

# Book Review: The Role of Law in Social Work Practice and Administration

Stein, Theodore J. (2004). *The Role of Law in Social Work Practice and Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press.

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Stein points out that the primary audience for his book includes social work students and practitioners. He emphasizes that his intention is to address the relationship between social workers and attorneys and hopes that his work will improve the legal vocabulary of social workers. He wants social workers to have the ability to articulate legal questions more coherently to lawyers and to enable social workers to have a greater understanding when lawyers speak to them. Stein's objectives are to have social workers understand:

- the various ways in which the law affects their profession
- how to expand the knowledge from his text into their own research
- some ways in which they and attorneys can collaborate to better serve clients (see page 3).

Clearly, Stein achieves all three objectives. However, it is unlikely that practitioners will buy this book or read it from cover to cover. They are more likely to borrow it from a library and use it like a reference book to look up a particular legal issue for which they are currently facing. It is written more like a textbook for BSW and MSW students.

His book is divided into three parts. None of the parts have titles, but they are coherently conceptualized for the most part. The first section which constitutes four chapters, addresses an introduction to law and the judicial system. These chapters address an overall description of the philosophy and history of laws and how laws play out in social work practice. This information is not new and is available in social work and law textbooks. However, chapter 4 is quite different and interesting. Here, Stein offers guidance in conducting legal research and he does a remarkably good job. Chapter 4 clarified some issues that I have faced.

The second part of the text lacks a coherent theme and is divided into three chapters. I see no need for the inclusion of chapter 5. Here, Stein offers the standard typology of social service agencies that can be found in most all BSW policy textbooks. Unlike the other chapters within this book, chapter five seems misplaced and does not embrace the objectives Stein articulated on page 3. On the other hand, the other two chapters within this section are quite valuable. Chapter 6 should

be required reading for all social workers. Here, Stein *very* briefly addresses the courtroom process and how social workers should respond. It would have been preferable to have omitted chapter 5 and expanded on chapter 6. Chapter 7 covers the issue of malpractice and will immediately draw the interest of practitioners.

The book's last part constitutes seven chapters. Here, Stein offers a survey of legal issues that social workers will confront. These chapters are not relevant to practitioners but rather give students a solid foundation of the logic of law in specific areas of social work practice. These areas include: Family, Education, Child Welfare, Adoption, Domestic Violence, Health Care, and Mental Health. Although these chapters are well-written, they do not go into sufficient depth for practitioners. In addition, practitioners would only be interested in reading the chapter that addresses their current area of practice and are not likely to be interested in reading the other areas. Students (both MSW and BSW) would need an understanding in an area for which they have an interest in seeking to practice.

I see *The Role of Law in Social Work Practice and Administration* primarily as a textbook to be adopted within MSW and BSW academic programs. In addition, I think it would be an excellent addition to any social work library. I could see a wide range of social work courses employing the last seven chapters as closed reserved reading. For example, everyone who is enrolled in a school social work course should read Stein's chapter on Education.

The true educational value of this book is the writing style. Stein constantly employs lists to explain complex legal concepts. These lists give students a series of criteria to address and/or examine when facing a particular legal issue. Stein is able to move the students from complex abstract legal concepts to areas that are much more concrete and usable.