

The End of Social Welfare History: Implications for Social Work Education



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The Importance of History



Why History Matters

- **By studying processes, trends, & trajectories, and analyzing patterns of continuity & change, history provides the theories and methods to locate problems and issues within the structures & systems in which they occur.**
- **Globalization & internationalization create an urgent need to understand how, over time, socio-cultural, spatial, & political processes create and sustain inequities and injustices.**

Social Work & History

- A distinguishing characteristic of social work is its recognition that history & people's perception of the past shape individual & societal behaviors in many ways (DeSchweinitz, 1956):
 - Identifying issues worthy of attention
 - Developing theories of causation
 - Assumptions about human needs & helping
 - Constructing individual & societal interventions

Social Work & History

- All SW practice begins w/inquiry about the past
- History describes how specific events can be understood in a larger context – e.g., of poverty, oppression, culture, personal/family experience.
- History illuminates the complex & conflicting roles SW has played in struggles for social justice
- It helps us understand the limits & potential of social work today and for the future

SW Education & History

- Early SSW's emphasized the history of SW & had a strong int'l orientation (Waaldijk, 2011).
- Today, we are increasingly working with people whose lives have been shaped by the past
- Globalization requires us to understand the role of SW in a historical and trans-national context
- Knowledge about our history can help us reflect on what role we can play today & in the future
- Yet, the professionalization of SW has made both SW scholarship & education more ahistorical.

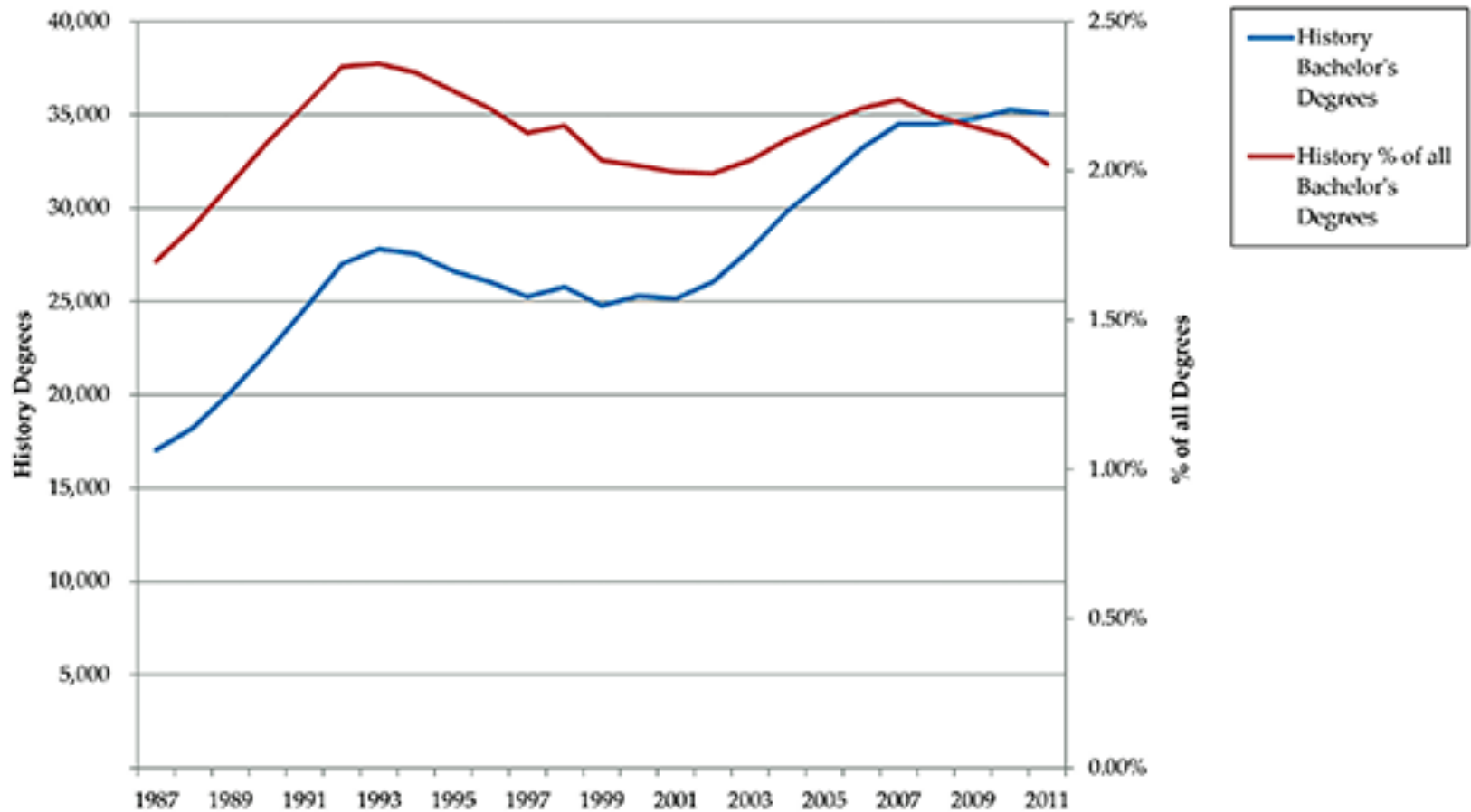
Expectations: 2008 EPAS

- “...Programs are further influenced by their *historical*, political, economic, social, cultural, demographic, and global contexts and by the ways they elect to engage these factors.” (EP 1.2)
- “Social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission, and its core values. *They know the profession’s history.*” (EP 2.1.1)
- Engage *diversity & difference in practice* (EP 2.1.4)
- Advance *human rights and social and economic justice* (EP 2.1.5)

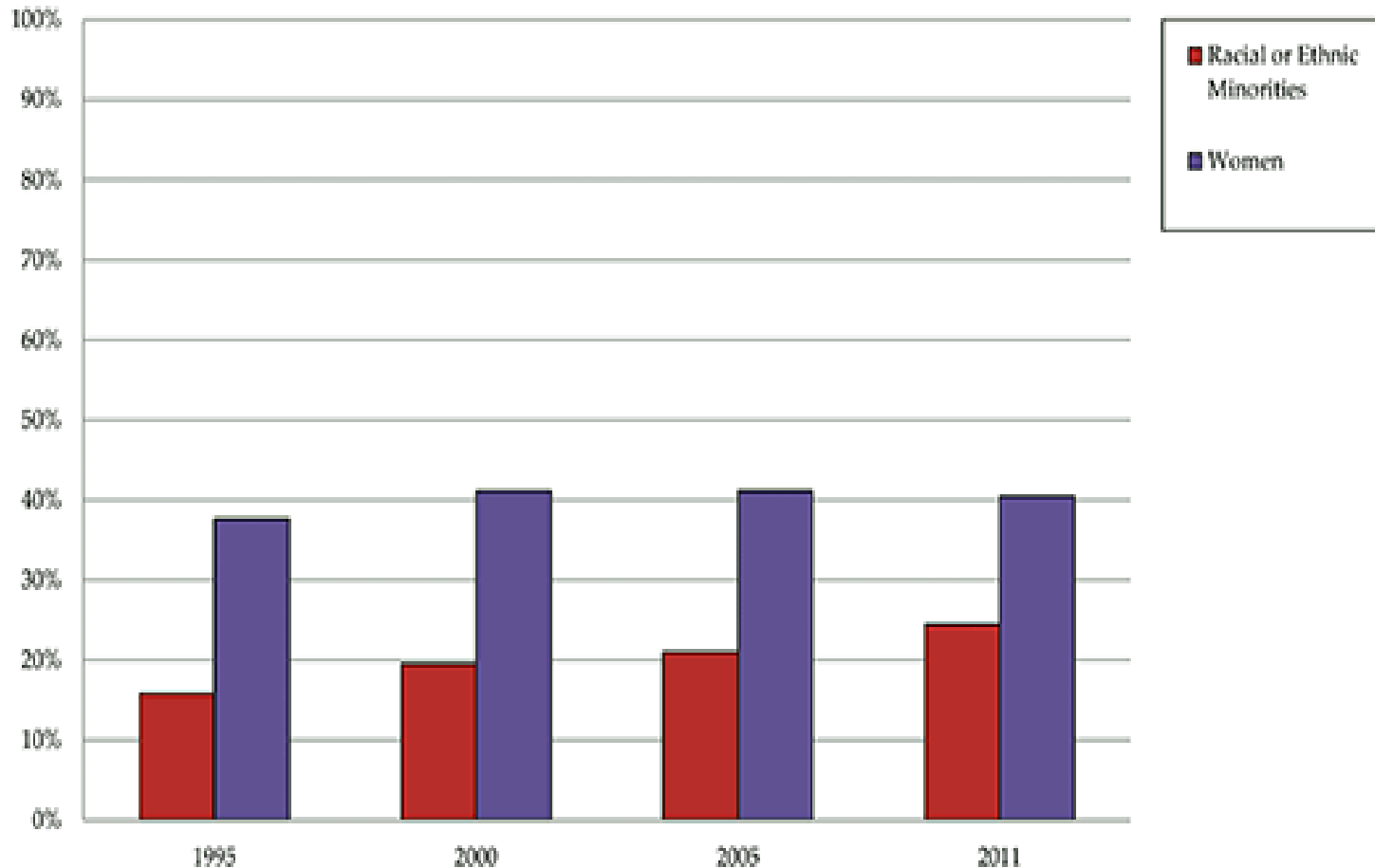
Expectations: 2008 EPAS

- Engage in policy practice to *advance social and economic well-being* (E.P. 2.1.8)
- Respond to *contexts* that shape practice (E.P. 2.1.9)
- “History is the discipline of context.” (Thompson, 1971)
- History is a “multilayered concept that exists across space and time.” (Fisher, 1999)

Decline in History Majors



History Majors Among Women & Racial/Ethnic Minorities



Social Work Students & History

- **Current students have grown up and been educated in an increasingly ahistorical culture**
- **K-12 education has increasingly downplayed history in favor of other social sciences**
- **A large majority of MSW students major in psychology, sociology, social work, or related fields have taken no or few courses in history**
- **Many students lack a basic knowledge of the historical context in which social work evolved**
- **Results of informal survey (2008-present)**

Methodology

1. 20-Item Survey distributed via Survey Monkey:
 - Program size, type, & institutional auspice
 - Demographics of faculty & students
 - Educational background of faculty
 - Age & geographic location of program
 - Location & extent of program's historical content
 - Methods used & topics covered
 - Recent trends & their explanation
2. Analysis of websites of doctoral programs
3. Informal survey of 1st Year MSW students

Sample: Program Setting

	<u>BSW</u> (Combined N=405)	<u>MSW</u>	<u>Ph.D.</u> (N=71)
<u>Urban</u>			
All	39.4%	58.4%	73.5%
Sample	45.5%	63.9%	80.0%
<u>Suburban</u>			
All	28.5%	23.0%	23.5%
Sample	29.5%	22.2%	13.3%
<u>Rural</u>			
All	32.1%	18.6%	2.9%
Sample	25.0%	13.9%	6.7%

Sample: Program Auspice

	<u>BSW</u>	<u>MSW</u>	<u>Ph.D.</u>
<u>Public</u>			
All^	54.7%	73.5%	66.2%
Sample	46.8%	75.0%	63.4%
History Course*	31.8%	20.0%	24.4%
<u>Private</u>			
All^	45.3%	26.5%	33.8%
Sample	53.2%	25.0%	36.6%
History Course*	28.0%	40.0%	19.2%

Location of Content on SW History

	<u>BSW</u>	<u>MSW</u>	<u>PhD*</u>
Required Course	31.1%	26.3%	22.5%
Course on SW Prof.	62.2%	-	-
Req. Policy Course	71.1%	86.8%^	25.4%*
Adv. Policy Course	26.7%	36.8%	NA
Intro Practice Course	22.2%	28.9%	NA
Adv. Practice Course	8.9%	5.3%	NA
Req. Theory Course	-	-	7.0%
Elective Policy or History	-	-	5.6%
Workshops/Lectures	8.9%	10.5%	18.8%
Other (Various Courses)	20.0%	5.3%	35.3%

Focus of Historical Content

<u>Content Covered</u>	<u>BSW</u>	<u>MSW</u>	<u>PhD</u>
SW Profession	100%	93.9%	72.7%
Social Welf Policy	100%	100%	81.8%
Oppressed Pops.	87.5%	81.8%	63.6%
SW Philosophy	62.5%	63.6%	72.7%
Non-US SW (Int'l)	30.0%	33.3%	45.5%
Other*	10.0%	6.2%	11.2%

Materials Used to Cover History

	<u>BSW</u>	<u>MSW</u>	<u>PhD</u>
History Text	35.0%	75.8%	50.0%
Text w/History Chaps.	87.5%^	60.6%*	80.0%
Articles re SW History	52.5%	69.7%	80.0%
Primary Sources	35.0%	36.4%	70.0%
Films, DVDs, etc.	75.0%	57.6%	50.0%

Summary of Key Findings

- Most programs have reduced coverage of history, especially in newer MSW & Ph.D. programs
- ~10% of BSW & MSW programs have eliminated history course or collapsed it into foundation policy courses (MSW) or courses on the social work profession (BSW)
- Rationales included cost, lack of interest, need for other courses, EPAS requirements

Summary of Key Findings

- Most programs cover evolution of SW profession
- Fewer programs place it in its broader context
- Coverage usually begins in late 19th/early 20th C
- Few programs compare U.S. social welfare and social work to that of other nations
- Based on texts and articles used – Most programs present a “mainstream” perspective on U.S. social work & social welfare history
- Few programs include a critical perspective

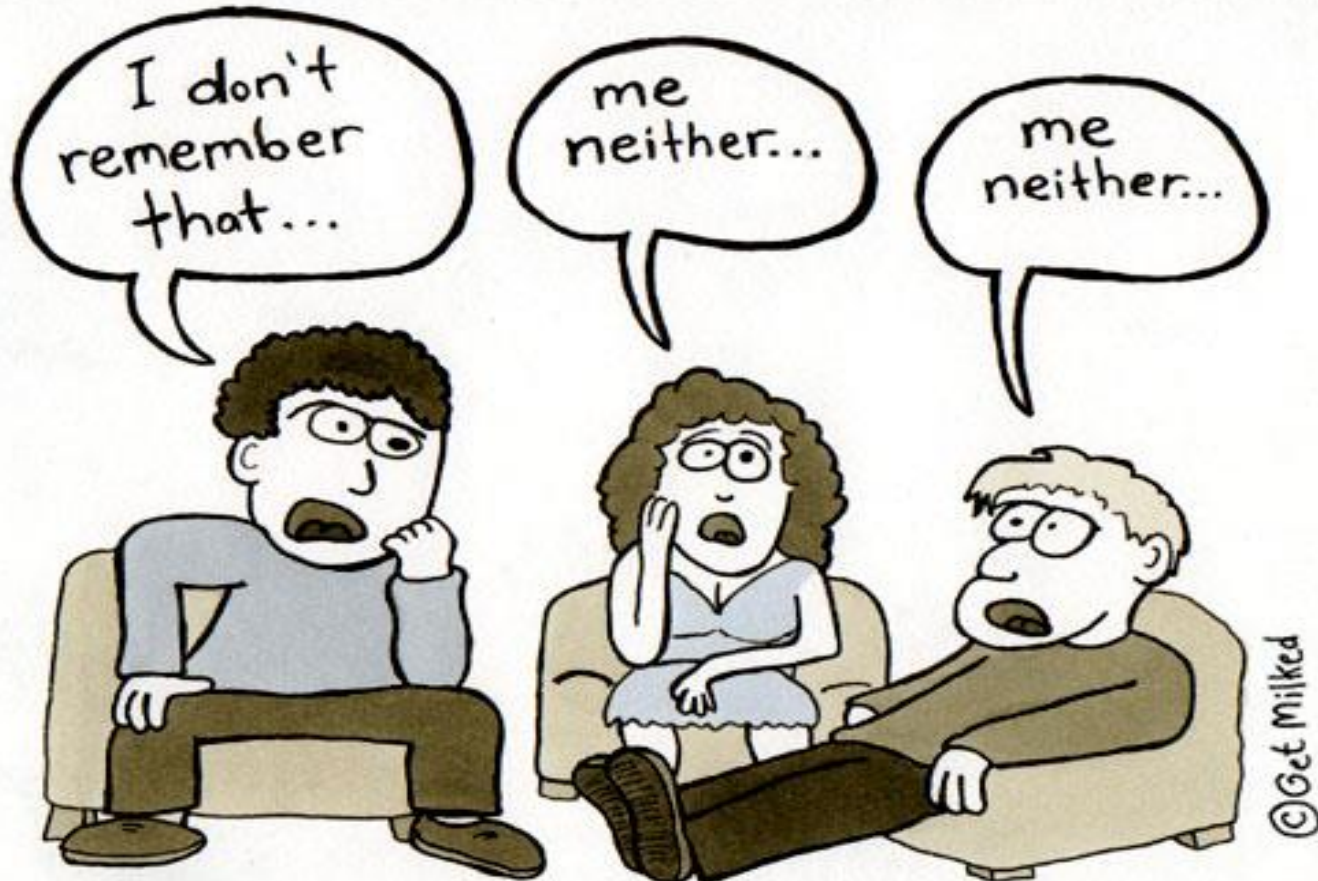
Why It Matters



Why It Matters

- Fewer SW students have backgrounds in history
- Influence of social media – “Presentism”
- Need to correct myths about social work’s past:
 - Social work is a “women’s profession” (Meyer)
 - Clinical practice has always been dominant
 - Racial/ethnic minorities played a limited role
 - Social work lacks a radical tradition
 - SW history is without conflict (Abramovitz, 1998; Reisch & Staller, 2011)
 - Contemporary issues have no precedents

Implications



THE END OF HISTORY

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Implications

- **History enables us to maintain a sense of continuity – a precondition for making new beginnings (Lorenz, 2006).**
- **Understanding the history & role of social work education requires a long view of history & a sense of where social work fits in the larger context of social change (Weick, 1993)**
- **Achieving cultural competence requires us to understand the role of culture in the past & how it shaped the evolution of social work.**

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THANK YOU!

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