

As you consider schools, it is most important that you make sure they are CSWE-accredited or in candidacy for accreditation. Schools that are accredited by CSWE have gone through a rigorous process to ensure that they meet the minimum standards for social work education and that their graduates are prepared to practice social work at a professional level.

Some schools may state that they are "in candidacy" for CSWE accreditation. Candidacy is a pre-accreditation status, and schools must have met certain requirements to be admitted into candidacy by CSWE. Schools that are in candidacy are working toward accreditation and have shown that they have the potential to achieve that status. Assuming that the school completes candidacy and receives full accreditation, students who attend the school while it is in candidacy will receive accreditation of their degrees once the school is accredited, if the degree is earned under the same curriculum that receives accreditation. If you are considering a school that is in candidacy, ask when the school expects to receive accreditation and whether the curriculum you will receive your degree under is the curriculum under which the school expects to receive accreditation.

If you are considering attending a program that is in candidacy status, it is important that you learn as much as possible about when the program expects accreditation and that you evaluate as much as possible its prospects for achieving it. Programs in candidacy status that participated in this edition's "In Their Own Words" survey (Appendix C) were asked to report the date when accreditation is expected. The program's failure to achieve accreditation could have serious implications for the marketability of your diploma. There was recently the case of a program that did not achieve accreditation as expected. Its graduates found themselves unable to sit for the state licensing exam and to qualify for many jobs that require it. Grants that fund many programs have as a requirement that staff in those programs be licensed.

Having an accredited degree is important for a number of reasons. Besides ensuring that your education meets minimum professional standards, you need an accredited degree in order to receive most state social work licenses. An accredited degree will also enhance your employment opportunities, and some professional associations (such as the National Association of Social Workers) require it in order to join or receive full membership privileges.

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