

Kansas bill could end mandatory DEI in social work programs | Opinion

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- A Kansas social work educator argues that new accreditation standards impose a specific political ideology on students.
- A pending Kansas budget bill aims to prevent mandatory DEI and CRT-related coursework for social work licensure.
- The author claims these accreditation rules force indoctrination over education, harming the social work profession.
- The proposed legislation is intended to protect academic freedom and prevent ideological compulsion in universities.

When a foster child needs a safe home or a veteran struggles with trauma, they don't need a political ideologue; they need a compassionate, well-trained social worker.

As a social work educator, my daily mission is to prepare my students to be exactly that. Yet in Kansas schools of social work, an ideological purity test is being disguised as professional accreditation, resulting in a quiet but dangerous shift that threatens the foundation of this noble profession.

Outside accrediting organizations are no longer simply setting professional benchmarks to ensure quality; they are now dictating the specific ideological frameworks our students must adopt. When unaccountable groups prioritize political conformity over genuine education, Kansas legislators have a duty to step in and restore the balance of authority.

In 2022, the Council on Social Work Education–Board of Accreditation (CSWE-BOA), a national organization based in Virginia, adopted new standards requiring university social work programs to integrate “anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion” across the curriculum and to teach students to interpret contemporary society exclusively through concepts such as systemic racism, white privilege and structural oppression.

These requirements do more than encourage classroom discussion of these ideas. They compel programs to demonstrate that the controversial tenets of critical race theory underpin both the explicit and implicit curriculum. Compliance is mandatory.

Without accreditation, graduates cannot obtain licensure. Without licensure, graduates cannot practice in Kansas, leaving them without job opportunities and the most vulnerable

in our communities at risk. Kansans depend on competent, compassionate social workers who are trained to help real people facing real crises, not ideological activists.

A measure in the pending budget bill ensures that social work students in Kansas aren't subjected to this kind of indoctrination. Under the measure, students will not be required to complete DEI- or CRT-related coursework outside programs where such subjects are central to the field of study, and it prevents institutions from pressuring faculty to incorporate such content as a condition of tenure, promotion, or course approval.

Programs whose primary focus is racial, ethnic, or gender studies may continue to offer such coursework. The budget bill does not ban discussion of diversity, equity, or critical race theory. It does not prevent professors from teaching controversial material. In fact, it explicitly protects academic freedom and classroom discussion.

What the bill restricts is compulsion, not inquiry. That distinction matters for the future of social work in Kansas.

My aim is to prepare students to think critically and creatively as they prepare to help others. In my classes, I strive to expose students to a variety of ideas about a just society and social work's role in pursuing one. The CSWE-BOA's politicized accreditation requirements, however, mandate that I teach students a single, narrow ideology.

In other words, the CSWE-BOA is forcing social work programs like mine to indoctrinate students rather than educate them, leaving future social workers ill-prepared to confront the challenges that await them.

Since its inception, the social work profession has continuously grappled with the concept of a just society, drawing on centuries of philosophical thought. Scholars and practitioners have long debated whether social justice is best pursued through protecting universal moral rights, ensuring distributive fairness, maximizing overall community well-being, or dismantling structural imbalances of power. Historically, those disagreements have sharpened and strengthened the discipline.

The new accreditation standards do something different: They elevate one contested framework, structural critique, from a theory open to examination into the required lens through which all other theories must be applied. Once a framework becomes mandatory rather than debatable, the university's core mission, the pursuit of truth through open inquiry, begins to erode.

The budget bill eliminating mandatory DEI courses is necessary to save the educational mission of my social work program. The CSWE-BOA has stated that it will exempt a

program from the politicized DEI accreditation requirements, provided it is located in a state that has enacted legislation restricting DEI course mandates.

The proposed budget bill restores balance. It preserves academic freedom while preventing ideological coercion. It allows controversial theories to be taught but prevents them from being imposed as mandatory professional litmus tests outside clearly defined programs devoted to their study. It affirms pluralism over orthodoxy as the proper foundation of higher education.

Reducing social work to a single mandatory ideological framework will undermine the profession and hurt the most vulnerable in our communities. If Kansas leaders fail to assert their authority now, our schools of social work risk becoming administrative extensions of activist-driven accreditation bodies, training students within frameworks they are not free to question.

The people of Kansas should demand that our institutions of higher education are not hobbled as they pursue what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful, the historical mission on which the very foundations of the academy rest.

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