

Professional Practice Doctoral Program Accreditation Pilot Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA) is currently piloting the accreditation of professional practice doctoral programs (i.e., DSW programs). General CSWE's Department of Social Work Accreditation FAQs can be found [here](#).

Note: All questions regarding the pilot should be directed to practicedoc@cswe.org

1. Does CSWE have a list of accredited doctoral-level social work programs?

No. CSWE's COA is currently piloting the accreditation of professional practice doctoral programs (i.e., DSW programs). The list of selected pilot programs will be kept confidential throughout the pilot process. PhD programs are not accredited by CSWE's COA.

2. What are professional practice doctoral programs?

Social work practice doctorates (i.e., DSW programs) prepare graduates to advance practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels as well as in higher education and/or professional leadership.

These doctoral programs educate master's-level social work practitioners who are graduates of CSWE-accredited programs as doctoral level practitioner-scholars who will develop, translate, and advance social work practice knowledge; engage in systematic inquiry; and apply and disseminate research-informed knowledge, values, ethics, and skills in social work through practice, professional leadership, and teaching.

3. How many programs will be accepted into the pilot?

A total of 4 programs (roughly 20% of existing professional practice doctoral programs) will be selected to participate in the pilot. This limited caseload of programs allows COA and CSWE staff to intentionally review each stage in the process and make adjustments, as needed.

4. Why pilot?

A pilot is a required step before CSWE's COA can request adjustment to its scope of accreditation from the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). COA has determined that they intend to pursue change in scope and proceed with accreditation of professional practice doctoral programs at the end of the pilot. CSWE's COA cannot guarantee that CHEA will approve a request of change in scope.

5. Can I find out which programs have been selected to participate in the pilot?

The list of selected programs will be kept confidential throughout the candidacy pilot process. Because accreditation of these programs is currently being piloted and accreditation is not guaranteed, COA will not be releasing

candidacy decisions for the pilot programs to the public. In addition, programs participating in the pilot are discouraged from disclosing their participation status.

Identifying information will be made public once the pilot is complete or an initial accreditation decision is made.

6. When will additional professional practice doctoral programs be able to seek accreditation?

COA and CSWE staff will evaluate the capacity to expand the pilot initiative to include additional programs at the completion of the Benchmark 2 process for the initial set of programs (currently projected to occur in 2024).

7. What does it mean if I graduate from a professional practice doctoral program that is not accredited?

Piloting is a typical process for all accreditors seeking to expand their scope of accreditation. All stakeholders, including licensing boards are aware of and understand that this is a standard and gradual practice.

Any potential barriers to practice due to doctoral accreditation status are not anticipated until well into the future.

8. If I graduate from a professional practice doctoral program that is granted accreditation in the future, can I be considered to be a graduate of an accredited program?

The accreditation status obtained at initial accreditation only covers the components that were reviewed during the accreditation review process. Therefore, the accredited status only applies to those students who started the program in the academic year during which candidacy is granted and beyond. For example, if a program is granted candidacy in Spring 2023, all students who started the program in Fall 2022 or later will have graduated from an accredited program, if/when the program receives initial accreditation. See policy 3.1.1 in [EPAS Handbook](#) for more details. Accreditation status will not be retroactively effective to previous students and curricula.

9. What is required in order for me to apply to a professional practice doctoral program?

Each program selects and implements their own admissions criteria. At a minimum, Accreditation Standard 3.0.2 in the [Accreditation Standards for Professional Practice Doctoral Programs in Social Work](#), requires that the professional practice doctoral programs only admit students that:

- have earned a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program¹; and
- have a minimum of 3 years of practice experience beyond the master's degree in social work.

10. Why did CSWE's COA decide to pilot professional practice doctoral programs? What does this mean for the bachelor and master's level education?

The number of professional practice doctoral programs has been growing in recent years. In response to many questions in the field about how DSW graduates fit within the education continuum, COA partnered with programs, social work educators and leaders, doctoral students, and other constituents who worked together to conduct an environmental scan, gather data and feedback, and create [accreditation standards](#) to set a minimum threshold for recognizing professional practice doctoral programs as having a level of performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public the program serves.

Baccalaureate social work programs (accredited by CSWE's COA since 1974) and Master's social work programs (accredited by CSWE's COA since 1952, and its predecessor since 1919) maintain their significant and vital place in the continuum of social work education in preparing students for competent social work practice across all system levels (micro, mezzo, and macro) and with diverse clients and constituencies. Bachelor's programs prepare students for generalist practice while master's programs prepare students for generalist and specialized practice. Professional practice doctoral programs prepare graduates to advance practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels as well as in higher education and/or professional leadership.

11. What is CSWE's, or its Commission on Accreditation (COA)'s, position on the terminal degree for social work education and practice?

Neither CSWE, nor its Commission on Accreditation (COA), address / designate a terminal degree for social work education or practice.

If your inquiry is in regard to faculty preparation or regional accreditation requirements for faculty qualifications / credentials, please contact the program's [accreditation specialist](#) for your currently accredited baccalaureate and master's social work program. The COA and [EPAS](#) clearly continue to emphasize the value of master's level social work preparation for faculty in accredited social work programs as well as for post-degree social work practice.

¹ This includes individuals whose degree was recognized as equivalent through CSWE's [International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service \(ISWDRES\)](#) and graduates from Canadian social work programs accredited by CASWE covered by the [memorandum of understanding between CSWE and CASWE](#).

12. I have questions regarding licensure. Who can I speak to at CSWE?

CSWE staff do not discuss licensing. Professional social work licensure post-degree is under the authority of a designated board within each individual state government. Your state government is responsible for regulating licensure and setting criteria required to become a licensed professional social worker. Requirements may differ by state. Contact information for individual state licensing boards can be found on the [Association of Social Work Boards \(ASWB\) website](#) or through an internet search for a licensing board for a particular state. Questions regarding licensure and professional practice should be directed to the board in your state. Questions regarding the national social work licensing exams should be directed to the ASWB, the body that publishes and administers the exams.