



## Letter to the Council on Social Work Education

### Introduction

*One of the first actions of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work Anti-Racist Doctoral Program Student Committee was to draft the letter below to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). We collected signatures from Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral social work students and submitted the letter with 114 signatures to the CSWE President and Board on July 2, 2020.*

### Suggested citation (APA 7th Ed. format):

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- **In-text parenthetical citation:** (UPitt SSW ARDPSC, 2020)

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July 2, 2020

Dear President and Board Members of the Council on Social Work Education:

The continuous state-sanctioned violence against Black people, including George Floyd, David McAtee, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Sean Reed, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, Dominique Fells, Rayshard Brooks, Antwon Rose II, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin and many others, in this country and across the world, underscores our ethical obligation as social workers to embrace anti-racism as a core value of our education and practice.

To improve alignment between social work values, education, and practice, we, the undersigned students and alumni from the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, urge the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to explicitly include “anti-racist pedagogies” in the competencies of the educational policy and accreditation standards. In coalition with students from social work programs across the country, (1) we ask that the term “anti-racist” be specifically included in Competency #2, “Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice”; we join with students at the University of Michigan to further demand that CSWE use its considerable regulatory power to enforce the following as additional requirements for accreditation: “(2) mandate that every accredited social work program create and submit a plan to investigate, identify, and address white supremacy culture, past and present; the history of racism in America; and racist practices in their program, on the interpersonal and institutional levels; (3) require on-going faculty and staff training on the cultures and history of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); and (4) recognize and promote diverse cultures and practice methods of BIPOC for social work practice.” Lastly, (5) we ask that accredited social work programs explicitly define anti-racist hiring and promotion practices that encourage the hiring and ongoing support of BIPOC faculty. Given that white supremacy is deeply woven into our institutions, profession, and overall social environment, we ask that CSWE explicitly require schools to identify and maintain ongoing cultural humility and anti-racist training at all levels of school staff, faculty, and students.

While social work schools and organizations make statements of solidarity, we students are wary of watered-down statements and university initiatives labeled with evasive terms like “diversity” and “inclusion.” We ask that CSWE do more to demand accountability for racial justice and, in this way, contribute to a truly anti-racist social work education and, ultimately, profession. Without the changes recommended above and those being demanded by students from across the United States, social work will fail to acknowledge and remedy its contribution to creating and maintaining white supremacy in social work schools and institutions. We must teach and examine an accurate history of our profession, including but not limited to our role in segregated settlement houses and social services, our role in attempting cultural genocide against Native American and Indigenous peoples through the Native American boarding school system, our role in incarcerating Japanese Americans, and our contemporary role in the prison industrial complex, the continued disproportionate removal of Black children through the child welfare system, and the continued state-sanctioned violence against BIPOC communities. To dismantle racist structures, we must explicitly identify the voices and theories of knowledge that are

represented in social work education -- shaped by Euro-centric white cis-male, heteronormative, anti-Black, neoliberal, and capitalist ideologies that form and maintain white supremacy. We must teach intersectionality across the curriculum, examining how intersecting social identities of gender expression and identity, race/ethnicity, nationality, class, ability, sexual orientation, and age shape the systemic oppression experienced by Black, Latinx, Native American, Indigenous and Asian people as well as the practices to address resulting injustices.

Social work education must radically alter its theoretical approaches and praxis if we are to train social workers who are truly committed to racial justice. These efforts cannot be achieved through short-term or surface solutions. Rather, sweeping, transformative, and ongoing change must address the deep roots of white supremacy and racism within the social work academy. CSWE can and must use its regulatory power to hold social work education accountable to operationalize widespread promises for an anti-racist social work profession. The liberation of Black people is ALL of our liberation.

We want to thank you for your time and work. We know that CSWE has repeatedly asked for input from the social work community on the EPAS as well as to inform resources to support social work education. To that end, we suggest a forum or virtual town hall to allow the social work community to share our concerns and discuss reforms within our profession. Finally, we ask for urgency in responding to the requests of students across the country. While our school is going through reaffirmation this year and we are aware that EPAS are being reviewed now, we hope that we don't have to wait many years to see these changes. We look forward to hearing how CSWE intends to implement changes to address the concerns of social work students outlined here.

