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 sched-
uled 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 unani-
mously 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 dis-
agreement 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 any-
thing on BSW gatekeeping in the recent past. I sent them letters,
asking if they would like to form a national task group on bac-
calaureate-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 Standards. 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 attention to the work, I facilitated the banding together of this trailblazing group of social work educators who pooled their expertise 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 education. 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