Comment on Proposed 2029 EPAS
[Sexuality | Relationships | Gender] Research Collective

What is changing?

We, the members of [Sexuality | Relationships | Gender] Research Collective (SRG), are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) 2029 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), particularly the removal or weakening of language related to anti-racism, anti-oppression, human rights, and social justice, and what the devaluation will be for our profession.

These standards do more than guide what is taught in social work programs. They establish what future social workers are expected to know, what skills they must demonstrate, and what programs are held accountable to teach.

The 2022 EPAS made important progress by explicitly naming anti-racism, oppression, and racial, social, economic, and environmental justice as essential parts of social work education. The proposed 2029 revisions move away from these commitments.

> For example, Competency 2 shifts from *Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice* to *Promote Dignity, Respect, and Justice for All*. Competency 3 replaces *Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice* with *Apply Person-in-Environment Perspective in Practice*.

While dignity, respect, and the person-in-environment perspective are foundational to social work, they should not replace explicit expectations for anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice or the importance of human rights and justice work.

There is an important distinction between teaching social workers to recognize injustice and equipping them with the skills to challenge it.

Why does this matter?

The language of accreditation standards matters because it determines what social work programs are required to teach, assess, and demonstrate. When anti-racism, anti-oppression,

and specific forms of injustice are no longer explicitly named, they risk becoming optional rather than foundational.

Social workers regularly encounter people experiencing the consequences of racism, poverty, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. Our responsibility cannot stop at simply helping individuals navigate these challenges. We must also be prepared to question, challenge, and shift the systems that are creating and benefiting from them.

> For example, imagine a trans person seeking mental health support whose identity isn't recognized by the service's intake forms or administrative procedures. A social worker might understand how this affects the person's experience and respond sensitively, yet shouldn't their training also prepare them to question and challenge the institutional practices creating those barriers in the first place? There is an important distinction between teaching students to recognize inequality and requiring them to demonstrate what they can do about it.

We must require our students to be competent in anti-oppressive practices at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. This is a signature component of social work.

We are also concerned about weakening expectations for critically examining social work's own history of harm, including racism, forced assimilation, and the disproportionate surveillance and separation of families. Understanding this history is necessary to recognize how our profession can continue to contribute to oppression.

We recognize the political and legislative pressures CSWE faces surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, these challenges should not determine whether our profession maintains its commitment to social justice.

If social justice is a defining value of our profession, it must also be an explicit, measurable expectation of our education.

What are we asking CSWE to change?

We urge CSWE to restore and strengthen explicit commitments to anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-ableism, human rights, and structural advocacy throughout the proposed 2029 EPAS.

Specifically, we recommend:

1. **Competency 1:** Require students to critically examine social work's history, mission, and responsibilities through anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive perspectives, including the profession's historical and ongoing role in perpetuating harm.

2. **Competency 2:** Maintain the 2022 language explicitly naming social, racial, economic, and environmental justice, expand it to include disability justice and trans justice, and restore expectations for advocating against oppressive structural barriers.
3. **Competency 3:** Retain the person-in-environment perspective while explicitly addressing how racism, ableism, classism, (cis)sexism, cis(genderism), heterosexism, and other forms of oppression are embedded in institutions and policies. Require students to identify who creates and maintains barriers, who has the power to change them, and what responsibility social workers have to act.
4. **Competency 4:** Explicitly incorporate anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive approaches to research, including identifying and addressing bias in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.
5. **Competency 5:** Require students to understand and critically examine the history and current structures of social policies and services through anti-oppressive, anti-ableist, and anti-racist perspectives. Students should also demonstrate the ability to analyze, develop, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.
6. **Competency 7:** Address how individual bias, power, privilege, and institutional structures influence assessment and decision-making.
7. **Competency 8:** Restore expectations for culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions, collaborative decision-making, and advocacy with and on behalf of clients and communities.
8. **Competency 9:** Require anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive perspectives when evaluating outcomes, including examining who benefits and whether interventions reinforce existing inequalities.
9. **Competency 10:** Require students to critically evaluate the ethical implications of technology, including its potential to reinforce bias, increase surveillance, limit access, or harm individuals, communities, and ecological systems.

Social work education is not separate from the systems we are asking future social workers to challenge. Racism, ableism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression can and do exist within our own classrooms, practicum placements, and institutions. Standards that explicitly name these issues and require action work to hold social work programs accountable for addressing them.

As a research collective committed to equity, justice, and centering the experiences of communities oppressed due to their sexualities, genders, and relationships structures, SRG believes social work education must prepare students to recognize and challenge oppression, including within their own profession.

We cannot expect future social workers to challenge unjust systems if we are unwilling to hold our own institutions to the same standard.

Public comments close November 20, 2026. You do not have to be a social worker to submit feedback. Complete the 2029 EPAS Draft Survey here.