

## Preface

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**T**he graduate training of social administrators in the United States is trapped in a massive paradox. We hope to help address that paradox by providing a coherent and integrated approach to the tasks of social administration that can be helpful both to those enrolled in social work education programs and to those who find themselves serving as social administrators with limited preparation for that role.

The paradox has come about because many in the social work profession have sought to assert a type of hegemony over the domain of social services administration. It has been argued that all social agencies should be designed and led by social administrators with professional social work training. However, in most social work programs, the training of social administrators is relegated to a minor part of the curriculum. Thus, we find that there is a limited pool of persons with professional social work training who have sufficient education in the tasks of social administration to function as social administrators.

One traditional adaptation to this paradox has been the traditional social agency system whereby workers moved up through the ranks, with a few of them eventually reaching administrative positions. Administrative skills and outlooks were learned mostly on the job. Much the same type of arrangement has been typical in many health, education, and human service set-

tings. In public schools, for example, principals were traditionally promoted from among the ranks of teachers, nursing home administrators were often former nursing supervisors, and college deans were and still are almost always former faculty members. However, in many states, to become a principal or nursing home administrator one must now be certified, which usually involves a process of formal education and testing. No comparable certification process exists for social workers moving through the ranks to become social administrators.

Yet, under the present curriculum arrangements, it is looking more and more like social work education has, to some degree, engaged in a bad-faith bargain. It is still claimed that social administrators should be MSWs. However, the traditional apprenticeship system for training social administrators and promoting up through the ranks shows signs of breaking down under competitive pressures from other fields. In all but a handful of schools, training of administrators is still limited to a small portion of the typical MSW student's curriculum. Further, such offerings are frequently electives and taken only by a small percentage of the student body. Additional requirements in other subject areas, added after each revision of social work accreditation standards, mean that the situation has become even more problematic as limits on the realistic length of MSW programs are faced.

The vacuum that has resulted from this has not gone unnoticed by other disciplines. Beginning with the dramatic growth of social services in the 1960s, numerous public administration and business management education programs took an increased interest in aspects of social administration, but social work education responded to the perceived threat with limited systematic curriculum responses. This occurred during a period in which social work education in the United States expanded enormously, and state licensure laws put the profession of social work on a more solid footing than it has been during its hundred-plus year history.

During the 1990s, there was a dramatic increase in the number of graduate nonprofit management programs. In many of these, social service administrators make up one of the largest groups of students. At the time of this writing, the number of nonprofit organization and management programs in the United States approximately equals the total number of MSW programs.

Thus, the paradox of social work education claims, on behalf of the social work profession, an intellectual sovereignty that it is in no position to enforce and buttresses its claims with limited educational efforts. At the same time, several viable public and nonprofit human services management programs have developed that offer extensive educational offerings in human services management and that increasingly compete with MSW and BSW programs.

We mention this complex and thorny situation because it provides an important key to understanding the structure and focus of this book. Things need not be as they presently are. We suggest that the social agency model informing the view of social administration we outline implies a close, interdependent relationship between the complex tasks of social administration and the equally complex and challenging tasks of direct or clinical social work.

To claim—as we do throughout—the necessity and desirability of close bonds between social administration and social work in social agencies does not mean that only BSWs and MSWs should be administering social agencies. That vision may have been appealing during a time when social work was the sole academic discipline with an interest in social services. However, the realism of that claim was nullified by choices made by the social work profession and the social work education establishment decades ago and by the movement of other disciplines into the resulting vacuum.

Our claim is that social administration is a distinctive and circumscribed subject, that is, a comprehensible and definable intellectual subject matter or topic. As such, it is capable of standing on its own and yet benefits greatly from participation in the ongoing intellectual currents of the management sciences, public and nonprofit administration, and—no less important—the direct practice of social work. Our dual purpose in this book is to embrace the increasingly large divide between social administration and the practice of social work and the moral and political necessity and desirability of strong ties among social services, social agencies, social work, and social administration.

Though the book is intended primarily for use in social work education programs, it might as easily be used in other programs that prepare human services administrators. Just as the social work profession needs to face up to the dilemma, others engaged in training social administrators need to understand the importance of the strong and enduring ties between professional social work and the social agency. This book may also be of help to those in social work and in other fields who find themselves as social administrators with little or no formal preparation for that role. For them, the book can be a part of their on-the-job training.

The first part of the book introduces and lays out a basic model of social administration as an activity encompassing management, leadership, decision making, and institution building. Part of the emphasis here is an effort to connect the model of the social agency to organization theory and community theory. In the second part of the book, attention is devoted to a number of general administrative processes that together form a cycle (planning, implementation, operations, and accountability and evaluation). In the third part, attention is devoted to some equally general organizational

processes (communications, information, authority, and power). In the final chapters of the book, discrete topics of fundamental importance in contemporary social administration are considered.

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# Social Administration

