered on social work practice, *Modjadji, Mankwane, and Makhubele Jabulani* focus on the psychosocial needs of women living with hypertension, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in promoting well-being and treatment adherence. The authors advance a community development approach grounded in inclusivity and empowerment as a framework for coordinating healthcare providers, community organizations, and patients. They highlight the often underrecognized role of social workers in facilitating stakeholder engagement and addressing the social dimensions of chronic illness.

Several conceptual papers address concerns in social work education. *Logan-Greene, Sperlich, and Glennon* take up the urgent issue of firearm violence, emphasizing its disproportionate impact on Black Americans. Noting that social workers are increasingly called upon to engage in violence prevention, the authors argue that the profession remains underprepared to recognize and address firearm-related risk beyond a narrow set of roles. They offer a comprehensive framework for social work education that addresses the nature of firearm violence, challenges common misconceptions linking violence and mental illness, and equips students with skills to assess risk, engage clients in harm-reduction conversations, and navigate the policy debates shaping practice. *Joseph* focuses on research education within Advanced Standing MSW programs, proposing a structured 12-week research methodology template designed to demystify thesis writing and reduce students' anxiety about engaging with research. By offering a practical, scaffolded approach to problem formulation, literature review, and methodology development, this conceptual paper provides faculty with a concrete tool to strengthen students' research confidence and integration into graduate-level scholarship. Complementing this focus on pedagogy and curriculum design, *Knox, Gergerich, and Garcia* introduce the Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Teaching and Course Critique Framework, a reflective and systematic tool for examining power, privilege, and inclusivity in social work education. Grounded in the 2022 CSWE EPAS and informed by culturally relevant teaching, queer pedagogy, and decolonization theory, the framework supports educators in critically assessing course content, classroom culture, and instructional practices. The authors offer a practical mechanism for advancing social work's commitments to equity and justice within everyday teaching practices. Finally, *Hightower* reexamines one of social work's core conceptual foundations by proposing the Individual-in-Contexts Model (ICM) as an evolution of the Person-in-Environment paradigm. While affirming the profession's enduring commitment to linking individual change with broader systemic reform, the article critiques the limitations of existing models that privilege social environments while neglecting natural, physical, and power-laden contexts. *Hightower* invites social work educators and practitioners to adopt a more expansive and reflexive understanding of context, one that better aligns theory, practice, and the profession's reformist aims.

Apgar and Luquet interrogate the rapid expansion of online social work education, raising critical questions about access, equity, and accountability in the absence of dedicated accreditation standards. While online programs have increased educational accessibility, particularly for working students and those historically marginalized within higher education, the authors highlight troubling workforce data showing that Black social workers are disproportionately represented in online programs and carry higher levels of student loan debt. The article challenges the assumption that increased access necessarily yields equitable outcomes.

Three literature reviews in this issue critically examine how social work theory, education, and practice engage with social justice-oriented commitments, particularly in relation to Indigeneity, embodied inequality, and advocacy. Centering Indigenous scholarship and global ethical mandates, *Alviz* conducts a review on Contextual Indigeneity in Social Work which calls for a decolonizing transformation of the profession. Drawing

on frameworks such as Tribal Critical Race Theory, Indigenous Decolonial Feminism, Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and the Indigenous Wholistic Framework, *Alviz* argues that social work education and practice must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, resilience, and lived realities. A second literature review, by *Hyland*, turns attention to menstrual health inequity and period poverty, highlighting how stigma, systems of oppression, and inadequate access to menstrual health management products undermine dignity, participation, and autonomy. Through a scoping review, *Hyland* reveals significant gaps in how menstruation and period poverty are conceptualized within the literature, noting the absence of a consistent social justice lens and limited recognition of the diversity of menstruators' experiences. *Young, Hassler, and Stoeffler* examine advocacy as a foundational yet ambiguously defined component of social work practice. Analyzing over two decades of literature through a case-to-cause paradigm, the authors find that while advocacy is consistently affirmed as central to the profession's mission, its conceptualization remains diffuse across scholarship and professional standards. By proposing a conceptual definition and strategies for greater clarity, this review invites educators, researchers, and practitioners to more intentionally operationalize advocacy within social work education and practice.

Reviewer Appreciation

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