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101 Careers in Social Work
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This book is dedicated to my wonderful and amazing family who never stop believing in me: my mother, Christina Ritter, for teaching me the meaning of love and compassion and the art of listening; my father, Clinton Ritter, for inspiring my love of politics and the fight for the underdog; and my sister, Alissa Ritter, for being my best friend in this life.

—JAR

To my son Tuihakavalu, the light of my life; and my parents Moana and Faleola Ofahengaue, who inspired me to think and live outside the box in order to achieve my passion in social work.

—HFOV
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We were extremely motivated to write this book because there has never been a greater need for smart, competent, and compassionate social workers than right now. There are many pressing social problems at home and around the world. In recent years, we have witnessed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the home mortgage crisis, rising income inequality, Hurricane Sandy and other natural disasters around the world, mass shootings, and a heated political debate surrounding illegal immigration. We know that social workers will continue to be in demand as the aging population grows and as we grapple with the millions of Americans who are unemployed and/or struggling financially while the cost of food, gasoline, and higher education continues to rise. Social workers will also be needed to aid returning American soldiers and their families, many of whom will need medical and mental health services for years to come.

However, despite these challenges, there is hope; many Americans have been galvanized by these issues and want to have their voices heard. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are winding down, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is being implemented, and the issue of growing income inequality has found its way into the national discourse. These are exciting times—especially for social workers!

After reading this book, we hope that readers will understand the mission and values of the social work profession and will use this book as a guide to help them assess which field(s) of social work practice might be a good fit for them. We hope they will be inspired by the real stories of social workers from all across the country who are doing exciting and interesting things (see the “Social Worker Spotlights” in Chapters 4 through 17).

Finally, we wrote this book because we are troubled by the idea that very few people “get” the social work profession. The general public has a fairly limited view of what social workers do across this country every day. Many people are familiar with the clinical or direct services work carried out by social workers, but have no idea that there is a “big picture” side to the social work profession and that the mission of the social work profession includes a commitment to social justice. Most do not realize that social workers work with organizations and communities, and in the political and international arenas.
They do not know that social workers are filmmakers and artists and politicians and community activists. We want to educate people about the countless array of options out there for social workers with an earned bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate in social work, and inspire them to be very creative in designing their career based on their own unique skills and passions. We hope that after reading this book, you will realize that there is no “typical” social worker—and no “typical” social work career.
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Brian Rivers, BSW, LSW  
Trina Scordo, MSW candidate  
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I ■ THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK
1 WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK?

In these times of difficulty, we Americans everywhere must and shall choose the path of social justice, the path of faith, the path of hope, and the path of love toward our fellow man.

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, October 2, 1932

Congratulations! By picking up this book, you are taking an important step in exploring a career in social work. Perhaps we’re a little biased, but we believe that social work is a career for an extraordinary life. This book will help you assess whether social work is for you or, if you have already decided to be a professional social worker, help you decide which specific fields of social work practice are a good fit for your interests, skills, preferences, personality, and—of course—passions! In fact, this book profiles more than 101 different career options for social workers—including classic or traditional social work vocations as well as emerging ones and a few that are somewhat unconventional.

People find their way to social work in many different ways. Some have a close friend or family member who is a social worker and so are somewhat familiar with the kinds of things social workers do. Many have probably seen social workers portrayed in movies, such as I Am Sam or White Oleander, or in television shows, such as Grey’s Anatomy or Judging Amy. (Unfortunately, many portrayals of social workers in the media are not always accurate or do not give very positive depictions of the profession.) Others find their way to social work because they know that they want to help others or improve society but are not sure what path to go down—perhaps teaching, counseling, psychology, nursing, law, or public policy? Maybe social work? In social work programs, you will find a wide range of students, from young, traditional-aged college students to those who are not so traditional, such as career-changers who want to do something completely different from what they were originally trained to do.

The variety of options available to those who have a social work degree is extremely impressive and is one of the many reasons students choose to pursue a social work degree. If you are looking for a career that is meaningful and challenging—and never boring—social work might be for you. A degree in social work will help you create your own unique career path—one full of exciting possibilities.
I ■ The Profession of Social Work

SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM THE FICTION

Some say social work is a science, and some say it is an art. We argue that it’s both. But after you become a practicing social worker, you quickly learn that most people have a fairly narrow conception of what social workers do and the kinds of jobs they hold. There are also a number of myths about the social work profession. If you want to try an interesting experiment, ask people the following question: “What do social workers do?” The following responses are fairly typical: Social workers “help people”; they “work with abused children and their families”; they “work with poor people who are receiving government benefits.” Although these answers aren’t wrong, they barely skim the surface when it comes to the options available to those interested in a career in social work, let alone the knowledge and skills required to be a professional social worker.

According to the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008), the primary mission of the social work profession is

[T]o enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

One very simple definition of social work is that it is the study of social problems and human behavior. Thus social workers address any number of important social problems in this country and around the world, including, but not limited to

■ Poverty and homelessness
■ Child abuse, neglect, and exploitation
■ Disabilities
■ Teen pregnancy, suicide, and other problems facing youth
■ Family problems such as poor communication, divorce, and family violence
■ Sexual violence
■ Depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders
■ Community problems such as crime, substandard schools, violence, and lack of jobs and community resources
■ Supporting older adults
■ Assisting immigrants and refugees
■ Working with individuals diagnosed with chronic or terminal illnesses
■ Discrimination against individuals who have been oppressed in U.S. society, such as those living in poverty, women, racial/ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and those with disabilities
■ Substance abuse/addictions
■ Crisis intervention (e.g., natural disasters; mass shootings)
### Top 7 Myths About the Social Work Profession

**Myth #1:** Most social workers are employed by the government.

**Fact:** The majority of social workers work in the private sector for nonprofit organizations, in for-profit settings, and for faith-based organizations. Many are self-employed.

**Myth #2:** All social workers are poorly paid.

**Fact:** Although some social workers do receive salaries that are lower than they should be, many social workers are well paid, particularly those who move into administrative or supervisory positions (see individual career chapters for more information about specific salary ranges). Some social work fields, such as medical social work and mental health, pay salaries that are quite competitive. (See Table 1.1 in this chapter, for specific salary information.)

**Myth #3:** All social workers have stressful jobs.

**Fact:** Though some social workers, such as child protection caseworkers, have very stressful jobs, many social workers’ jobs rate low on the stress scale. However, an important skill for a social worker is self-care to avoid burnout.

**Myth #4:** Anyone who has a job that involves helping others can be called a “social worker.”

**Fact:** Only those who have earned a degree in social work can call themselves a social worker. In some states, you must also be licensed to use this title.

**Myth #5:** To do therapy or counseling, you need a degree in psychology or counseling.

**Fact:** Actually, the majority of mental health practitioners in the United States have a MSW degree and are licensed clinical social workers. Some choose to have a private practice; others work for the government or in a nonprofit or for-profit organization.

**Myth #6:** Social workers “enable” their clients by solving their problems for them.

**Fact:** Social workers empower others by providing them with the skills and resources they need to resolve challenging situations and problems.

**Myth #7:** Social work is “easy,” because it deals with “touchy-feely” stuff.

**Fact:** Though social workers are caring and compassionate individuals, they also need to be intelligent and have strong critical thinking skills to understand research, policy, and the various theories guiding social work practice.
Social workers are change agents who work with a wide variety of client populations in a vast array of settings. They work in schools; family violence shelters; adoption agencies; the court system; hospitals and clinics; substance abuse treatment centers; advocacy organizations; government agencies; for-profit, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations; community centers; assisted living and long-term care facilities; homeless shelters; international organizations; and the military. To be able to use the title of social worker, in most states you must have a degree in social work (BSW or MSW) and be licensed by the state. However, after you have met these requirements, your job title may vary depending on your job setting. Common social work job titles include community organizer, mental health clinician or therapist, caseworker/case manager, activist, researcher, professor, program manager/supervisor, and executive director. Social workers also work in the political arena as lobbyists, advocates, and legislative aides. And the best part is that social workers can work with one client population for a number of years, then decide to switch to another field of practice for an exciting new challenge. Have we hooked you yet?

**HOW IS SOCIAL WORK DIFFERENT FROM OTHER RELATED PROFESSIONS/DISCIPLINES?**

Many are confused about how social work is different from other related professions, such as sociology and psychology, or various degrees in counseling, so we’ll help sort this out for you. A number of unique features define the social work profession, setting it apart from other disciplines. One of the most important distinctions is that social workers engage in both micro- and macropractice. This means that we work directly with individuals and families but are also concerned with social and political change and working to address pressing social problems at the local, national, and international levels. We are concerned about addressing problems such as discrimination, oppression, and human rights violations, and we work to achieve social and economic justice. This means that social workers work toward creating a more just and fair society in which everyone has access to equal opportunity. We care about the problems of poverty and economic inequality and the fact that millions of

### TABLE 1.1 Employment and Median Salary by Type of Social Worker, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment and Median Salary by Type of Social Worker, 2012</th>
<th>NUMBER OF JOBS</th>
<th>MEDIAN SALARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child, family, and school social workers</td>
<td>285,700</td>
<td>$41,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care social workers</td>
<td>185,500</td>
<td>$49,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and substance abuse social workers</td>
<td>114,200</td>
<td>$39,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other</td>
<td>61,200</td>
<td>$54,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Americans do not have access to quality health care and mental health services. In sum, social workers not only help individuals function better within their environment (microsocial work), but also work on changing the environment so that it works better for individuals and families (macrosocial work). This is what we call social work’s *person-in-environment* perspective. When social workers are doing an assessment of an individual or family, they must examine the client in the context of the client’s social environment. Doing this helps provide a holistic assessment that includes various challenges and opportunities in the client’s larger social environment (e.g., family, community).

Table 1.2 shows some of the differences in educational requirements, course work, and focus between social work and related disciplines.

The social work profession has a number of core values that help define and guide our practice. These core values are outlined in the NASW’s (2008) *Code of Ethics*: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. You can read the entire Social Worker’s *Code of Ethics* at the NASW website, www.socialworkers.org. It outlines the importance of *client confidentiality*, meaning that you cannot share anything a client shares with you without the client’s express permission. You also cannot treat someone without his or her informed consent. Before agreeing to treatment, clients have the right to be informed about many things, including what the treatment will involve as well as its benefits and risks.

Social workers value *diversity* and are trained to be *culturally competent*. In social work, diversity is broadly defined and encompasses race, culture, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. When we work with individuals, families, groups, and communities, we operate from a *strengths perspective*. We use interventions that *empower* others to face challenges of daily living. We respect an individual’s *right to determine his or her own course of treatment* and to make his or her own decisions, except in cases when he or she is at risk of hurting self or others. We believe that people are *resilient* and can *change* when they have the will and the necessary knowledge and resources.

Social workers who earn their bachelor’s degree in social work (BSW) are trained to be generalist social work practitioners, which means they have the skills required to work with individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations in a variety of social work and host settings. A host setting is a work setting in which social work is not the primary role or function of the organization, such as a school or hospital. Earning a master’s degree in social work (MSW) allows social workers to develop advanced skills and to concentrate or specialize in a specific area of practice (e.g., health/mental health, community practice, aging, children and families). Social workers who earn their doctorate (PhD) pursue careers in research or work as university professors. Anyone interested in pursuing a BSW or MSW degree should ensure that the program he or she attends is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). For more information on social work education and licensure, please see Chapter 3.
The Profession of Social Work

TABLE 1.2  Social Work and Related Fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL WORK</th>
<th>PSYCHOLOGY</th>
<th>SOCIOLOGY</th>
<th>COUNSELING PROGRAMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Can practice with a bachelor’s degree, but many employers prefer a master’s degree</td>
<td>Although some jobs are available to those with a master’s degree, the PhD is strongly preferred and is required for many jobs as a psychologist</td>
<td>A PhD is required to work as a researcher or university professor, but there are a variety of potential settings for those with a master’s degree in sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Work</td>
<td>Liberal arts perspective; required course work will include policy, human behavior and the social environment, research, practice courses, and elective courses</td>
<td>Specialty areas: clinical psychology, school psychology, cognitive, developmental, neuroscience, social, and personality Heavy focus on research</td>
<td>Courses may include deviance, medical sociology, race, gender, religion, social stratification, organizations, research, social statistics, and the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Focus</td>
<td>Micro- and macropractice; help people with problems of daily living that may require direct intervention or referral; also concerned with social justice and helping clients who are oppressed and living in poverty</td>
<td>Heavy focus on psychological testing, diagnosing client disorders, and providing psychotherapy</td>
<td>Study of human behavior and interactions at the group level and also of the social structure and institutions that humans create</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW DID SOCIAL WORK BEGIN?

Social work has a rich and colorful history. In 1898, Columbia University became the first school of social work in the United States, marking the beginning of the social work profession. However, many individuals did what we now identify as “social work” before social work was professionalized. Perhaps
the most famous example of one of these early social workers is that of Jane Addams, a remarkable woman who founded Hull House in Chicago, a settlement house that provided a wide range of services to recent immigrants in Chicago who were facing serious problems, including exploitation on the job, life in unsafe and overcrowded tenement buildings, poor health, discrimination, child labor, juvenile delinquency, insufficient sanitation, and poverty. The women who worked at Hull House lived in the community where they worked instead of returning to their middle-class communities as was more typical at the time. They also advocated for those that they served, pressuring city leaders to improve the living and working conditions in industrial, urban areas.

The philosophy behind the settlement house movement included many of the hallmarks of the social work profession, including respect for ethnic diversity and customs, valuing community members’ taking care of each other, belief in the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, political advocacy, and recognition that poverty and lack of opportunity are often the greatest barriers to success—but are not flaws of one’s character.

The social work profession was greatly expanded and legitimized by the presidencies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New Deal) and Lyndon Johnson (Great Society) when they significantly expanded the role of the federal government in providing for the social welfare of its citizens. Frances Perkins, a social worker, was the first woman to be appointed to the cabinet of a U.S. president. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s secretary of labor, Perkins drafted much of the New Deal legislation in the 1940s. In 1955, the NASW was founded, and in 1998, the social work profession celebrated its hundredth birthday!

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR SOCIAL WORKERS?
The job outlook for professional social workers is very good. Unfortunately, because individuals and families will continue to face personal problems and challenges, and because social problems such as poverty, illness, substance abuse, and family violence continue to persist, social workers will be needed. In fact, certain demographic trends—such as the growing number of older Americans (the “graying of America) and the continuing influx of immigrant populations, many of whom will need social services and support—mean that social workers will be in higher demand than ever. The areas of practice that will be most in demand for social workers in the coming years will be working with children and families in a variety of settings, working with individuals who suffer from substance abuse and mental health disorders, and working in the medical field with a variety of populations, including aging adults. Social workers will also be needed to work in advocacy organizations to be a voice for those populations (e.g., children; older adults; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] individuals; low-income individuals) who need advocates in the
The Profession of Social Work

A Brief History of the Social Work Profession in the United States

1877 American Charity Organization: First organized attempt to help people with severe social problems.

1886 Settlement House movement begins, the most famous being Hull House in Chicago led by Jane Addams. These settlement houses provide a wide range of services to immigrants and those living in poverty.

1898 Columbia University becomes the first school of social work in the United States.

1916 Social worker Jeannette Rankin becomes the first woman elected to Congress.

1931 Social work pioneer Jane Addams receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

1935 Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal: Social Security Act passed, creating a number of important federal social welfare programs (e.g., Social Security, unemployment compensation, public assistance) and a safety net for those below the poverty line. Social worker Frances Perkins serves as FDR’s Secretary of Labor.

1952 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is formed.

1955 National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is formed.

1965 Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society and War on Poverty: Many social programs created, including Head Start, food stamp program, VISTA program, Medicare, and Medicaid.

1998 Social work profession celebrates its centennial!

political and legislative arena so that our local, state, and federal legislators will be responsive to their needs.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2014), the employment of social workers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations in the coming years. The employment of social workers is projected to increase 19% between 2012 and 2022, particularly for those working with older adults, with children and families, and in substance abuse and medical/mental health settings. The growth of health care social workers is expected to be 27%, whereas mental health/substance abuse social workers will grow by 23%, much more quickly than the average. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, social workers held about 607,300 jobs in 2012. Table 1.1 provides a breakdown of social workers by type.

Individuals who have an earned degree in social work are very marketable—employers know that they are trained to be excellent communicators, to be skilled in crisis intervention, to be creative problem solvers, to have
good “people skills,” and to have a valuable skill set transferable to many work settings.

Social work is a dynamic profession, constantly evolving and growing. The profession has a colorful history and continues to be relevant and vital to many individuals, families, and communities across the country and the globe. It is a noble profession, dedicated to service and social justice. Social workers have a unique mission and value system to help them serve people in need, many of whom are forgotten or invisible to the general public.

One of the most appealing features of the social work profession is that there are so many diverse career options. The possibilities are endless when you consider the variety of roles held by social workers, the diverse range of client populations they work with, and the various work settings open to those who have a BSW or MSW. One of the most distinctive features of social work is how incredibly broad the profession is. This book will profile more than 101 career paths for professional social workers, including a checklist in each career chapter to help you assess which ones might be a good fit for you. Social work is a wonderful career, but it is not for everyone. Chapter 2 will help you assess whether it might be for you. Good luck!

REFERENCES
