

WHY SOCIAL SCIENCE ?

Because It is an Engine for Social Progress

February 27, 2017

By Darla Spence Coffey, PhD, MSW, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Social Work Education & James Herbert Williams, PhD, MSW, MPA, Arizona Centennial Professor of Social Welfare Services at Arizona State University

The [Council on Social Work Education](#) (CSWE) is dedicated to preparing the next generation of social work practitioners, policy makers, and researchers with the competencies to address society's needs. The [Society for Social Work and Research](#) (SSWR) is a catalyst for excellence in developing, implementing, and translating research that advances social work practice and social policy that improves human well-being. Together we advance society through the delivery of quality services informed by social science research. As March is Social Work Month, with this year's theme being "Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates. Champions," CSWE and SSWR appreciate the opportunity to share with the community what makes social work research an important part of social science as a discipline.

While the public is generally aware of social work as a profession of practitioners, it is less aware of its science. And yet, social work researchers have been integral to the science that has led to improvements in people's lives and the amelioration of social ills for generations. Social work science played an important role in progressive social movements such as the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, child labor laws, and women, political, civil and human rights. Social work science led to many of the "Great Society" programs to address poverty and racial injustice and the development of humane care for service men and women. Social work science has facilitated culturally and contextually relevant services for people across the lifespan (from cradle to grave) and influenced consumer protection policies and programs.

Social work science leads with "social" and intentionally focuses its gaze at the nexus of person and environment. For any desired outcome, the social trumps everything else. In health, the influence of the clinical encounter is far surpassed by social, cultural, and behavioral factors. In housing, it is the network of social support and relationships that provide stability and guard against unforeseen challenges to it. In education, success is dependent upon not just what happens within the four walls of the school, but on the health of each child's family, neighborhood and community.

One distinction of social work is the diverse range of research conducted by social work scholars. As a discipline that is significantly focused on interconnected systems, our research addresses a wide-range of social problems across multiple systems and populations. Rigorous social work research is a prerequisite for effective interventions, programs, and policies to address pressing social issues. Social work research expands our knowledge of the human

condition. As social work continues to grow, the research is more meaningful and impacts the lives of children, families, and communities. The growth in the profession's body of research has not only expanded in substantive areas but also in methodology and analytical techniques.

Social work has set a ten-year course to make a significant impact on the most pressing current social issues. The [Grand Challenges for Social Work](#) (GCSW) is a large-scale initiative to bring a focus and synergy between social work research, practice, and education to bear on a range of universal social, economic, political, environmental, and psychological problems. GCSW is committed to advancing a strong scientific base for social work that provides solutions for positive transformation to several areas of need that social workers tackle daily. GCSW is focused on innovation, collaboration, and evidence-based programs that address social issues in a meaningful manner and can develop measurable progress for solving some of our most urgent social problems within a decade. The Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative describes a vibrant social agenda to change the social fabric and create a more just society. GCSW is "Social Progress Powered by Science."

Why social science? Because social science— and social work research in particular— is an engine for social progress.

***DARLA SPENCE COFFEY, Ph.D., M.S.W.,** is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). CSWE is the national association for social work education, representing nearly 800 accredited undergraduate and graduate programs of professional social work. Through its programs and initiatives, CSWE promotes emerging technologies, interprofessional education, and innovative models, pedagogies, and practices to advance social work education. As the voice of social work education, CSWE works to strengthen the position of social work within higher education, the national political environment, and in the perceptions of the general public.*



***JAMES HERBERT WILLIAMS, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.P.A.,** is Arizona Centennial Professor of Social Welfare Services at Arizona State University and served as President of the Society for Social Work and Research 2016 – 2018. The Society for Social Work and Research is dedicated to the advancement of social work research. The Society works collaboratively with a number of other organizations that are committed to improving support for research for social workers. Our members are faculty in schools of social work and other professional schools, research staff in public and private agencies, and masters/doctoral students. The Society advances, disseminates, and translates research that addresses issues of social work practice and policy and promotes a diverse, just, and equitable society.*



CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

@COSSADC • #WhySocialScience

www.whysocialscience.com • www.cossa.org