

## Letters to the Editors Spring 2007

Editor:

I truly applaud Steve Marson's comments in the Fall 2006 Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics. I support his assertion that professional licensure (or registration) of social work faculty represents a matter for ethical consideration. This issue has been discussed briefly in some of our professional venues but seems largely opposed under the guise of representing undue governmental influence and control over academic freedoms. Other long-time faculty have been discouraged by their ineligibility for the "advanced clinical" recognition due to a dearth of recent and requisite, direct clinical practice. On a personal level, I imagine we can all identify logical excuses not to participate in state regulation. And while each of our individual rationalizations may have merit, this issue must be examined for its overarching impact upon the profession as well as the greater society. This isn't about you and me. It's about us. I propose that professional licensure upholds social accountability much as paying taxes, voting, respecting traffic regulations, and attending to jury duty.

Professional values and ethics must not be solely defined by legislation. I'm uncertain whether any state presently requires social work educators to maintain a professional license. And this is not an issue most state legislatures are likely to pursue, as in pure numbers, it involves only a small portion of the population. I propose, however, that it is a clear measure of our professional values that we each voluntarily seek and maintain professional licensure or certification.

I would suggest several specific items for us to consider in this discussion:

- Flawed legislation should not be an excuse for our avoidance of regulation. Where there are deficiencies with the form and/or function of state professional licensing or registration statutes, social work faculty should be in the forefront of professionals seeking to inform and influence legislators to amend the statutes. This is what social workers do. Our credibility is reflected in our commitments and actions as well as our credentials.
- What is the mixed message we give to our students about the importance and value of professional licensure in assuring quality of service and protecting vulnerable populations, when we don't have the license ourselves?
- Many faculty participate in elective conferences related to social work education like the APM & BPD. But generally, they are not required to participate in continuing education regarding direct practice issues. How do they remain current in the field? Or do they? (*We are* a practice profession, aren't we?) Most state licensure laws include a requirement to document annually an established number of continuing education hours, often with clear expectations of ethics content and in the case of "clinical" social workers, content on diagnosis & treatment. Are we perhaps pitching the importance of "lifelong learning" while avoiding any personal measure of accountability?

- Perhaps the ACSW or one of the other NASW specialty recognitions may reasonably serve as an alternative to a particular state's recognition.
- Does the failure to obtain and maintain a license perhaps limit one's opportunities for civic engagement or to otherwise contribute professionally to the community? As an example, social work faculty who recently volunteered with the Red Cross to provide disaster mental health services were turned away from those specific functions, as they had no state licenses. (In fairness, many of them did go on to serve valuably in other “non-professional” roles.)
- What about instances where faculty clearly and flagrantly violate (even multiple) standards established in the NASW Code of Ethics? I suppose we’ve all seen this happen, either as teachers or students. Yet the NASW only has the authority to remediate with or sanction current members. Without NASW membership or a state regulatory board’s authority, there is no other transparent venue for accountability. Except gossip. Former and current employers will most often refuse to disclose or even acknowledge anything related to “personnel matters” out of their fear of litigation. I know of one "social work faculty" who has physically assaulted and threatened colleagues, repeatedly and egregiously violated multiple NASW COE standards, lied about academic qualifications and credentials, and still succeeded in attaining faculty appointments. At successive institutions no less! So much for professional transparency.

I encourage all social work faculty to raise these questions with their colleagues. Please, look beyond your own measure of personal comfort. Consider the wider issue of the profession's accountability and responsibility. If you are a student, please understand this: You have a right and obligation to ask your faculty about their credentials and certifications, and you have a right to clear and logical explanations. Such is how we all grow.

Gary E. Bachman MSSW, LSCSW, Associate Professor & Field Director Park University –  
Department of Social Work, Parkville, Missouri

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Editor:

Good for you! I've long been frustrated by how many of my academic colleagues don't see the need as a professional or as a model for students to become licensed.

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Editor:

GREAT EDITORIAL!!!!!! We identify ourselves as social workers, therefore, we are credentialed. (period)

Joel R. Ambelang, Associate Professor, Social Work Concordia University Wisconsin

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Dear Dr. Marson:

I am a retired social work practitioner and educator who has been conducting research on how licensed mental health practitioners use the Internet to share information with each other in a variety of electronic forums. In addition, the goal of my organization, Psych journey, is to build a bridge between health seekers and health providers, including social workers.

I have covered a number of ethical issues on our Web sites, including the ethics of online discussion of patients on open discussion groups and listservs and the ethics of calling for boycotts of managed care organizations with its antitrust implications. I noticed that I have interviewed at least a couple of members of your board, including Dr. Frederic Reamer on more than one occasion and also Linda Grobman, who has a written Q&A interview in progress.

Judith M. Unger, ACSW, LCSW

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In a very short time, we plan to launch our newest Web site, The Insider's Guide to Law and Ethics in Mental Health. One section of this site will be devoted exclusively to attorneys and another to experts on ethics. I would be very interested in interviewing you on your publication and what you may consider the important ethical issues of the day for social work and other mental health practitioners.

There is a bit of irony here. While I heard of your journal from Dr. Susan Sarnoff, who I interviewed a couple of years back, your journal recently came to my attention through a posting of one of your editorials, "Licensing of Social Work Faculty: An Issue of Ethics?" on an Internet discussion group for psychotherapists. I am not sure what your reprint policy may be or if the poster asked or obtained your permission to disseminate your editorial to hundreds of people, but one of the legal/ethical issues we are exploring for our new Web site is intellectual property. We have observed that mental health professionals (and social workers seem to be in the forefront) think nothing of cutting and pasting entire articles from news sources and journals to these discussion groups that are then archived indefinitely. This, of course, saves the members the price of a subscription, but it also raises some interesting ethical as well as legal questions. And sadly, for me as a social worker myself, this practice makes all social workers look bad.

For your review I have included below some initial articles on intellectual property that I have on my Newsvine blog. Eventually these articles, along with several others, will be on our new Web site. I also included the cut and paste of the editorial from your journal. If such a practice is in keeping with your policy or if you granted permission to disseminate, please disregard. If it was taken without your permission and against your reprint policy, you may wish to address it with the poster and or Yahoo Groups.

I do hope you will consent to an interview and I thank you for your consideration.  
Sincerely,

John A. Riolo, PhD