

CalSWEC

California Social Work Education Center

Focusing on Public Social Services

Our First Decade: 1990–2000



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Funded by the Zellerbach Family Fund, the California Department of Social Services, and the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“CalSWEC is an innovative and bold program. If it is successful, it may establish a significant new pattern for professional social work in the United States.”

—from *Unfaithful Angels: How Social Work Has Abandoned Its Mission*, by Harry Specht and Mark E. Courtney

Message from the Dean

As CalSWEC enters its tenth year of operation, its leaders, staff, faculty, and students can with satisfaction contemplate the organization's significant achievements. More professionally qualified social workers are now employed in the public child welfare services in California than ever before, curricular offerings in child welfare at the state's schools of social work have been strengthened, and a large number of students have been financially supported, helping them to realize their goal of becoming social workers.

Links between county child welfare agencies, the state, and schools of social work in California have been strengthened, and there is a greater commitment to collaborating effectively so that the welfare of the state's children can be enhanced.

While it is fitting that these many achievements be celebrated, all of those involved in CalSWEC recognize the challenges that lie ahead. The need for professional social work staff in other settings, such as mental health, school social work, and gerontological social work, is great. It is CalSWEC's goal to address this in the coming years. However, this will require an even greater commitment to build on the experience of the past ten years and to collaborate with all who care about the unmet needs of so many of California's citizens. At a time when prosperity in California has reached unprecedented levels, social workers are only too aware of the needs of those who have not shared fully in the state's economic achievements.

CalSWEC will continue to work for the welfare of all of California's citizens and, in so doing, seek and encourage social work colleagues both in the state and around the nation to properly recognize the role of the public social services in meeting social needs, addressing problems, and enhancing opportunities. CalSWEC personifies this commitment, and the dedication of all those who have worked to fulfill its original goals needs to be recognized. Congratulations on a successful first ten years, and good luck for the years ahead.



James Midgley, PhD
Dean and Specht Professor
School of Social Welfare
University of California, Berkeley

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Dean James Midgley



where we came from

In 1990, when the academic community and the public social services joined forces to create the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), the primary goal was to improve the commitment of social workers to work in the public sector with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. When CalSWEC was formed, it was considered the most ambitious such collaboration in the country. Today, CalSWEC continues to serve as a national model of leadership in school/agency partnerships. Universities throughout the nation still use the California Child Welfare Competencies, developed by CalSWEC, as a starting point for curriculum development.

Social Work and Public Social Services: A Fragile Relationship

Historically, schools of social work have assumed a leadership role in preparing students for work with disadvantaged families. The commitment of the profession to these particular services in the public sector, however, has always been regarded as tenuous.

The social work profession arose at the end of the late 19th century in the charity organization societies at a time when government hardly had a role in the social services. Only with the 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act did the federal government begin to provide financial support to the states for social casework services. These provisions were broadened year by year, and in 1974 the addition of Title XX to the Social Security Act established the framework for the states to offer comprehensive programs of social services.

From 1962 to 1980, as national interest in publicly supported social services grew, social work education in those settings for a time experienced an increase. Title XX supported a number of innovative collaborative projects between schools and public agencies and agency-based field units. This was short-lived, however, as public agencies were accused of being tools to regulate the poor, and funding for professional education fell victim in the dismantling of the welfare state.

Consequently, although nationally the total number of graduate students in social work education increased by nearly 70 percent from 1969 to 1980, during that same period student support decreased between 50 to 70 percent, depending on whether it was a federal, state, or county source. The proportion of students specializing in child welfare increased by only 43 percent, and the numbers specializing in public assistance and corrections decreased by 39 and 51 percent, respectively. California mirrored the national trend, as the percentage of its students receiving support for graduate social work education from local government dropped by 75 percent. The proportion of students placed for field work in publicly supported social services, especially in departments of social services, decreased.



Affirming the Commitment to Public Social Services

When Dr. Harry Specht became dean of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley in 1977, only one of some 200 students in the school's Master of Social Work (MSW) program was doing field work in a public social service agency. Most were training to be clinicians, many of them intending to become private practitioners of psychotherapy. Moreover, county social service agencies were suspicious of schools of social work, seeing little connection between their needs and what was being taught in the graduate programs. Dean Specht and the teaching staff set out to change that course by revising the school's mission, which became the following: to produce professionals for careers in the publicly supported services and to serve deprived populations.

By the late 1980s, schools of social work, professional organizations, and public agencies began exploring possibilities for collaboration, precipitated by changes facing society and the social work profession. These included the following:

- Increasing numbers of social workers were achieving top leadership positions in public agencies but were experiencing difficulty attracting and retaining MSW direct service workers.
- The job market was expanding in response to the increase in recognized social problems, such as child abuse, AIDS, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and homelessness; most agencies, lacking internal training divisions, turned to the universities for assistance in developing in-service education.
- Highly publicized stories of abuse and death occurring among children in placement were creating pressure for professionalization of services.
- Funding organizations were increasingly interested in supporting school/agency coalitions, rather than funding either sector independently, as a mechanism to enhance the quality of services.
- The presence of an ethnically diverse staff that mirrored the client population was considered key to client acceptance and satisfaction; however, the tremendous growth of immigrant and minority populations in California was no match for the small numbers of social workers of color being trained by schools of social work to serve those populations.

The Birth of CalSWEC

Dean Specht took his vision—to advance social work's commitment to the poor and the services upon which they depended—to a larger audience. He found support in Zellerbach Family Fund Executive Director Edward Nathan, a former field director at UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare. Together, they drew upon the Bay Area's county social services agencies and the local graduate schools of social work to form a coalition focused on the improvement of

services and enhanced inter-county collaboration. The result was the Bay Area Social Services Consortium, or BASSC, which took shape in 1987 with a series of Zellerbach Family Fund-sponsored conferences, the first of which focused on medically fragile babies.

BASSC was initially composed of seven county departments of social services, Dean Specht, and Mr. Nathan. Within a year, however, it had expanded to include nine county departments and three Bay Area schools of social work. This collaboration and other efforts in the state created a relationship between the deans and directors of the schools and county social service managers that resulted in a shared understanding about problems in education and staffing.

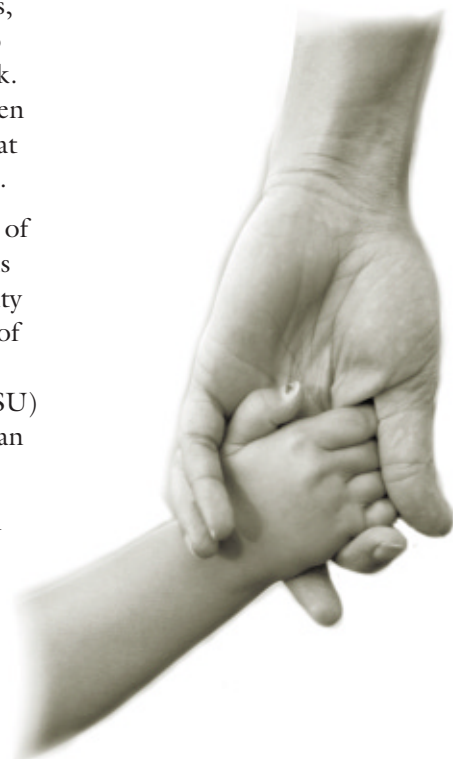
On the heels of BASSC's success and with the help of the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the collaboration was extended to all of the state's 58 social service departments through the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), and the state's ten graduate schools of social work: UC Berkeley, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Southern California, and the California State University (CSU) campuses at Fresno, Long Beach, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose.

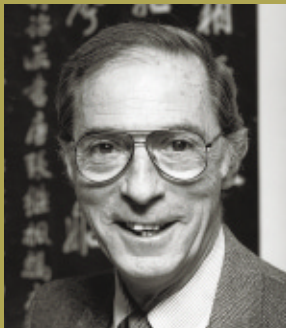
In a groundbreaking move that demonstrated their good faith, the deans and directors of the schools unanimously adopted the following common mission statement in November 1989:

“There will be two central components of the mission of social work and social welfare education in California. The first is the enlargement and enhancement of knowledge for the profession and the field through study and research. . . . The second . . . is the preparation of social workers for a wide range of professional leadership and practice roles addressing the needs of oppressed and disadvantaged persons and communities through publicly supported services.

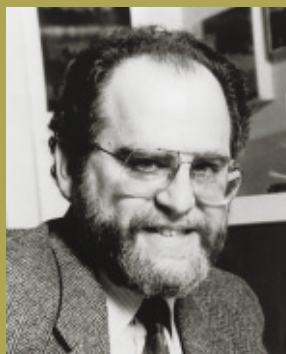
“As services-oriented institutions, MSW educational programs in California have a special mission to serve students from groups that historically have not participated in university education because of age, socioeconomic background, physical disadvantage, geographical location, and discrimination. . . .

“Priority recipients of direct social work services will be seen as the poor and underserved, and the central purpose of social work practice will be enabling individuals, groups, and communities to meet their social needs by making use of societal resources. The primary locus of practice will be in institutional systems supported by the public, i.e., public social services and voluntary social services agencies. . . .”





Dr. Harry Specht, Dean
School of Social Welfare
University of California, Berkeley
1977 – 1995



Dr. Bart Grossman
Executive Director, CalSWEC
1990 – 1995



Dr. Nancy Dickinson
Executive Director, CalSWEC
1995 – 1998

The goal of the landmark partnership was to redirect MSW education in California toward increasing the numbers and improving the preparation of social workers for working in the public social services. “We have to get students into public social services, change working conditions, and set new educational trends all at once,” said Dean Specht.ⁱⁱ

As a possible source of the project’s stipend funding, the CWDA identified Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Stipend funding for students was integral to the project, which at the time was governed by three central realities:

- (1) Disincentives to graduate education, such as low public agency salaries and increasing educational costs, can be overcome only by linking substantial financial aid for students to requisite public agency employment after their graduation;
- (2) Any significant effort to reprofessionalize the enormous child welfare system in California requires support for a large number of students; and
- (3) Current budget exigencies prevent the creation of a significant aid program that depends primarily on state and county contributions.

John Lanigan, then-project officer for the Ford Foundation, offered to provide three years of support for the project, with the possibility of an additional two-year extension. Eight California foundations agreed to match the Ford grant—the Elise Haas Fund, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Louis R. Lurie Foundation, the Community Foundation of Santa Clara, the San Francisco Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, the Von Löben Sels Foundation, and the Zellerbach Family Fund.

In 1990, the California Center for Graduate Social Work Education for the Public and Non-Profit Social Services was born. Dr. Bart Grossman, field director at UC Berkeley’s School of Social Welfare, became the center’s first executive director. Soon after the center’s creation, Dean Specht renamed it the California Social Work Education Center, or CalSWEC.

Creating a financial aid program for social work education was considered critical to increasing the numbers of minorities in professional social welfare positions to be reflective of the diverse populations they served. In 1990, the state’s population of children was 9.3 percent African American and 28 percent Hispanic, and the percentage of children in foster care was 37.9 percent African American and 20.6 percent Hispanic. The ethnicity of professional child welfare staff, however, was 9 percent African American and 11 percent Hispanic. Moreover, only 34 percent of California child welfare workers, the most professionalized of all county welfare services, had MSW degrees. Nationally, only 15 percent of all social workers with master’s degrees were employed in public or county departments of social services. One-third of California’s counties had no MSW professionals at all.ⁱⁱⁱ

As one of the first and most important tasks during his tenure, CalSWEC Executive Director Grossman undertook the search for a source of financial aid to students, particularly those already employed in the public social services and members of ethnic and racial minority groups. Under the stipend plan, the students would upon graduation commit to a year of employment in public child welfare for each year of financial support.

Dr. Grossman found his answer in the California Department of Social Services (CDSS); the Office of State Programs of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) of then-U.S. Department of Social Services; the CWDA; and the California Chapter of the NASW. In 1991, CalSWEC and the four entities signed the California Child Welfare Education Partnership Agreement, a union to develop a program that would promote the preparation of MSW social workers for employment in public child welfare systems. Key people involved in preparing this historic agreement were Carol Rosen, ACYF; Marsena Buck and Ellen Dunbar, NASW; Loren Suter, CDSS; Richard O'Neil, CWDA; and Dean Specht.

The program would be made possible through: (1) the creation of a state financial aid program for social work education based on Title IV-E (Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, P.L. 96-272) of the Social Security Act that would give priority to current county agency employees and persons who reflected the populations they served, (2) the implementation by the state's graduate schools of social work of a competency-based curriculum for MSW students in child welfare specializations, and (3) the promotion of collaborative school/agency research and development activities directed at the improvement of child welfare services.

Unique in its size and scope, CalSWEC attracted national attention because of its focus on the transformation of both MSW education and social service delivery in the state by: upgrading the professional background of some already-employed workers by drawing them back to the university for an MSW; increasing the number of minorities in professional positions in social welfare to reflect the populations they served; and opening the doors to innovation by integrating university research with county services.

When CalSWEC was founded, no one was certain how long it would last, but all those involved in its creation could not think of a time when this collaboration between university and government was more needed.

*The historic California
Child Welfare
Education Partnership
Agreement was signed
in 1991 to develop a
program that would
promote the
preparation of MSW
social workers for
employment in public
child welfare systems.*

ⁱ Grossman, B., Laughlin, S. and Specht, H. (1991) Building the Commitment of Social Work Education to Publicly Supported Social Services: The California Model. In K. Hooper Briar, V. Hooker Hansen, and N. Harris (Eds.) *New Partnerships: Proceedings from the National Public Child Welfare Training Symposium 1991*. Florida: Department of Social Work, Institute on Children and Families at Risk, Florida International University.

ⁱⁱ New Center Aims to Return Social Workers to Public Service. *CalReport* (winter 1991):12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Survey of California Child Welfare Departments, 1987–1998, California Chapter, NASW.