Finding aid for the Academy of Certified Social Workers Competence Certification Board records 0464

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The Academy of Certified Social Workers Competence Certification Board records consist of meeting minutes and agendas, correspondence, and reports, that document the activities of this body during the early 1980s. Included is information about the establishment and oversight of certification standards for social workers, and the design of the certification examination administered by the Educational Testing Service. The records also provide some information about general activities carried out by the Board in its relationship with the National Association of Social Workers and the Academy of Certified Social Workers, including membership issues and general social work education.


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Scope and Content
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Historical note
The Competence Certification Board (CCB), in the period covered by these records, had as its principle responsibility the oversight of NASW’s Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW) program. The ACSW exam, given twice yearly, was begun in 1973, resulting by 1979 in an ACSW membership of 47,000, with approximately 4,000 new members admitted each year. NASW had originally set up CCB as a separate corporation in 1961, to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest in conducting examinations which would give credentials only to NASW members. In the early 1970’s, before ACSW examinations began, CCB’s separate incorporation was dissolved by NASW, in a move that remained controversial throughout the 1970s.

NASW was then the only major professional group to collect specific data on the exam performance of ethnic and racial groups. Since 1974 it had been aware that African American candidates for the ACSW exam had a 50% failure rate, as compared to a 15% rate for caucasians. NASW was unable to isolate or explain reasons for this high failure rate, but CCB was nevertheless scheduled to report on its findings for the first time in 1979. The collection reflects the anxiety felt by CCB, both in making the failure rate public, and in devising some means to reduce it by adjusting the character of its ACSW examination in consultation with the professional testing service employed.

Since African-American candidates as a group were older and had more years of experience in social work, it was decided to base one third of exam scores on experience and professional references. This change resulted in a 75% pass rate, but led to other problems including a charge that the examination had become too easy, and that it was largely irrelevant to actual social work practice. By 1981 the Board was preoccupied with "rescaling" concerns, and had decided to bolster the reputation of its exam through the expensive and time-consuming new process of Validation Research, with the assistance of consultants and examination technology specialists.

Faced with a need for new expertise in testing procedures, the Board prioritized its work and decided to defer consideration of specialization in the profession, and of continuing education for social workers. But it was required, thanks to pressure by vocal groups within NASW, to pay attention to the long-delayed concerns of Baccalaureate Social Workers (BSW) in the
area of credentials. NASW did not know, and apparently was unable to discover, how many BSW members it had acquired since this group was admitted to membership, against considerable opposition, in 1973. As “entry level” workers who filled many positions nationally in the hard-pressed public social services agencies, BSW wanted the recognition and status that they believed some sort of professional credential would entail. The collection reflects, particularly in correspondence, an opening phase of sharp disagreement in NASW about the BSWs’ desire for a credential. This was seen by some as a threat to the professional status of social workers with MSW and ACSW designations in that a BSW credential was thought likely to confuse the public and devalue advanced degrees.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Academy of Certified Social Workers (U.S.). Competence Certification Board. -- Archives
Agendas (administrative records)
Correspondence
Minutes
Reports
Social work education--United States--Archival resources
Social workers--Certification--United States--Archival resources

| Box 1, Folder 1 | CCB meeting minutes 1982 April-May |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Educational Testing Service exam development 1980-1982 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Educational Testing Service Standards for Quality and Fairness 1981 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | ACSW correspondence and memorandums 1980-1981 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | CCB meeting agenda 1981 January |
| Box 1, Folder 6-7 | CCB meeting agenda 1981 July |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | CCB meeting agenda 1982 April |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Specialization in social work 1981 |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Mandatory continuing education 1980 |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Reports and Papers--NASW, ACSW 1980 |
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