Preface

Frustration provided the impetus for this book. Social work educators and field instructors often express unrelenting frustration with attempts to carry out their gatekeeping responsibilities. Spurred by a series of sessions and workshops on gatekeeping presented at annual conferences of the Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), in 1993 a group of volunteers from across the country decided to do something about this frustration by gathering information on the “state of the art” in social work education gatekeeping. This book grew out of the work of these social work educators, who proceeded with courage and determination into relatively uncharted waters. Because the history of this project’s evolution is somewhat peculiar, as group efforts go, it seems well worth highlighting.

During my sabbatical leave in the spring semester of 1993, as I sat pondering the stacks of projects before me, I found myself returning to a study on gatekeeping I had previously carried out. Having resolved to bring this particular study to a logical conclusion, I revised and polished both of the articles the research had yielded and shipped the two manuscripts off to publishers; nonetheless I had a nagging sensation of unfinished business.

Like other social work educators across the country, I had spent several years attending all of the sessions on gatekeeping issues offered by the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program
Directors at their annual BPD conferences, as well as those scheduled at the annual program meetings of the Council on Social Work Education. Many of us who attended these sessions began to recognize each other and continue the discussions outside of each conference session. Over time, a network of sorts was formed, which led to my eventual participation as one of several speakers during gatekeeping panel presentations at BPD and CSWE conferences.

I was always struck by the enormous number of conference attendees who gravitated to these sessions, given the many other choices that were available during the same time slots. The chairs were always filled and the room jammed past capacity as people stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the aisles. I was equally struck by the lively discussions and the widespread concern that unanimously was expressed about gatekeeping issues. These sessions usually drifted into the bogs of “we can’t—though I wish we could, but we don’t know how, and what about legal implications and potential legal repercussions?” Nonetheless, I would come back from the conference sessions full of steam, only to find myself drifting into those same bogs as my home faculty and I unsuccessfully struggled with the problems and issues associated with our gatekeeping responsibilities. At my school much disagreement prevailed about all aspects of gatekeeping, and little progress was made in developing effective policies that would guide our gatekeeping efforts.

So during that frigid January of my sabbatical leave, I searched out the names of everyone who had published or presented anything on BSW gatekeeping in the recent past. I sent them letters, asking if they would like to form a national task group on baccalaureate-level gatekeeping, which would collaborate to develop “something” in writing, although I wasn’t sure what. I included in my letter a request for names of other social work educators who might be interested in undertaking this (loosely structured, ill-defined, but absolutely essential) project.

Miraculously, more than a dozen social work educators responded to my initial call, although membership fluctuated as people drifted in and out of the group during the more than six years it took to complete this work. Because the group grew out of the Baccalaureate Program Directors Association, we called
ourselves the National Task Group on BSW Gatekeeping Stan-
dards. Twice when the task group was scheduled for a meeting at
BPD conferences, the room filled with other conference attendees
who thought the meeting was a general session on gatekeeping. A
few of these folks became new task group recruits.

Despite the absence of both grant monies to facilitate the effort
and release time at my home institution to give concentrated atten-
tion to the work, I facilitated the banding together of this trail-
blazing group of social work educators who pooled their expert-
ise and collaboratively saw this project through to completion.
Although hazards in my own life delayed completion of the book
for two years, the release time I was given during the fall of 1998
enabled me to finalize the manuscript and get it off to Columbia
University Press.

The materials developed by the National Task Group on BSW
Gatekeeping Standards represent the only collective thinking to
date on gatekeeping issues and standards in social work educa-
tion. The task group, of which I am the chair, offers this book to
our social work colleagues in hopes that it becomes a candle that
will partially illuminate the shadowy corners of gatekeeping in
programs across the country.

Patty Gibbs, Chair
National Task Group
on BSW Gatekeeping Standards