

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare



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Abstract and Keywords

The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW) is a scholarly and professional society of distinguished social work and social welfare scholars and practitioners that was conceived in 2009 to establish excellence in social work and social welfare research and practice. The first 10 Fellows were inducted in 2010 and a total of 172 Fellows have been inducted since that year. Nominations are solicited from current Fellows, processed through a Nominations and Elections Committee process, and voted on by the membership. Through committee structure and an expanding, and now independent, practical initiative called the Grand Challenges for Social Work that was the Academy's first initiative, the Academy serves to advance social welfare through advocacy and policy and to encourage scholarship, along with expanding the reach of the Academy Fellows' expertise into critical government and public forums. The AASWSW is in its second-year of administering a mentoring program to provide expertise and resources for early career faculty through Fellows who volunteer as mentors for specific projects like a grant application or research manuscript. Future Academy endeavors include awards for innovation and impact in research or practice, sponsoring policy briefs, often in conjunction with other academies, and serving as a relevant source of information for the social work profession.

Keywords: scholarship, Grand Challenges, advocacy, mentoring, social welfare research, policy briefs

Introduction

The Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare was established in 2009 as an honorific society of distinguished scholars and practitioners dedicated to achieving excellence in the field of social work and social welfare through high-impact work that advances social good. Fellows of the Academy are nominated and elected by existing Fellows on a yearly basis under the auspices of a Nominations and Elections Committee. Nominations may include (a) scholars whose work has had a significant impact in the field through rigorous and highly regarded peer-reviewed articles, books, government publications, grants, testimony, and invited/public addresses; (b) theoreticians whose writings have guided major research activities and practice outcomes in the field; (c) researchers whose findings

have promoted advances in social work/social welfare practice and/or policy; (d) developers of evidence-based practices that have gained national recognition and use; and (e) policymakers, administrators, and/or practitioners whose work has made a significant impact nationally or internationally, for example on national laws, state models for national programs, and/or national practice standards. New Fellows are inducted at the annual meeting of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). The Academy has elected 172 Fellows who represent a range of interests in social work and social welfare.

The idea of creating an academy had been discussed at meetings of social work professional organizations like SSWR, the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work, and the St. Louis Group in the years prior to 2009, with mixed reactions. Many saw wisdom and utility in establishing an academy for the social work profession. Some argued that it would serve to position the profession on an equal par with professions like nursing, medicine, engineering, and education, all of which have academies. Others in favor of establishing an academy said that such an academy could serve to inform Congress on social issues and keep Academy Fellows abreast of social problems of high public concern (Barth, Gilmore, Flynn, Fraser, & Brekke, 2014). Detractors voiced concern that an academy would be perceived as elitist (Barth et al., 2014). After approximately five years of debate, those in favor of establishing an academy prevailed and the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare, broadened to include those who work to advance social welfare but were not trained as social workers, was established in 2009. While the Academy could be considered elitist in the sense that it is honorific, all who are active in social work and social welfare and share the mission of establishing excellence in social work and social welfare research and practice are potentially eligible for nomination.

History of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare: 2009 to 2018

Figure 1 provides a timeline of the Academy, from its incorporation in Ohio at the Mandell School of Social Work at Case Western Reserve University in 2009, through contributions from charter sponsors to the present. The first class of fellows was selected in 2010 and inducted at a 2011 ceremony at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The first Board of Directors was appointed at that time. The Academy's first staff person, Sarah Butts, was hired in 2013 at the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, to work in concert with inaugural President Richard Barth.



Figure 1. Timeline of the American academy of social work and social welfare, 2009–2018.

The Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW) was the first major initiative of the Academy. Its Executive Committee began to meet in 2013, soliciting input from Academy Fellows and social workers around the country. Due to increasing complexity of the Academy’s structure, STAT Marketing assumed fiscal responsibility of the organization in 2014, to manage accounting needs, including contributions from sponsors of the GCSW. STAT Marketing helped the Academy to secure 501c3 status in 2015. The first election for Academy Board of Director’s seats was held that same year. Yearly membership meetings by webinar were begun in 2016, and revisions to the Academy’s first set of bylaws, initially written in 2010, were discussed at the 2017 membership meeting and passed in a vote later in the same month. The GCSW was formally launched at the annual meeting of SSWR in January of 2016 and became independent in 2018. The purpose of GCSW was to advance society, build new science and transdisciplinary skills, and improve relationships between social work organizations and among other partnering disciplines (Fong, Lubben, & Barth, 2018).

The Grand Challenges for Social Work

Twelve Grand Challenges were determined

1. Ensure Healthy Development for All Youth.
2. Close the Health Gap.
3. Stop Family Violence.
4. Advance Long and Productive Lives.
5. Eradicate Social Isolation.
6. End Homelessness.
7. Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment.
8. Harness Technology for Social Good.
9. Promote Smart Decarceration.
10. Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality.
11. Build Financial Capability for All.
12. Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice.

In 2016, the Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare elected their second president, Sarah Gehlert, who was inducted at the annual meeting of SSWR in January of 2017. The

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Academy leadership moved to the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis when Sarah Gehlert became the second president of the organization. The Academy then moved to the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina later that year when Gehlert became dean of the institution. Because of the success of the GCSW and establishment of its Steering and Executive Committees, the first Academy staff person, Sarah Butts, became the Executive Director of the GCSW in 2017.

The Academy's Board of Directors began to meet monthly by conference call in 2011. In the wake of the successful launch of the GCSW initiative, and the establishment of a Grand Challenges Steering Committee and the Grand Challenges Executive Committee, on which the Academy president sits, Academy board members felt that it was appropriate to develop new strategic initiatives. The group held an in-person strategic planning meeting during the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education in September of 2017. Facilitated by John Tropman of the University of Michigan, the planning process began by examining the four missions articulated on the Academy website. The Board of Directors determined that all were valid and remained timely, and the Board began to articulate possible activities that either were already in process or might help advance the mission. Board members then volunteered to champion committees to further each mission and independently determined how much of the Academy's time would be devoted to each.

Development of Committees

The first committee, the Performance Committee, was to encourage outstanding research, scholarship, and practice that contribute to a sustainable, equitable and just future. Activities proposed were (a) a mentoring program to provide expertise and resources for early career faculty through Fellows who volunteer as mentors and are matched to junior faculty who seek that expertise (the Academy would invite schools to inform their faculty of the availability of mentoring on grants and papers); (b) specialty panels or symposia sponsored to advance excellence and promote the Academy's visibility; and (c) an internship program based within the Academy to support one or more doctoral or postdoctoral junior fellows on social work relevant research/practice projects. Board champions are Nancy Hooyman and Gail Steketee, who serve as initial co-chairs. Board members proposed that the committee devote 29.3% of total board time to the committee.

The second committee established, the Policy and Advocacy Committee, has a responsibility to inform social policy by serving as a frontline source of information for the social work profession, as well as Congress and other government agencies and nongovernmental entities charged with advancing the public good. Activities might include (a) the development of policy briefs (e.g., working papers, position papers) sponsored by the Academy in conjunction with other national academies (e.g., Education, Nursing, Science, Engineering, and Medicine) that leverage expertise from the GCSW, and (b) government engagement such as responses to Congressional requests and initiating work with Congress-

sional entities by providing congressional briefings, assembling expert panels, and developing policy briefs. Board champions are Jeanne Marsh, Jeffrey Jenson, and Luis Zayas, who serve as initial co-chairs of this committee. Board members voted to devote 29.3% of its time to the committee's activities.

The third committee is the Innovation Research Committee, whose charge is to promote the analysis of and research on policies, programs, and practice innovations for their impact on society. Proposed activities for the committee are (a) continued support for the GCSW and ongoing activities that are congruent with its mission; (b) an SSWR panel sponsored by the Academy to highlight innovation in this area; (c) a newsletter that highlights Academy activities; (d) media promotion of Academy activities; and (e) an "Academy Award" for excellence, innovation, and impact in research or practice sponsored by the Academy. An important initial activity was a January 2018 SSWR symposium jointly sponsored with *Social Service Review*, which related to the next hundred years of social work as a profession. Board champions are Rowena Fong, Matthew Howard, and John Tropman, who will serve as initial co-chairs of this committee. The board voted to devote 22.7% of its time to the committee.

Finally, the Awards Committee's goal is to celebrate excellence in social work and social welfare research, education, and practice. Proposed new activities are (a) sponsoring an educational presentation at annual program meeting of the Council on Social Work Education and a practice presentation at annual meeting of the National Association of Social Workers and (b) sponsorship of a keynote speaker at SSWR. Existing ongoing activities under this committee are the selection of new Fellows and the induction ceremony. The induction ceremony will continue to be open to all SSWR attendees, accomplished in part by including the ceremony in the SSWR conference program as a regular event open to registrants. Board champions for this committee are Gail Steketee and Sarah Gehlert, who serve as initial co-chairs of this committee. The board voted to devote 17.2% of its time to the committee's activities.

Current Structure

The Academy is administered by a nine-member Board of Directors, including an Executive Committee consisting of the president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. When new leadership emerged in 2017 after seven years of Richard Barth's presidency, the position of president became a three-year term, the same tenure as for the vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Each president will serve an additional year on the board as past president to ensure continuity, increasing the number of board members to 10 during every fourth year. The Board of Directors has two standing committees. The Finance Committee, which oversees the Academy's budget and oversees yearly audits with STAT Marketing, has three members: the president, treasurer, and secretary. The Nominations and Elections Committee, which is charged with soliciting and vetting nominations for Academy membership and for the Board of Directors, consists of three board members and four regular members selected from the elected Fellows of the Academy.

Future of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

The Academy Board of Directors has established a firm infrastructure from which to move toward achieving its mission of advancing excellence in the field of social work and social welfare through high impact work that advances social good. The mechanism for communicating with Fellows is established and will be expanded, and the Academy has laid the groundwork for providing expertise to Congress and other governmental entities. After success in launching the GCSW as its first initiative, the Academy Board of Directors is planning exciting new initiatives, as outlined earlier.

The Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare aims not only to celebrate excellence in social work and social welfare research, education, and practice but also to guide and foster that excellence through early career mentoring across all social work programs and by expanding the reach of the Academy Fellows' expertise into critical government and public forums. This will help to shape the Academy into a strong and effective organization and gain the interest of a wide array of internal and external stakeholders.

Further Reading

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