

Although most CSWE-accredited schools of social work grant Master of Social Work degrees, not all do so. For all intents and purposes, including the important issue of certification and licensing, it does not matter. Whether your diploma reads, "Master of Social Work," "Master of Social Service Administration," "Master of the Science of Social Work," or "Master of Arts" (all actual examples of degrees granted by CSWE-accredited graduate programs of social work in the United States), the only issue that matters is whether or not the granting institution is accredited by CSWE. The licensing agencies are not concerned with what your diploma says, but simply that it be from a CSWE-accredited institution.

In some instances, there may actually be some advantages, purely in terms of perception rather than substance, to the diploma reading something other than "Master of Social Work." There are a great many who will take issue with this point of view. I choose to offer it here simply to put it on the table and make readers aware of its existence.

For those of you who expect to practice in social policy, research, analysis, community organization, and other non-clinical areas, there may be advantages to having a degree other than the traditional MSW. Many of the people who review applicants for positions in non-clinical settings may not have a social work background. Some may not be fully aware that many graduate schools of social work have excellent training in research, policy formulation and analysis, community organization, and similar areas. Therefore, when they review a résumé that states the person holds an MSW, they may be inclined to dismiss the applicant as someone versed in clinical but not policy areas. If the résumé states something else, such as a Master's in Social Service Administration, the potential employer may be less likely to be misled.

On the other hand, clinical graduates of schools that grant diplomas other than the traditional MSW are not usually miscast as "non-clinicians," because they are eligible for clinical certification and licensing.

Let me quickly follow the above by warning you against making a choice of school simply on what your diploma will say. Most schools of social work, regardless of programmatic focus on clinical versus policy education, offer Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees. In fact, many of our nation's leading policy and administrative programs grant MSW degrees. If you find such a school that meets your needs as a policy student, don't hesitate to pursue enrollment. All it may mean down the road is that when, and if, you encounter a potential employer who has the misconception that MSW automatically means clinician, you will have to tactfully educate that person.

The reader who is extremely interested in policy issues may at this point be wondering what the advantages are of a policy education within a social work program. How does it differ from a program in public policy? In general, public policy programs tend to be broader in their approach to policy, and will be just as likely to look at a space program, for instance, as social programs. A social work-based policy program will focus only on social welfare policy.

Another typical difference is that public policy programs tend to take a quantitative approach, whereas social work policy programs tend to take a qualitative approach to the subject. Public policy programs, therefore, tend to have more extensive requirements in the area of quantitative research than social work policy programs.

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