

University of Michigan-Flint Social Work Department
Statement on Diversity

The social work curriculum offers students opportunities to progress through a series of experiences which foster recognition of differences among people, identification of how diversity impacts people, and finally a professional orientation which represents value of and respect for diversity and the differences among people.

To this end, diversity is defined as existing as a natural event and represents a universal, complex phenomenon involving variability of the human species at many levels. Carried to its extreme diversity emphasizes that every human is different from every other human being.

The process of attempting to manage variability of people results in grouping of people by various similarities and is a subjective process that results in labeling and differential valuing. Diversity has a positive value because it reflects open systems that are synergistic and allow for an exchange of energy.

(Adopted 5/1/01)

Populations at Risk

“Population at Risk” is a term used to describe a group whose members experience social situations that are based on historical discriminating practices, relative status and access to power, and result in compromised access to power such that they are vulnerable to being denied equitable/equal opportunities for quality of life.

1. Although, every individual has the potential to be denied access to opportunities, and some individuals within a population at risk may not personally experience deprivation, individuals in some groups are more likely to experience deprivation based solely on their group membership. Groups at risk include:

- Women
- People of Color
- Gay and Lesbian Persons

Because of their relevance to the program, other at-risk populations are discussed. They include:

- Age
- Ethnicity

- Culture
 - Class
 - Religion
 - Physical or mental ability
 - Displaced and secondary market workers
2. Risk is recognized in the specific context. Sources of power, the institutional processes and desirable resources, goods and services are interactive relationships and change in different situations.
 3. Risk status is based on a power relationship between groups, *not size or number* of people in the group. The majority is the group with more power relative to the minority, the group with less power.
 - Minority status is further differentiated when the membership is ascribed. Membership in a group at risk is based on characteristics that can be readily identified and are beyond the control of individual members.
 - Intensity of risk status differs among minority groups based on differential access to power and ability to assimilate to the majority within one or more of the social institutions.
 4. There are three primary mechanisms for differentiating access to the opportunities for quality of life that result in deprivation: Oppression, Discrimination, and Economic Deprivation.
 - Oppression mechanisms are systematic and institutionalized processes, exercised by the group in power, to deny members of other groups access to resources, goods and services that are necessary for quality of life. Oppression occurs as a macro system process in the structures and actions of bureaucracies, communities, and institutions.
 - Discrimination mechanisms are micro system processes and involves the acts of individuals toward individuals that deny access to the resources, goods and services that are necessary for quality of life. Discrimination occurs in the individual and small group interaction patterns, and in the one-on-one interactions within larger social organizations.
 - Economic Deprivation refers to the consequences of oppression and/or discrimination that result in restricted access to the specific power resources associated with the social institution of the economy, (e.g., money, commodities such as housing and health care, social class, and interactive relationships with other social institutions). Although those who experience relative poverty are economically deprived by the technical definition, those individuals who experience absolute poverty are most at risk for achieving their basic needs and are the focus of social work.

5. Equitable opportunities are necessary for Population at Risk to experience

fairness in their access to power. Equity assures all interacting parties an

outcome that is in direct proportion to their contributions. This does not mean

equal outcomes as described by the same outcomes regardless of contributions. The primary

role for social workers is creating opportunities and advocating for equitable

interactions. Equitable opportunities are sought at all levels (micro, mezzo and macro) of

human interactions and are an organizing principle for the dual focus of social work.

- Inherent in social interactions is the exchange of power and contributions to the process that are not the same. Historical patterns of interactions have solely valued the contributions of class based power (i.e., capitalist risk, money) and created inequitable consequences for the labor force contributions. Therefore, the process of establishing comparable worth is necessary to achieve equity, such that all contributions are recognized and valued, and the rewards are in proportion to the comparable value of the contribution.
- Social Justice is the term used to describe human interactions that are based on the goal of opportunities which result in equitable outcomes. Social justice is facilitated by the humanitarian actions of individuals and in governance by a “Just and Moral” society. Evidence of social justice is represented in the practice of distributive justice and in the declaration and defense of human and civil rights primarily within the social institution of polity.
- Economic Justice is the term used to describe the goal of opportunities that result in equitable outcomes. Justice is influenced by the power and interactions primarily within the social institution of the economy.

6. Although it is an assumption of all human behavior, that individuals and

groups are in a continuous and life long process of improving their quality of

life, populations at risk experience reduced or restricted opportunities for

achieving a quality of life associated with survival.

- Quality of life refers to the individuals’ access to resources to fulfill the needs identified by Maslow’s Hierarchy. The focus of members of populations at risk are at the foundation levels of this hierarchy: Survival, Safety/Security, and to a limited extent, Love and Belonging.
- Quality of life for groups refers to the range of choices available to respond to environmental challenges. Members of populations at risk have restricted access to the range of alternatives for behavior and limited choices of response to environmental challenges.
- Quality of life for society refers to the roles of the social institution of social welfare. Successful functioning of social welfare results in a balance of interdependence among social groups. Interdependence is reflected in the appropriate balance of the cycle of

dependence and independence throughout the life cycle of individuals. Historically, the focus of attention to populations at risk has been the management and reduction of dependence and emphasis on the value orientation of independence. The focus of social work is to facilitate a more appropriate balance of interdependence at the macro level between the five social institutions and at the micro level between the individuals and small groups.

It is the objective of the social work curriculum to integrate the content on Populations at Risk and the related concepts of oppression, discrimination, economic deprivation with principles of social and economic justice. The curriculum is organized to facilitate a progression of learning from recognition and understanding with the ultimate goal of preparing students cognitively, affectively and behaviorally to advocate for non-discriminatory practices and alleviation of oppression.

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