Licensure and Gatekeeping in the Helping Professions: A Comparative Study of Social Work and Counseling in South Carolina

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Abstract: Since the early 1900s, the regulation of social work practice has been a contested topic of discussion and debate in the social work profession. One of the ways in which social work and other helping professions can be regulated is through obtaining a license. Oftentimes, a license for social work, as well as for other helping professions, includes a licensure examination. Due to racial disparities found in licensure passage rates, researchers have asked questions of importance and relevance to the social work profession. This article examines the accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) social work programs alongside the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) counseling programs. It also addresses the licensure policies and procedures for social workers and counselors in South Carolina, providing a comparative and contrasting analysis. Recommendations include streamlined licensure processes for SW and Counseling, greater transparency in exam passage by demographic and training specializations and supporting social work and counseling students and alumni effectively.

Keywords: Accreditation, licensure, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

In both social work and counseling, the processes of licensure and gatekeeping are critical for ensuring the competence and ethical standards of practitioners. Gatekeeping serves as a proactive mechanism for maintaining the integrity of the profession by regulating entry, education, and subsequent licensure, with unique implications for each field. Street (2021) explains that professional gatekeeping is the process of "assessing and screening students' professional suitability for social work practice" (Halaas et al., 2020, p. 417), and occurs through activities such as selective admission practices, coursework, student reviews, and academic advising (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013). Many different professions—especially the helping professions—have implemented gatekeeping practices.

In counseling, we argue that training institutions are the gatekeepers who play an essential role in identifying the students who are fit to join the profession. In their work, Burkholder and Hall (2014) state that teacher-counselors determine the academic and practical aptitude of the students and their professional aptitude and ethical insight. This gatekeeping role is to protect clients and to ensure the standards of the profession, as seen in the complexities in determining who should and should not advance through training programs (Burkholder & Hall, 2014). Different studies have called for more rigorous selection procedures, which may include competency tests at both entry to and throughout

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the courses (Swank, 2014; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Using the Counseling Competencies Scale can also help ensure objectivity in the assessment process, sustaining the role of the gatekeeper in educators (Swank & Lambie, 2012).

The entry into the social work profession, therefore, is also subjected to rigorous gatekeeping practices in social work education. The literature reveals that social work educators bear a considerable burden in shaping who gets to enter the profession at the beginning of the pipeline as they grapple with students' ethical and applied skills (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). Social work programs are typically the first point of contact for people who want to work in the field, so it is crucial to have proper gatekeeping in social work to protect the profession (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013). As emphasized in the literature, the pressure of the state policies and the economy/volume of work against the background of limited resources for these policies present a challenge to this role and thus cast doubt on the social work educators' capacity to enforce strict gatekeeping without affecting the quality of service delivery (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010).

One way some of these helping professions gatekeep is through licensure. "The central purpose of licensure and regulation is to protect the public, the consumers of social work services…Licensure and regulation also distinguish the practice of social work as unique to qualified professional social workers" (Morrow, 2023, p. 9). The social work and counseling professions use licensure to ensure ethical treatment of clients. Morrow (2023) noted that, in the United States, state-level statutory laws are shaped by the social work licensure and practice regulations which are in place in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The regulation of social work and counseling in South Carolina is overseen by two distinct licensing boards. The South Carolina Board of Social Work Examiners, created under Title 40, Chapter 63 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, is composed of a diverse group of seven members appointed by the Governor. Its members include two licensed baccalaureate social workers, two licensed master social workers, two licensed independent social workers, and one lay member (S.C. Code Ann. § 40-63-10). Similarly, the South Carolina Board of Examiners for Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, Addiction Counselors, and Psycho-Educational Specialists is established under Title 40, Chapter 75 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. This board consists of eleven members appointed by the Governor, including nine licensed professionals from the respective disciplines and two members from the general public (S.C. Code Ann. § 40-75-10). The composition of these boards allows for the regulation of each profession by its peers, ensuring that licensing requirements and disciplinary actions are both professional and relevant.

The Role of Licensure Exams as Gatekeeping Mechanisms

While academic gatekeeping focuses on the evaluation of students' suitability throughout their program, licensure exams act as the final, standardized gate. This mechanism is crucial because it ensures a minimum level of competence for all who enter the profession, regardless of their university, instructor, or program of study. The core argument for licensure testing is that it protects the public by ensuring that all practitioners

possess a foundational body of knowledge and the necessary skills to practice safely and ethically. This is especially important in helping professions, where client well-being and safety are paramount.

The emphasis here is on standardization. While a university's accreditation ensures a quality curriculum, the specific learning outcomes and rigor of a program can still vary. A licensure exam provides a uniform measure of knowledge across all graduates. For instance, in social work, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exams are designed to test a candidate's mastery of the core competencies necessary for practice. Passing this exam is a non-negotiable step to becoming a licensed social worker in the state of South Carolina. The same principle applies to counseling, where the National Counselor Examination (NCE) or other state-specific exams act as the final barrier to entry.

The gatekeeping processes in both fields are not only based on competence and fitness but also on ethical decision-making, which is influenced by the students' backgrounds. In counseling, there is a need for culturally appropriate interventions that highlight the challenging dynamic between the two categories of variables: the person and the situation (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). Goodrich and Shin (2013) mention that multicultural factors should be taken into consideration when evaluating students' readiness for practice and their performance, which reflects the broader social reality that counseling educators have to consider.

In social work, there is also recognition of the diverse students' characteristics that determine their learning and future practice. However, there is a view that prevalent practices that deny people opportunities based on their criminal history are inconsistent with the social work practice beliefs of recovery, dignity, and the value of people's experiences (Duvnjak et al., 2021). It is for this reason that educators in social work programs face ethical dilemmas in their gatekeeping roles as they attempt to balance the ideals of inclusion and exclusion in the profession. It also has its challenges in terms of professional ethics and client safety.

Both fields support the idea of clear definitions of what constitutes "problematic behaviors" in students and the need for detailed standards in program handbooks to avoid ambiguities (Foster et al., 2014). Such documentation also benefits students by providing a better understanding of what is expected of them in terms of professional behavior. It thus makes the gatekeeping process more credible by providing clear standards against which performance can be measured.

The consequences of gatekeeping are not only related to individual fitness but also to the general structure. In both social work and counseling, these gatekeeping procedures can be ineffective and affect the quality of service provided in the community in the future. Thus, in the absence of proper gatekeeping procedures, client safety is at risk, and the professionals' credibility may be compromised (Burkholder & Hall, 2014). This underscores the importance of further research in this area, which the literature calls for (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Foster et al., 2014; Swank, 2014).

As the research is still ongoing, it is crucial to note the significance of the need for continual training of educators who are in the position of gatekeeping. Educators must also

receive training in effectively assessing student competencies and engaging in reflective practice as gatekeepers (Swank, 2014).

Counselors and social workers acting as gatekeepers must continually learn and adapt because environmental factors, especially social change, impact gatekeeping in complex and dynamic ways. There is still much to be gained from the cooperation between the educators of these two disciplines, which may open new possibilities for sharing experiences and approaches to gatekeeping (Aaltonen & Kivijärvi, 2018). Gatekeeping in social work and counseling offers a way to ensure that practitioners meet certain standards of conduct. The area of licensure and education is a significant area of focus, and those who are involved in defining the standards of practice for the next generation of practitioners must deal with ethical, practical, and operational issues to strengthen their fields. In the end, as these fields develop, so must the gatekeeping mechanisms that support them.

Conceptual Approach and Data Sources

This article employs a comparative and contrasting analytical approach to examine the accreditation standards and licensure policies of social work and counseling professions. The primary data sources include official accreditation documents from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Additionally, current statutory laws and regulatory policies pertaining to social work and counseling licensure in South Carolina are analyzed. The discussion is further informed by existing academic literature on gatekeeping, professional education, and licensure within the helping professions.

Nature of the Article: A Conceptual Analysis

This paper is structured as a conceptual article, which differs from empirical research that generates new data through experiments, surveys, or direct observation. Instead, a conceptual article synthesizes and analyzes existing information, theories, and frameworks to develop new insights, propose new models, or offer a fresh perspective on a particular topic. The aim is to advance understanding through interpretation and integration of established knowledge.

Our approach to this article aligns with the characteristics of a conceptual analysis in several key ways. First, we do not present original empirical data collected from primary sources (e.g., interviews with practitioners, surveys of students). Instead, our analysis is built upon a thorough examination of publicly available, authoritative documents and existing scholarly literature. This includes the accreditation standards set by CSWE and CACREP, specific program requirements from universities in South Carolina, and relevant state licensure statutes.

Second, the core of this article involves a comparative and contrasting analysis. By systematically reviewing and synthesizing the distinct yet overlapping frameworks of social work and counseling education and licensure, we aim to highlight critical similarities and differences. This process of comparison and synthesis allows for a deeper

understanding of the unique professional identities, educational pathways, and regulatory landscapes of each field, particularly within the context of South Carolina.

Finally, the article culminates in the development of implications and recommendations. These are not derived from new data but rather emerge as logical conclusions and actionable suggestions based on the comprehensive conceptual synthesis of the existing information. This approach allows the paper to contribute to the ongoing discourse by providing a structured overview and critical assessment of current practices, thereby informing future directions for policy, education, and professional practice in the helping professions.

Council on Social Work Education

Accreditation plays a vital, multi-layered role in professional education, ensuring academic quality and protecting the public. However, the varying types of accreditation can sometimes be a source of confusion. To clarify this, it's essential to understand the distinct functions of the regional, programmatic, and federal accreditation bodies that govern both social work and counseling programs. This tiered system provides a comprehensive framework for educational oversight, which ultimately impacts a student's eligibility for professional licensure.

Both the CSWE and CACREP have rigorous accreditation processes that ensure programs meet high standards for student training and program quality. This oversight provides a layer of public protection by ensuring that graduates are prepared to enter the workforce. It is important to distinguish between three levels of academic accreditation that govern professional programs. Regional accreditation, such as through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), applies to the university as a whole and ensures the institution meets general academic standards. Programmatic accreditation, provided by bodies like the CSWE and CACREP, focuses specifically on the curriculum and standards of a single professional discipline. Finally, the Department of Education (DoED) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) serve as overarching federal bodies that officially recognize and oversee both regional and programmatic accrediting agencies, ensuring a consistent standard of quality across the United States.

According to the CSWE (2025a), the accreditation of a program covers all approved locations and delivery methods, as long as the degree is a recognized social work program. All accredited programs in the directory are reviewed periodically and are assigned one of five statuses: accredited, accredited (conditional), accredited (withdrawal in progress), candidacy, and pre-candidacy.

The CSWE's standards define these statuses. Accredited programs are fully accredited, while accredited (conditional) programs have documented noncompliance that must be addressed within a year. An accredited (withdrawal in progress) program is accredited with a planned closure date. Candidacy status indicates a program has completed at least one year of the candidacy process and is moving toward full accreditation within two years. Finally, pre-candidacy programs have had standards approved in draft form and are scheduled to be reviewed for candidacy status within one year.

Graduate Level Accreditation in South Carolina

Currently, there are only two CSWE-accredited Master of Social Work (MSW) programs in the state of South Carolina. Previously, Limestone University held the distinction of being the third CSWE-accredited program in South Carolina. However, the university ceased operations in 2025 due to financial difficulties. The two programs still operating today include the University of South Carolina with an initial accreditation date of 1969 and Winthrop University with an initial accreditation date of 2005 (CSWE, 2025a). Both programs offer an online option for students as South Carolina has many rural areas. The University of South Carolina's main program is based in the capital, Columbia, South Carolina, with two other campus locations to include Charleston and Greenville (CSWE, 2025a). Winthrop University's program is in Rock Hill, South Carolina (CSWE, 2025a).

The University of South Carolina has a full-time and an extended-time student program where students must complete 60 credit hours. Advanced standing students, who hold a CSWE-accredited BSW degree, must complete 42 credit hours (University of South Carolina, n.d.-b). Winthrop University's MSW offers a 60-credit traditional program for students who do not hold a CSWE-accredited BSW and a 39-credit hour advanced standing program for students who do (Winthrop University, 2025b). For CSWE, programs can be online or hybrid, micro/macro, clinical, generalist, or have other specialty tracks.

The CSWE sets the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) to guide and accredit baccalaureate and master's level social work programs. The evolution of EPAS reflects a shift in social work education, moving from a content-focused approach to a more outcomes- and competency-based framework (CSWE, 2025b). While various standards have been in place since the mid-20th century, the modern EPAS iterations have seen three major revisions since the early 2000s. The 2001 EPAS consolidated curriculum policies and accreditation standards into a single document, emphasizing efficiency and integrating baccalaureate and master's mandates (Queiro-Tajalli et al., 2001). This was followed by the 2008 EPAS, which represented a significant shift to a competency-based approach, outlining measurable practice behaviors as the organizing principle for curriculum design (Holloway et al., n.d.). The 2015 EPAS continued to refine this competency-based framework, introducing concepts like multi-dimensional assessment (CSWE, 2025b). The most recent iteration, the 2022 EPAS, further develops the standards, incorporating current understandings of professional competence and social work values (CSWE, 2022).

The CSWE does not accredit doctoral-level education in social work (CSWE, 2025a). For some doctoral programs, students can only be admitted with a master's degree from a CSWE-accredited social work program. Students pursuing a doctoral degree in social work can choose to earn either a Doctor of Social Work (DSW) or a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in social work (Social Work License Map, 2020). There are currently no DSW programs in South Carolina and the University of South Carolina offers the only Ph.D. in Social Work (University of South Carolina, n.d.-b). It is the CSWE-accredited MSW degree that is the foundational educational requirement for licensure in many states, including South Carolina.

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

Graduate Level Accreditation in South Carolina

In the counseling field, there are multiple graduate degree designations. In South Carolina, students can earn an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree, a Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), or a Master of Science (M.S.) in different areas of counseling (Northern Illinois University [NIU], 2025). It should be noted that Clemson University only accepts students into the Ed.S. degree program after they complete a minimum of 48 credit hours from a CACREP-accredited program, and it requires a completion of 30 more credit hours, once admitted (Clemson University, 2025). The University of South Carolina, on the other hand, accepts students from undergraduate studies into one of their three Ed.S. programs and requires a completion of 66 credit hours, once admitted (University of South Carolina, n.d.-a).

Table 1. *CACREP Programs in South Carolina*

University &/or School	Degree	Specializations	Year Introduced
University of South Carolina, College of Education	EdS	School Counseling	1983
		Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling	1997
		Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2019
	PhD	Counselor Education and Supervision	1983
Clemson University	MEd or EdS	School Counseling	1998
		Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2019
Winthrop University	MEd	School Counseling	1999
		Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2015
South Carolina State University	MEd	School Counseling	2004
		Rehabilitation Counseling	2017
The Citadel	MEd	School Counseling	2004
South University - Columbia	MA	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2013
Columbia International University	MA	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2014
University of South Carolina, School of Medicine	MA	Rehabilitation Counseling	2017
Webster University	MA	Clinical Mental Health Counseling	2018
Abbreviations: EdS=Educational Specialist, PhD=Doctor of Philosophy, MA=Master of Arts, MEd= Master of Education			

Similarities and Differences of Social Work and Counseling

Accreditation and Coursework Similarities and Differences

There are several similarities in social work and counseling programs. First, aside from overall accreditation standards that must be met through the Council for Higher Education (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education (DoED), along with regional standards for all of the universities in South Carolina through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), both social work and counseling have even more stringent accreditation

standards that must be met through CSWE and CACREP. This can add another layer of protection that consumers of a social work or counseling program are getting a quality education.

In South Carolina, social work and counseling programs differ in degree offerings, credit-hour requirements, and curricular structures, reflecting variations in professional training and gatekeeping. Social work provides an undergraduate BSW, which can allow advanced standing or expedited completion of an MSW, with CSWE-accredited programs ranging from 36 to 60 credits depending on prior coursework (CSWE, 2022; University of South Carolina, n.d.-b; Winthrop University, 2024b, 2025b). Faculty in social work programs are not always required to hold a doctorate, and doctoral degrees do not need to be CSWE-accredited, although a minimum number of faculty with doctorates is required to launch an MSW program (CSWE, 2022). Counseling programs, by contrast, include eight CACREP-accredited programs in South Carolina, with master's programs typically requiring 60 credits and Ed.S. programs ranging from 60 to 91 credits, depending on prior coursework, while doctoral programs require 52 to 96 credits (CACREP, 2024b; Clemson University, 2025; Columbia International University, 2024; South Carolina State University, 2024; South University, 2025; The Citadel, 2025; University of South Carolina, n.d.-a; Winthrop University, 2025a). These differences in foundational training, along with disparities in licensure reporting, such as the NBCC not publishing first-time NCE pass rates versus the ASWB reporting a 74% first-time pass rate at the graduate level (ASWB, 2024) may contribute to observed variations in licensure outcomes between the disciplines.

A CACREP-accredited program employs no more than 10% of faculty without a CACREP-accredited doctoral degree, which is why many master's, educational specialist, and doctoral programs choose to only hire CACREP-accredited degree holders (CACREP, 2024a). There are no undergraduate CACREP-accredited programs currently (CACREP, 2024a). The qualifications of a program's faculty are a direct gatekeeping mechanism, as a program cannot achieve or maintain accreditation without faculty who meet the strict standards set by accrediting bodies. This, in turn, directly impacts students because graduation from an unaccredited program can prevent them from even being eligible to sit for their state's professional licensure exam. A key difference between social work and counseling is the varying requirements for faculty qualifications, which can influence a program's ability to maintain its accreditation and, therefore, its graduates' eligibility for licensure.

While both MSW and Master of Counseling degrees prepare graduates for impactful roles in helping professions, a key distinction lies in the foundation philosophical approach and the resulting array of distinct disciplines within counselor training that are less emphasized in social work education. Counseling programs, particularly those accredited by CACREP, often focus intensely on specific theoretical orientations and intervention modalities designed for direct clinical practice with individuals, couples, families, and groups. This leads to specialized tracts in Addiction, Career, Clinical Mental Health, Clinical Rehabilitation, College Counseling and Student Affairs, Marriage, Couple, and Family, and School Counseling, each with highly focused curriculum on diagnostic assessment, treatment planning, and evidence-based therapeutic techniques tailored to those populations and settings.

In contrast, while MSW programs offer clinical concentrations, their curriculum often maintains "person-in-environment" perspective, integrating micro, mezzo, and macro practice and emphasizing social justice, policy, and advocacy alongside direct service. This broader focus means that social work education, while robust in clinical preparation, may not offer the same depth of distinct, highly specialized counseling disciplines with dedicated accreditation standards that are a hallmark of professional counseling training. This fundamental difference in clinical training can impact the approach to discipline specific and interdisciplinary supervision in the mental health community.

Social work programs include nine competency areas noted in the EPAS (CSWE, 2022) and counseling programs include eight competency areas (CACREP, 2024a). Social work and counseling programs both expect students to complete certain coursework that aligns with competencies and a field education/internship experience of varying hours (CACREP, 2024a; CSWE, 2022); however, social work students in BSW or MSW programs must be supervised in the field by someone who holds a CSWE-accredited degree (CSWE, 2022) while counseling students can be supervised by someone who either holds a CACREP-accredited degree or a related profession (CACREP, 2024a). This means that while a CACREP-accredited degree holding counselor license could not supervise a social work student in field, a CSWE-accredited degree holding social worker license could supervise a counseling student in an internship. It is clear that the social work profession has worked hard for title protection—an area many counselors feel the profession of counseling is lacking. This includes state-level legislation that protects Social Worker identity and title (S.C. Code Ann.§40-63-30, 2024).

The CSWE's 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) are built on nine core competencies that guide social work education and practice. These include:

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.
2. Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice.
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
5. Engage in policy practice.
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. (pp. 8-13)

Social work students in a BSW program must complete a minimum of 400 hours of field education and master's program students must complete a total of 900 hours of field education (CSWE, 2022). In section B3.3.6 of the EPAS for 2024, it is noted that field supervisors of baccalaureate students must hold a baccalaureate or master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and have at least two years of post-social work degree practice while section M3.3.6 of the same standards note that all master's students receive field supervision from an individual who holds a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and who has at least two years of post-master's social work degree practice experience in social work (CSWE, 2022).

The CACREP's (2015) Core Standards are organized around eight core areas that guide professional counseling education. These standards are:

1. Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice
2. Social and Cultural Diversity
3. Human Growth and Development
4. Career Development
5. Counseling and Helping Relationships
6. Group Counseling and Group Work
7. Assessment and Testing
8. Research and Program Evaluation. (Counseling Curriculum, F1-8)

Like social work, counseling students must also complete a practicum/internship with qualified supervisors. Counseling fieldwork site supervisors must have a minimum of a master's degree, preferably in counseling or a related profession; active certifications and/ or licenses in geographic location where the student is placed; a minimum of two years post-master's professional experience; relevant training for in-person and/ or distance counseling supervision; relevant training in the technology utilized for supervision; and knowledge of the program's expectations, requirements, and evaluation procedures for students (CACREP, 2024a). Doctoral students who do not have those qualifications can still serve as practicum/internship supervisors for students in entry-level programs but, must: have completed entry-level counseling degree requirements consistent with CACREP standards; have completed or are receiving preparation in counseling supervision, including instruction for in-person and/or distance supervision; and be under supervision on a regular schedule that averages one hour a week from a qualified core or affiliate counselor education program faculty supervisor (CACREP, 2024a). Students in CACREP-accredited programs must complete an internship of 600 supervised hours with a minimum of 240 hours of direct service contact with actual clients (CACREP, 2024a).

Both social work and counseling programs have courses in psychopathology, diagnostics, human behavior and the social environment/lifespan development, diversity, research, and program evaluation (CACREP, 2024a; CSWE, 2022). Though course names may be different in either program, it is expected that students are educated in these areas and must show competency in them. This shows that both CSWE and CACREP take note of the importance of understanding human development, cultural competence, diagnosis, assessment, research, and program evaluation. They also recognize the importance of hands-on experience through internship and field education. Both accrediting bodies demonstrate that social work and counseling are much more similar than different.

Beyond the specific competency alignments, four general overarching differences distinguish CSWE-accredited social work education from CACREP-accredited counseling programs (CACREP, 2016; CSWE, 2022). First, a fundamental distinction lies in their foundational philosophical approaches: social work emphasizes a holistic "person-in-environment" perspective, while counseling maintains a more targeted clinical and therapeutic orientation.

Table 2. *Similarities and Differences of CSWE and CACREP Program Standards*

CSWE (2022) EPAS	CACREP (2016) Counseling Core Standards	Compare & Contrast	
		Similarities	Differences
Demonstrate Ethical & Professional Behavior (Competency 1)	Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice	Both emphasize ethical decision-making, professional conduct, legal standards, & self-care.	CACREP explicitly includes orientation to professional organizations & advocacy (CACREP, 2016) while CSWE focuses more broadly on anti-racism/anti-oppression lenses & lifelong learning within the profession's mission.
Advance Human Rights & Social, Racial, Economic, & Environmental Justice (Competency 2)	Social & Cultural Diversity	Both highlight understanding diversity, oppression, privilege, & advocating for marginalized groups.	CSWE explicitly links these to human rights & broad social, racial, economic, & environmental justice (CSWE, 2022) emphasizing systemic issues more directly. CACREP focuses on multicultural counseling competencies & help-seeking behaviors within a counseling context.
Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice (Competency 3)	(Integrated within Social & Cultural Diversity & other standards)	Core themes of diversity, equity, & inclusion are present in both frameworks.	CSWE has this as a distinct, central competency, explicitly calling for anti-racist & anti-oppressive practice, reflecting a specific & prominent commitment in social work education. CACREP integrates these concepts throughout various standards, particularly social & cultural diversity (CACREP, 2016).
Engage in Practice-informed Research & Research-informed Practice (Competency 4)	Research & Program Evaluation	Both require understanding & applying research methods, evaluating findings, & using research to inform practice.	CSWE explicitly frames it as a two-way street: practice-informed research & research-informed practice (CSWE, 2022). CACREP includes program evaluation, which is also implicitly covered in CSWE but explicitly named here.
Engage in Policy Practice (Competency 5)	(Not a distinct core area; integrated within other standards)	Counselors engage with policy, particularly in advocacy for clients.	CSWE dedicates an entire competency to Policy Practice (CSWE, 2022) emphasizing understanding policy formulation, analysis, & implementation, & advocating for policies that promote social well-being. This reflects social work's historical macro focus. CACREP integrates policy considerations within advocacy & professional identity.
Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations,	Counseling & Helping Relationships	Both focus on building rapport, communication skills, & establishing	CSWE's competency is broader, encompassing engagement at all system levels (micro, mezzo, macro). CACREP specifically emphasizes counseling theories, case conceptualization, &

CSWE (2022) EPAS	CACREP (2016) Counseling Core Standards	Compare & Contrast	
		Similarities	**Differences**
& Communities (Competency 6)		professional relationships with clients.	developmentally relevant intervention plans within therapeutic relationships.
Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, & Communities (Competency 7)	Assessment & Testing	Both involve assessing client strengths, needs, & challenges.	CSWE's assessment is holistic, drawing on multidisciplinary frameworks like person-in-environment across all system levels (CSWE, 2022). CACREP has a dedicated **Assessment & Testing** standard, focusing on standardized & non-standardized tools, psychometrics (reliability, validity), & using assessments for diagnosis & intervention planning, reflecting a more explicit psychological testing component (CACREP, 2016).
Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, & Communities (Competency 8)	Counseling & Helping Relationships (specific intervention content also in specialty areas)	Both involve developing & implementing intervention strategies to achieve client goals.	CSWE emphasizes interventions across all system levels, including interprofessional collaboration & advocacy. CACREP focuses on counseling theories, crisis intervention, & specific therapeutic techniques relevant to individual & group counseling within its **Counseling & Helping Relationships** & specialty area standards (CACREP, 2016).
Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, & Communities (Competency 9)	Research & Program Evaluation	Both involve evaluating practice outcomes & using findings to improve effectiveness.	CSWE emphasizes evaluation across all system levels, including culturally responsive methods. CACREP links evaluation directly to research & program evaluation, often with an emphasis on data-driven outcomes in counseling settings.
Abbreviations: CSWE=Council on Social Work Education, CACREP=Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, EPAS=Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards			

Holistic vs. Clinical Focus

CSWE's framework (EPAS) is rooted in social work's holistic "person-in-environment" perspective, encompassing micro, mezzo, and macro practice, with a strong emphasis on social justice and advocacy. CACREP standards, while acknowledging social context, are more intensely focused on the development of highly skilled counseling practitioners and counselor educators with a clinical, diagnostic, and therapeutic orientation.

System Levels

CSWE explicitly delineates competencies across individual, family, group, organizational, and community levels. CACREP's core areas are often implicitly applicable across these levels but are primarily framed from the perspective of direct counseling relationships and interventions.

Policy and Advocacy

Social work (CSWE) explicitly dedicates a core competency to policy practice and advocacy, reflecting its historical mission of societal change. While advocacy is present in CACREP standards (e.g., in Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice), it's not a standalone core competency with the same depth of policy analysis.

Distinct Specializations

CACREP's structure includes distinct sets of standards for various specialized counseling areas (e.g., Clinical Mental Health, School, Career, Marriage/Family, Rehabilitation, Addiction), ensuring specific training for these roles. While social work has concentrations (e.g., clinical, macro), the core competencies apply broadly across all social work practice, without the same granular, distinct accreditation standards for sub-disciplines that CACREP maintains. These foundational differences in philosophical grounding, system-level engagement, policy focus, and disciplinary specialization are crucial for understanding the unique professional contributions and collaborative potential of social workers and counselors in the broader landscape of helping professions.

Licensure Similarities and Differences

Though an MSW degree heavily involves a systems approach to include family systems, a counseling degree in some states, such as South Carolina, can prepare a clinician for licensure as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) with the proper classes and time in the field working with families (Labor, Licensing, and Regulation [LLR], 2024a).

It is important to note that advanced generalist social work programs may not consistently include coursework in psychopathology. Students pursuing micro social work degrees should verify the inclusion of such courses, while those focusing on mezzo or macro practice will typically cover more management, organizational, and policy content.

Despite these specialized tracks, a Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW) generally retains the flexibility to pursue either clinical or macro-level roles. This inherent career pivot potential is a distinct advantage that some other licensed professional programs often do not provide.

In all CSWE-accredited programs, students must demonstrate proficiency in working with families. This is integral to the "person-in-environment" framework and the comprehensive nature of social work practice. The 2022 EPAS of the CSWE explicitly require this. While there is not one single competency solely dedicated to "families," the ability to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate practice with families is woven throughout multiple core competencies.

For instance, Competency 6, "Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities," clearly includes families. Similarly, Competency 7 (Assess), Competency 8 (Intervene), and Competency 9 (Evaluate Practice) also specify that students must be able to perform these actions with "Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities." This integrated approach ensures that social work graduates are prepared to work effectively with families as a fundamental unit of intervention within their practice (CSWE, 2022).

While a Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice (LISW-CP) and an LMFT pursue distinct educational and licensure pathways, both are qualified independent practitioners capable of providing comprehensive mental health assessment, diagnosis, and psychotherapy services to individuals, couples, and families.

Students who would like to become licensed clinicians who provide services to clients can earn a degree in counseling or social work. It is imperative to understand that, in the state of South Carolina, in order to become a licensed clinician in social work, counseling, marriage and family therapy, addictions, and as a psycho-educational specialist, an examination to gatekeep the profession is required (LLR, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

As noted earlier, in order to get licensed in many states, to include the chosen state to review, South Carolina, a social worker must graduate from a CSWE-accredited program (LLR, n.d.-b) and there do not appear to be any DSW or Ph.D. programs in social work which are CSWE-accredited, at the moment (CSWE, 2024). This means that in order to earn licensure in social work, the CSWE-accredited master's degree is needed, irrespective of holding a DSW or Ph.D. in social work.

Unlike social work, in counseling, a degree in a counseling field or a master's in psychology can lead to clinical licensure. For instance, The Citadel (2025) offers a master's in psychology that may be accepted if its coursework is demonstrated to be similar to CACREP-accredited classes, even if accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA; LLR, n.d.-a).

A social work license can only be obtained with a social work-specific, CSWE-accredited degree, while a counseling license can be pursued with a degree in a related field. Another area of interest regarding the licensure procedures for counseling includes that a doctorate from a CACREP-accredited program, without the need for a CACREP-accredited master's degree, can result in getting a license to practice clinically.

In social work, a person can hold a master's degree in something other than social work but, if accepted to a DSW or Ph.D. program in social work, still not be eligible to earn licensure to practice because a CSWE-accredited program is necessary for a license, as in the case of South Carolina (LLR, n.d.-b). In counseling, a person can hold a master's degree in something other than counseling and, if accepted into a Ph.D. program in counselor education and supervision or other CACREP-accredited program, still earn a clinical counseling license (LLR, n.d.-a.). CSWE's accreditation scope does not extend to DSW programs, although it does issue standards for them. Likewise, Ph.D. programs in social work are not subject to CSWE's practice regulations. Thus, the MSW is recognized as the terminal degree for social work practice.

For example, one of the authors of this article holds an MSW from a CSWE-accredited program, which is why she can be licensed as a social worker while her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision from a CACREP-accredited program allows her to earn licensure as a licensed professional counselor in South Carolina. Conversely, if a colleague held a master's degree from a CACREP-accredited program and was accepted into a DSW or Ph.D. in social work, a license to practice as a social worker, in South Carolina, would be denied.

South Carolina Social Work Licensure

In South Carolina, a social worker with a CSWE-accredited BSW can become a Licensed Bachelor of Social Work (LBSW). For those with a master's degree, there are three distinct licenses: the Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), the Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice (LISW-CP), and the Licensed Independent Social Worker-Advanced Practice (LISW-AP). The LISW-AP is specifically for social workers who practice at the macro level. Additionally, both the LISW-CP and LISW-AP can earn a supervisor designation, denoted by an "S" at the end of their credential (e.g., LISW-CP/S or LISW-AP/S), with extra continuing education. These supervisors are qualified to provide the necessary supervision for LMSWs to earn either their clinical or advanced practice independent license (LLR, n.d.-b). These licenses, with the exception of the LISW-CP/S and LISW-AP/S require an examination (LLR, n.d.-b). Those interested in a license as an LBSW, LMSW, LISW-CP, or LISW-AP must have the requisite education and take an examination. To earn advanced licensure of LISW-CP or LISW-AP, 4,500 clinical or advanced hours must be completed and 100 hours under the supervision of an LISW-CP/S and/or LISW-AP/S must be obtained (LLR, n.d.-b). To become an LISW-CP/S and/or an LISW-AP/S, licensure recipients must already hold the LISW-CP/LISW-AP and complete an additional 45 continuing education units (CEUs) in supervision but, no other exam is required.

South Carolina Counseling Licensure

In South Carolina, there are multiple clinical degrees one can hold after earning a CACREP-accredited degree (LLR, n.d.-a). Degree recipients of CACREP-accredited programs can earn the Licensed Professional Counselor Associate (LPCA), which is a provisional license, a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) which is the equivalent of

an LISW-CP in South Carolina, and a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor (LPCS) (LLR, n.d.-a). To become an LPC-A and then an LPC, aside from holding a degree from a CACREP-accredited program, a passing score must be earned on the National Counselor Examination (NCE). In order to become a LPCS, those with a graduate-level degree of either a master's or educational specialist must already hold an LPC for three years and take a supervision class as part of their program or complete 3 semester hours of supervision continuing education (LLR, n.d.-a). Those with a CACREP-accredited doctoral degree, which requires supervision as part of the program, can become an LPCS shortly after earning an LPC without the required three years holding the initial LPC license (LLR, n.d.-a). Aside from coursework completed, in order to become an LPC in South Carolina, CACREP-accredited degree recipients must complete 1,500 hours of post-master's clinical experience and post master's supervision in the practice of professional counseling performed over a period of not fewer than two years. Of the 1,500 hours documented, there must be a minimum of 1,380 hours of direct client contact and a minimum of 120 hours of supervision by an LPCS (LLR, n.d.-a). In South Carolina, transitioning from a LPC to a LPCS does not require an additional examination, mirroring the social work progression. Nevertheless, applicants for LPCS must hold a current, active, and unrestricted South Carolina LPC license. Furthermore, they must either have a doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision, or provide evidence of at least five years of continuous clinical experience, complete a minimum of thirty-six (36) hours of individual/triadic supervision from an LPCS, and submit proof of at least three semester hours of graduate study in supervision or board-approved training (LLR, n.d.-a).

In South Carolina, a CACREP-accredited graduate can earn a license as a Licensed Addiction Counselor (LAC) if they meeting the following requirements: 1,120 hours of post-master's clinical experience in the addictions field; 120 hours of supervision from an Addiction Counselor Supervisor; passing an addictions examination; and forty (40) hours of continuing education in addictions (LLR, n.d.-a). To become an Addiction Counselor Supervisor, one must hold a current, active, and unrestricted South Carolina Addiction Counselor, known as an LAC and be either a LPCS or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-Supervisor (LMFT-S; LLR, n.d.-a). No further examination is required to become an Addiction Counselor Supervisor after initial licensure has been acquired (LLR, n.d.-a).

A graduate of a CACREP-accredited program in South Carolin has the opportunity to earn licensure as a LMFT with the completion of 1,500 post-master's clinical experience in marriage and family therapy. Of those 1,500 hours, a total of 1,380 hours must be in direct contact with a client, with a minimum of 120 documented supervision hours from either a LMFT-S or a Qualified Licensed Mental Health Practitioner (QLMHP), which includes a person licensed as a Professional Counselor Supervisor, Addiction Counselor Supervisor, a Psychologist or a Medical Doctor (LLR, n.d.-a). The eligibility of LMFT in South Carolina also requires the passage of the National Marital and Family Therapy examination (LLR, n.d.-a). To become a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Supervisor (LMFT-S) in South Carolina, a current, active, and unrestricted South Carolina marriage and family therapy license must be held with evidence of at least five (5) years of continuous clinical experience, a minimum of thirty-six (36) hours of individual/triadic

supervision by an LMFT-S or QLMHP, and three semester hours of graduate study in supervision or other training approved by the board are required but, no further examination is needed (LLR, n.d.-a).

Professional Affiliation Similarities and Differences

Regardless of license status, both social work and counseling are considered professions, which have their own professional organizations to join. Social workers can join the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2025) while counselors can join the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2024). The state chapter of the NASW is known as the NASW-South Carolina (NASW-SC) and membership in the overall NASW makes a person an automatic member of the NASW-SC if living in South Carolina (NASW, 2025). The state chapter of the ACA is known as the South Carolina Counseling Association (SCCA) and membership in the SCCA is separate of the ACA (2024). There is a separate fee to join the SCCA after becoming a member of the ACA (2024). To run for office of either professional organization, even at the state level, membership in the overall organization is required with an added SCCA membership to be eligible for leadership roles in counseling (ACA, 2024; NASW, 2025). Another thing to consider is that both organizations also have their own code of ethics, by which members must abide, and they offer a discounted student membership (ACA, 2024; NASW, 2025).

NASW and ACA Codes of Ethics

The NASW (2021) *Code of Ethics* and the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* both serve as comprehensive frameworks guiding ethical practice in the fields of social work and counseling. They emphasize key principles such as client dignity, professional integrity, confidentiality, and cultural competence. Both codes are intended to help professionals navigate ethical dilemmas and uphold responsible standards of care. Each emphasizes the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, advocating for clients, and ensuring practitioners work within their areas of competence. Additionally, both codes provide decision-making frameworks to support ethical conduct in challenging situations.

However, notable differences reflect the distinct priorities of each profession. The NASW Code of Ethics focuses heavily on social justice, advocacy, and systemic change, urging social workers to address broader societal inequalities and work toward equity for marginalized populations (NASW, 2021). In contrast, the ACA Code of Ethics is more clinically centered, with detailed guidance on issues such as therapeutic relationships, assessment, informed consent, and the use of technology in counseling settings (ACA, 2014). The ACA code tends to offer more explicit direction on clinical and mental health issues, while the NASW code maintains a broader emphasis on community and policy-level advocacy. These differences underscore the unique ethical landscapes within which social workers and counselors operate.

Program Specific Licensure Preparation

Apgar (2021) asserted that CSWE educational competencies are based on what educators believe students should be able to do, whereas the ASWB exam content is based on what social work practitioners actually do (as cited in Morrow, 2023).While it is important to provide resources to current students, research shows that those who have already graduated may benefit from being targeted for licensure exam preparation (Arndt et al., 2021).

> The vast majority of people who choose to get licensed, when the option of licensure is available…do so in the first three years after graduation…focusing on outreach to social workers who are three years or more postgraduation to invest or reinvest in pursuing licensure seems to be a more promising strategy than focusing on recent graduates who may already be in the process of fulfilling licensure requirements (p. 365).

It may be of importance for programs that offer examination preparation to include alumni who have graduated more than three years prior. Though the authors of this paper cannot speak to the program specific licensure preparation of schools for which they did not attend or work, the value of providing students and alumni with resources at their respective schools can be promoted.

It may be important for programs that offer licensure examination preparation to include alumni who graduated more than three years prior, as providing ongoing access to these resources supports professional growth and community engagement. While the authors of this paper cannot speak to the specific licensure preparation practices of programs with which they are not affiliated, the value of institutions offering such support to both students and alumni is clear. For example, the authors who are faculty at Winthrop University voluntarily offer social work students and alumni the opportunity to attend a free two-day online and in-person preparation session for the LMSW exam each fall and spring semester. This training draws upon information from the South Carolina LLR website regarding licensure standards, coursework, textbooks, ethical standards from the NASW, and ASWB examination guides. Students completing their field experience may, with supervisor approval, earn up to ten field hours for attending and receive a certificate of completion. Similarly, the authors who are faculty at South University voluntarily provide students and alumni with an all-day, in-person training each quarter to prepare for the NCE in pursuit of LPC licensure. Internship students may, with supervisor approval, earn internship hours for attending and receive a certificate of completion. The faculty member responsible for this training receives course release to refine and update the material, as the administration recognizes it as equivalent to a course in faculty workload. Such practices could be beneficially adopted by both CSWE-accredited social work and CACREP-accredited counseling programs to enhance licensure readiness and promote continued professional development among students and alumni.

Gatekeeping in Social Work and Counseling

Efforts to improve gatekeeping in the social work profession encompasses a range of recommendations. Morrow (2023) outlines several key areas, such as narrowing the discrepancy between CSWE educational standards and ASWB exam content, bolstering licensure preparation within social work education, and addressing macro practice issues inherent in social work licensure. Further recommendations from Morrow (2023) involve standardizing license titles, establishing inclusive licensure pathways, promoting practice mobility, and expanding empirical research on social work licensure and regulation.

Complementing these insights, Apgar (2022) highlights three crucial ways to strengthen the profession's support system. These involve utilizing licensure examination pass rates for benchmarking to align with CSWE's emphasis on competency-based learning, enhancing transparency around critical student outcomes like examination pass rates both internally and externally, and improving access to licensure data to stimulate further research on social work regulation.

Since social work practice is regulated in all states, students are very aware of the centrality of licensure for employment and advancement after graduation. However, despite its importance, research in this area has not kept pace and there are few examples of curricular innovations in literature to assist students with passing licensure exams (Miller et al., 2015, as cited in Apgar, 2022, pp. 336-337). Limited faculty knowledge of social work licensure and regulation can diminish their commitment to preparing students for these processes (Morrow, 2023). This highlights the importance of greater collaboration between CSWE and ASWB in developing effective licensure education.

With both social work and counseling interstate compacts now in activation for South Carolina, these professions are poised to achieve greater reciprocity of licensure across state lines. This development underscores ongoing discussions among clinicians regarding the need for title consistency.

"Greater consistency in license titles would benefit the public in better understanding the professional identity of licensed social workers. Title consistency would also facilitate the ease of social workers seeking licensure at an equivalent level from one state to another" (Morrow, 2023, p. 11). Why should social workers or counselors be expected to fulfill completely different or more stringent requirements from one state to the next? An advanced or independently licensed social worker or counselor in South Carolina may be expected to take additional coursework or complete more hours of work in the profession with more supervision hours in another state to do the same job. This can present frustration for clinicians in both professions.

Previous social work research (Apgar, 2022) has drawn the parallel between helping professionals in marriage and family therapy, nursing, and pharmacy, with social work as it relates to exam passage for credentialing. Like social work and counseling accrediting bodies the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), and the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) have created standards that define program effectiveness through their licensure passage rates.

Alternative pathways to licensure could be more inclusive as the research has shown racial disparities in social work licensure (Morrow, 2023). Data on the National Counselor Examination (NCE) and the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Certification Examination (NCMHCE) from the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) was unable to be found by authors of this article due to this information not being publicly released and available with a demographic breakdown.

While an examination may be useful to some, Morrow (2023) suggested that alternatives to standardized exams could include portfolios, supervision, and case analysis as a way to indicate practice competency. It was also noted that while all U.S. states require passing a national exam for clinical licensure, most Canadian provinces do not require one for those who want to become a Registered Social Worker (RSW; Morrow, 2023). "It is empirically unknown whether passing a national exam predicts greater social work practice competence. Similarly, the impact of racial, ethnic, and gender differences in exam pass rates remains unknown" (Morrow, 2023, p. 12).

Questions have arisen in both the social work and counseling circles as to whether or not licensure was necessary to provide care to clients after completion of rigorous program accreditation standards when earning a degree. Although many helping professions, such as social work, counseling, nursing, and pharmacy, are not always federally mandated to hold a license, several factors nonetheless dictate its necessity. Specifically, state regulations and the ability to bill for services rendered largely control the requirement for licensure. Until certain federal and state agencies do not require a license to work for them and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) do not expect a license to provide reimbursement, licensure of particular professions will remain intact. As gatekeepers of our professions, it is now on us to find ways to help make licensure much more accessible without lowering our standards. After all, we can maintain a high level of respectability as we abide by our code of ethics to engage in cultural competence.

Implications for Practice, Education, and/or Licensure Policy

The comparative analysis of CSWE and CACREP accreditation standards, coupled with South Carolina's licensure policies, reveals several key implications. For practice, greater collaboration between social workers and counselors in interdisciplinary settings is encouraged, leveraging the unique strengths of both professions. Educational institutions should consider opportunities for shared foundational courses where competencies overlap, fostering a more unified understanding of core helping skills while maintaining distinct specializations. Regarding licensure policy, the differing supervision requirements for field placements warrant further examination to ensure equitable opportunities and consistent quality across both professions. Policymakers may also explore avenues to harmonize aspects of licensure where possible, particularly in areas of shared practice, while preserving the distinct identity and scope of each profession to enhance public protection and streamline professional mobility within the state.

Recommendations for Professional Practice and Policy

Comparing social work and counseling licensure and education in South Carolina reveals both a shared commitment to public protection and training and areas where improvement is needed. The following recommendations are proposed to address the systemic challenges highlighted throughout this paper, including barriers to professional mobility, disparities in licensure, and opportunities for greater interprofessional collaboration.

Streamline Pathways to Licensure for Professional Mobility

A detailed comparison of licensure requirements has helped highlight a significant barrier to professional mobility: the disparate, and sometimes confusing, state-specific requirements. To address this, South Carolina should work toward adopting and implementing interstate licensure compacts for both social work and counseling. These compacts, such as the Social Work Interstate Licensure Compact and the Counseling Compact, are designed to create a clear, reciprocal pathway for licensed practitioners to practice in multiple states without having to undergo a separate, lengthy licensure process for each one. By joining these compacts, the state would not only make it easier for qualified professionals to move to and work in South Carolina but also support the state's own professionals in serving populations across state lines, particularly in border regions or via telehealth. This would ultimately help to meet the increasing demand for mental health services.

Address Disparities in Licensure Exam Passage Rates

It was noted earlier that there is a presence of racial disparities in licensure exams. While an overview of the educational and programmatic differences was provided, it is recommended that South Carolina's licensing boards (such as the LLR Board of Social Work Examiners and the Board of Examiners for Licensure of Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Psycho-Educational Specialists) take a proactive stance in investigating and addressing these disparities. This includes:

- **Transparency:** Publicly releasing demographic data on exam passage rates for social workers and counselors.
- **Review:** Conducting a review of the exams for potential cultural or racial bias in question content.
- **Support:** Developing and funding free or low-cost test preparation resources specifically targeted toward students from marginalized backgrounds.
- **Alternative Pathways:** Exploring alternative methods for assessing competence, such as portfolio reviews or supervised practice evaluations, that could supplement or, in some cases, replace the reliance on a single standardized exam.

Foster Greater Interprofessional Collaboration and Education

A distinct philosophical and educational framework of social work and counseling, noting their similarities and differences, has been highlighted. To leverage their unique strengths and improve client care, a key recommendation is to foster greater interprofessional collaboration starting at the academic level. Graduate programs in both social work (CSWE-accredited) and counseling (CACREP-accredited) in South Carolina should be encouraged to create joint training opportunities, shared courses, and interprofessional workshops. This could include topics such as co-occurring disorders, telehealth ethics, and integrated behavioral health models. By fostering a shared understanding of each other's roles and a respect for their unique competencies, future professionals will be better prepared to work together in integrated healthcare settings, ultimately providing more holistic and coordinated care for the public. This recommendation aligns with the growing emphasis on integrated care models in the health and human services sectors.

Conclusion

This conceptual article has explored the intricate landscape of accreditation and licensure within the social work and counseling professions, particularly focusing on the distinctions and commonalities between CSWE and CACREP standards and their manifestation in South Carolina's regulatory environment. Our comparative analysis revealed that while both professions are diligently gatekept to ensure competent and ethical practice, notable differences exist in their foundational philosophical approaches, educational structures (e.g., the BSW pathway in social work), and specific fieldwork supervision requirements.

The emphasis on a "person-in-environment" perspective and broader policy engagement in social work contrasts with counseling's more concentrated focus on distinct clinical modalities. Despite these divergences, both fields share core commitments to understanding human development, cultural competence, ethical practice, and the importance of supervised experiential learning. The presented implications underscored the potential for enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration, the utility of exploring shared foundational coursework, and the need for ongoing review of licensure policies to ensure equity and professional clarity.

Ultimately, by understanding these nuanced similarities and differences, stakeholders in social work and counseling can better navigate professional boundaries, optimize educational pathways, and advocate for regulatory frameworks that effectively protect the public while fostering the continued growth and integrity of both vital helping professions. The ongoing evolution of gatekeeping mechanisms across these disciplines remains critical for preparing future practitioners to meet complex societal needs.

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Appendix. Acronyms

ACPE — Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education
ACA — American Counseling Association
ADEI — anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion
ASWB — Association of Social Work Board
BSW — Bachelor of Social Work
COAMFTE — Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education
CCNE — Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
CEUs — continuing education units
CACREP — Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
CHEA — Council for Higher Education
CSWE — Council on Social Work Education
Ph.D. — Doctor of Philosophy
DSW — Doctor of Social Work
EPAS — Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards
Ed.S. — Educational Specialist
LLR — Labor, Licensing, and Regulation
LAC — Licensed Addiction Counselor
LBSW — Licensed Bachelor of Social Work
LISW-AP — Licensed Independent Social Worker-Advanced Practice
LISW-CP — Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice
LMFT — Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
LMFT-S — Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-Supervisor
LMSW — Licensed Master Social Worker
LPC — Licensed Professional Counselor
LPCA — Licensed Professional Counselor Associate
LPCS — Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor
LPES — Licensed Psycho-Educational Specialist
LISW-AP/S — Licensed Independent Social Worker-Advanced Practice Supervisor
LISW-CP/S — Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice Supervisor
MCOs — Managed Care Organizations
M.A. — Master of Arts
M.Ed. — Master of Education
M.S. — Master of Science
MSW — Master of Social Work
NASP — National Association of School Psychologists
NASW — National Association of Social Workers
NASW-SC — National Association of Social Workers-South Carolina
NBCC — National Board of Certified Counselors
NCE — National Counselor Examination
NCMHCE — National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Certification Examination
NIU — Northern Illinois University
QLMHP — Qualified Licensed Mental Health Practitioner
RSW — Registered Social Worker
SCCA — South Carolina Counseling Association
SACS — Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
US DoED — U.S. Department of Education