

Political Social Work Careers and Leadership: From Jane Addams To You!

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Section 1: Overview

In the first part of this book, you were exposed to an array of domains in which political social work can be practiced, and reflected on your own ideology, political knowledge, skills, efficacy, privilege, and use of power. You learned how to apply theories, assessment skills, and models in political contexts. In the second and third parts of this book, you used these knowledge and skills to design and implement effective strategies for electoral and advocacy campaigns. In the final part of this book, you have reflected on how to monitor and evaluate success within a political context and have considered how social work ethics and values apply to political practice. In this chapter, we encourage you to reflect upon all that you have learned and consider how you will integrate these skills into your own social work practice. Whether you are a student, a practitioner, or a faculty member, we hope you will find suggestions in this chapter for ways to increase your political activity. In Chap. 1 we told you to “consider yourself asked” to get involved. In this chapter, we ask you to bring all that you have learned together to develop your own specific plan for political involvement.

Developing Social Work Competency

The Council on Social Work Education establishes educational standards for all social work programs in the USA. Content in this chapter supports building competency in the following areas that are considered core to the practice of social work:

COMPETENCY 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

COMPETENCY 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

COMPETENCY 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Domains of Political Social Work	
1. Engaging individuals and communities in political processes	◀
2. Influencing policy agendas and decision-making	◀
3. Holding professional and political positions	◀
4. Engaging with electoral campaigns	◀
5. Seeking and holding elected office	◀

Section 2: Political Social Work Careers

Throughout this book, as you have explored and examined the many facets of political social work, we hope that you have reflected upon what political social work means to your professional goals. In this chapter, we come back to where we started this book, asking you to join us in prioritizing political and social change as you consider your next steps in your social work career. The competencies that you have developed through your social work education, your practice and this book can help you incorporate political social work into your career in a variety of ways. This may be in a full-time capacity, as one component of your generalist or direct practice position, or in work that is part of your personal community and civic engagement.

As you further contemplate what political social work will look like in your career, we profile social work icon Jane Addams. She offers a model of how social workers from the profession's earliest days have integrated political work into their practice across systems.

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORKER PROFILE: Jane Addams

Hull House Founder

Jane Addams is a social work icon, who laid much of the foundation of the social work profession. Her success at Hull House, her Nobel Peace Prize, and the impact she had on society can overshadow her as a person. She started as a student, a learner trying to make sense of the social issues around her, grappling with the enormity of the issues that are still prevalent today and the lack of solutions to address them. She chose to tackle social change regarding issues like poverty, education, child care, and quality of life, both within her local community and through political change. How did she go from a college graduate facing a world with little role for educated women to Hull House, a multifaceted set of services and resources for immigrants, many poor, in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Harvard University [n.d.](#))? How did she find the confidence to believe that she could make a difference in such impossible-seeming endeavors? What stirred her advocacy heart and drove her to pursue and enact tangible changes in the way social services were thought of and delivered?

(continued)

The difficulty of the challenges she faced only seemed to motivate her. As she graduated from college and looked at her options, she found few. Coming from a wealthy background, she was able to travel around Europe, where she saw social problems that are still present today in both Europe and the USA—poverty, hunger, and more. She also witnessed firsthand the settlement house model that would serve as inspiration for the Hull House and many other settlement houses in the USA. Addams' experiences led her to advocate alongside clients and not merely on behalf of them. She tried to dismantle the paternalistic model of superiority to the poor present in many agencies through a settlement house based on community, intermingling of settlers and residents, and common opportunities (Brooks 2017). Rather than a model that relegated the poor to merely surviving, while “helpers” were seen as experts, settlers and residents could learn from one another and thrive in the settlement house model.

Neither Addams nor other members of the settlement movement should be placed on a pedestal or immune from criticism, particularly of the movement's refusal to serve African-Americans in integrated settings. However, Addams leadership shows a model of serving others through both community and political change. She worked toward women's suffrage and engaged in national party politics at a time when women did not yet have the right to vote. She worked to ensure garbage collection in poor neighborhoods, key to health and hygiene, was done correctly; eventually she gained the power to compel the garbage to be removed when she was appointed to the office of garbage inspector (Jane Addams is appointed garbage inspector n.d.). She received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work as the International President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1931. The speech honoring her with the award is available in the resource section of this chapter, along with more information about Hull House and settlement movements.

Domain 1: Careers in Engaging Individuals and Communities in Political Processes

Professional practice in this domain can take on a range of forms. In direct practice settings, social workers work within their agencies to increase voter engagement and political awareness. Other social workers practice full-time in this domain. Social workers like Tanya Rhodes Smith (profiled in Chap. 8) engage voters, train others to engage voters, and conduct research about the most effective ways to activate communities. Others conduct advocacy and legal work on behalf of populations who are denied the opportunity to vote. They may work for advocacy organizations whose work includes agendas focused on political justice, like The Sentencing Project, or may advocate to expand access to suffrage, like Jane Addams (profiled in this chapter) and Richard Cloward (profiled along with Frances Fox Piven in Chap. 8). Still others—like Sheryl Grossman (profiled in Chap. 14), Ana Rodriguez (profiled in Chap. 4), and Katie Richards-Schuster (profiled in Chap. 3)—work directly in partnership with marginalized communities, supporting them in developing their own political voices.

Domain 2: Careers in Influencing Policy Agendas and Decision-Making

Positions that provide opportunities to influence policy agendas and decision-making may be found in public agencies, nonprofit organizations, campaigns, political parties, or in organizations who lobby and advocate. In nonprofit agencies, positions with a substantial focus on this work have a wide variety of titles, including executive director, vice president of public affairs, director of governmental relations, director of public policy, program manager, organizer, policy advisor, or outreach coordinator. However, advocacy is a substantial part of the work of many macro practitioners. In their study of professional macro practitioners, with over 60 different job titles reported, Pritzker and Applewhite (2015) found that nearly 60% of respondents frequently or very frequently engage in advocacy in their current position. Over three-fourths reported that they had engaged in at least some advocacy in a prior professional position.

Across settings, positions in this domain tend to be open to professionals with a variety of degrees and therefore tend not to have “social work” in the title. Many more of these jobs may be held by social workers than is commonly realized. As one social worker, Heather Sandler, MSW, shared with the authors, “I am in a job right now that didn’t previously take MSWs because I detailed my education and experience to compare with the position’s [needs].” See also the advocacy careers of Constance Brooks and Nancy Amidei (both profiled in Chap. 6), Stephanie Mace (profiled in Chap. 8), and Sally Tamarkin (profiled in Chap. 5). Others like Susan Hoehstetter (profiled in Chap. 13) influence policy decision-making through work with foundations or in advising and training nonprofits to successfully work in the policy sphere. Juliana Cruz Kerker (profiled in Chap. 13) works full-time as a lobbyist. The National Association of Social Workers, idealist.org, usajobs.gov, advocacy organizations, and the professional networks you develop (see Section 4 of this chapter) are a good place to start looking for full-time jobs focused on influencing policy decisions.

In other cases, integrating this domain into your career may require that you advocate for the creation or expansion of a job beyond what is written. For example, it may be possible to infuse political content into a job that doesn’t appear political on the surface. Jennifer Willett, M.S.W., Ph.D., describes:

I couldn't get a macro job that I wanted (I was trained in community-based social work) so I took an administrative job running transition housing. It didn't require an MSW, I believe. My boss was a nurse. I then was “allowed” to be very involved in the local organizing scene. I also was constantly calling my reps, meeting with them, building coalitions, etc. Whereas my more micro peers were encouraged to run groups that clients in my program could go to. The higher-ups valued people who could do the base job but could also do other things that would make the organization better. So I found a job I could make what I wanted. I always tell my students to think about administrative jobs because, in my experience, they tend to be a bit more flexible.

Social workers also seek out volunteer opportunities, outside of their full-time position, to influence policy. Melanie Pang (profiled in Chap. 8) provides an example of this, engaging in much of her policy work outside of her full-time job.

Domain 3: Careers in Holding Professional and Political Staff Positions

Political social workers may seek full-time positions within public agencies at the local, state, or federal level, either in the civil service or as political appointees. Civil service positions are required by law to be publically advertised, so you may find open civil service positions easier to find than other political social work positions. Civil service jobs often give preference to individuals who have served in the armed services or the Peace Corps, who have disabilities, or who have previous government service. Therefore, “getting a foot in the door” with one civil service position can open up options for other opportunities. We encourage social workers interested in civil service positions to seek out advice from someone who has been through the process, or who does hiring in the civil service. Both students and alumni may have access to staff members in your college or university’s career office who specialize in government positions.

The process of applying for civil service positions often can be tedious, complicated, and time intensive. (For example, one author knows a person who just got an interview for a civil service position she applied for 2 years ago.) Some civil service positions require applicants to take and pass a standardized exam, even if applicants have already passed a social work licensing test (City of New Orleans 2017). Typically, position announcements (see the USA Jobs website in Resources) indicate if an exam is required. Federal positions often require a unique form of resume (see the Partnership for Public Service’s Go Government website in Resources). A few avenues for getting into civil service positions have a quicker process and are designed specifically for students and recent graduates. On the federal level, social work students are encouraged to look into positions through the Pathways and Presidential Management Fellows programs (United States Office of Personnel Management n.d.). Natalie Powell (profiled in Chap. 12) and Torey Powell (profiled in Chap. 3) both began their federal careers through the Presidential Management Fellows program.

The process to be considered for a political appointee position in a public agency varies widely by position and location. In some locations, you fill out an online application to be considered (State of California 2017). In others, you need to share your resume with someone who has connections with the hiring agency or official, or someone who knows you will need to pass along your resume. These jobs are often not posted publicly or, if they are, they are posted only briefly. As a result, networking with political allies can be particularly helpful. President Donald Trump’s director of presidential personnel, Johnny DeStefano was in charge of filling up to 4000 political appointee positions in late 2016 and early 2017. In a profile in *The Washington Post*, he explained his approach to hiring political appointees:

What I’m interested in now is, ‘Why do you want the job, and more specifically, why do you want to work for this administration? ... What’s your vision? I want to know that myself. I’m the person who’s vouching for them to the president of the United States. (Rein 2017)

Another option for full-time political staff positions is to work in the offices of elected officials. These positions range from entry-level legislative assistant positions to chief of staff. Susan Collins (profiled in Chap. 10) is chief of staff for a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Joanne Cannon (also profiled in Chap. 10) works in the district office of a U.S. Senator as his deputy state director. These positions are often not posted. Hiring processes for legislative jobs often take place through word of mouth and in-network recommendations. In many places, new legislative job openings are often shared with legislative interns, staffers, and former staffers via a private listserv.

It is important to note that political appointments are not limited to full-time positions. Social workers also are appointed to part-time service on government policy advisory committees, councils, commissions, and boards. At the federal level, advisory committees on which social workers have served include the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women and the National Advisory Council for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. On a local level, Melanie Pang (profiled in Chap. 8) serves as an appointed co-chair of the Houston Mayor's LGBTQ Advisory Board.

Creating a network of people who know the decision makers for these positions and know that you are interested is an important first step. Depending on your area, this may mean getting to know your local elected officials, people who volunteer for your local political parties, or members of key civic groups. This is one reason why field placements and participating in volunteer opportunities are so critical to finding jobs in political settings—they allow you to build the connections necessary to find out about potential job opportunities. If you are new to your area or haven't been involved in these settings before, reach out to these folks. Get to know their work, and enable them to become aware of you and your skills. Even if you do not yet have these connections upon graduation, you can still build contacts and a reputation for working hard through political volunteer opportunities. If you have been in social work practice since you finished your education, you may find that you have already built up a network that would help you in this process if you choose to look for these jobs.

Domain 4: Careers in Engaging with Electoral Campaigns

Positions in electoral campaigns offer a wide variety of experiences, skills, and salaries, and range from entry level to senior management. If you are interested in campaign jobs, you need to be willing to start at the bottom. Joanne Cannon began her political social work career as an intern on an underdog Congressional campaign. Knocking on doors or making phone calls may seem unexpected for someone with an MSW, but remember that doing these jobs well, whether as a volunteer or entry-level staff member, generally leads to more responsibilities and opportunities on a campaign. Many organizations hire paid canvassers, especially in the summer or during the end of a campaign. These are a great way to gain experience and to begin to build relationships with people in the political community where you live. One

common misconception is that if you want to work in politics, you need to work in Washington, DC. In fact campaign jobs are located all around the country.

If professional work on campaigns is the path for you, consider the following: Your social work skills prepare you well for these positions, as demonstrated by the career of Jessica Mitchell (profiled in Chap. 7). In this domain, however, you are likely to encounter many professionals who are not familiar with social work education. They may need to be educated about the strengths that you bring. As we discuss in more depth in Section 4, begin to prepare yourself by spending some time thinking about your own personal “message”—how you articulate and sell your social work skills to audiences who may not realize what those are. You also can help yourself get in the door for these positions by networking with those in the political community in your area, getting to know the players involved, and the expectations associated with the types of jobs in which you are interested.

Domain 5: Careers in Seeking and Holding Elected Office

Throughout this book we argue that social workers have a role in politics, but social workers may even have more public impact as elected officials themselves, whether as a member of a municipal commission, a local school board, state representative, the U.S. Senate, or even, one day, as president. When social workers take a seat at the table, they directly influence policies that affect the individuals and communities who are our profession’s highest priorities. Across the country, we see individual social workers participating in policy decisions as elected officials. For example, Steve Kornell (profiled in Chap. 11) serves as an elected member of the St. Petersburg City Council in Florida. Kara Hahn (profiled in Chap. 2) is the elected Majority Leader of the Suffolk County Legislature in New York. Even before reading this book, you may have been familiar with the first woman to hold national elected office in the USA, social worker Jeanette Rankin (profiled in Chap. 1), and the unofficial “Dean of the [U.S.] Senate Women” for over two decades, Barbara Mikulski (also profiled in Chap. 1) (Mundy 2015).

It is our wish to see the nine social workers serving in Congress at the time of this writing and the hundreds in positions across the country be joined by more, hopefully, by you. Elected social workers identify as female, male, and transgender, white, black, Latinx, Asian, and more. They have B.S.Ws, M.S.Ws, and/or Ph.Ds, and are interested in an array of issues. They were recruited into their runs for elective office by family members, friends or acquaintances, fellow social workers, other elected officials, and political activists from their communities (Lane and Humphreys 2011).

We want you to consider joining them. All of the available research suggests that individuals are more likely to run for office if they are specifically asked. We are asking you to please consider putting your name on the ballot. From garbage collector (like Jane Addams) to the U.S. House of Representatives (like current members Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ)), you can join a list of social workers who make a difference!

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE: Political Social Work Jobs

Find a full-time political position in your area. As you review the position, what are your initial impressions? Could you see yourself applying to this position? Why or why not?

A Special Note: Political Social Work in Direct Practice

Social workers in direct practice have a tremendous opportunity to use political skills to help their clients. As a direct practice social worker “in the trenches,” you see every day what works or fails in policy implementation. Policy-makers will not know what policies need to be changed, if they do not hear from direct practitioners and those who are directly impacted by the policies they create. By sharing this information directly with elected officials, as well as and with other social workers who hold full-time positions with policy influence, you can use your understanding of political systems to help clients on a global level at the same time as you help them one on one.

Above—and throughout this book—we have identified many ways that you can incorporate political social work into your direct service. These include, but are not limited to, participating in your organization’s community or coalition work, and identifying strategies through which you can politically empower your clients or community members. They also include volunteer opportunities in each of the five domains. We encourage you to seek out mentors who can help you find ways to incorporate political content into your practice. These may include field instructors or faculty if you are a student, or employer or coworkers if you are a professional practitioner.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Political Social Work in Your Community

Identify an individual in your community who either practices as a full-time political social worker or who incorporates political social work into a broader social work position or into their personal work in the community. Using publically available information or an informational interview, create your own profile of this person’s career path and their work.

Section 3: Preparing for Political Social Work Jobs

As you begin planning for practice in any of the five domains of political social work, this section identifies some important considerations. We hope you find these helpful in considering your potential career contexts and the path(s) you may take to get there.

Field Education

Field education can play a crucial role in preparing students for political social work practice—either directly in political settings or in agencies that engage with policy or politics in some form. Our advice in this section is for students, practitioners who serve as field instructors, and faculty members.

Students

Field education can provide you with opportunities to implement and expand the knowledge and skills that you have learned in this book and in your courses in real-world settings. In Chap. 5, you had the opportunity to read a blog post by Chenelle Hammonds, a social work student who had a field placement at the Texas Legislature. The insights that she shared in her post were all gained through her real-world experiences interning in that political setting. Field placements in political settings enable you to grapple with ethical conflicts with the support and advice of a social work field instructor. Field placements help you begin to build networks with future political allies, as well as with potential employers. Some of you may be interested in placements that are entirely focused on developing political skills; others of you might be interested in pairing your clinical education with political learning opportunities.

If you have not yet completed your field placements, we provide suggestions of some types of placements you might consider in order to strengthen your political social work skills. We map these placement settings on to the domains and contexts for political social work practice discussed throughout this book. Most of the types of agencies listed have the capacity to provide both micro and macro practice opportunities, of particular relevance for those of who are seeking generalist B.S.W. or M.S.W. generalist placements. If your school is hesitant to place students in partisan settings (a common barrier cited by field directors; Pritzker and Lane 2014), you might share this list as an example of the range of possibilities. For example, the list of options in Domain 4 can help students gather experience with electoral campaigns, with many in nonpartisan settings.

Some of these placements may already be available through your social work program; in other cases, the faculty or field staff at your school may be open to identifying new placements with political content. If these opportunities are not currently available, the following section suggests some possible opportunities to faculty. Later in this chapter, we discuss ways to advocate for changes to your social work program.

Possible options for political social work placements

Domain 1: Empowering voters and communities

Strategy 1: performing outreach to increase voting on the part of underrepresented groups

Strategy 2: registering eligible members of client systems to vote

Strategy 3: advocating for expanded political power to underrepresented groups, including increased voting rights and more just and responsive electoral processes

Settings: Any field placement

Domain 2: Influencing policy agendas and decision-making

Strategy 4: influencing the policy agendas of candidates

Settings: Local or national political parties, town committees, political leadership groups, political action committees, advocacy and professional groups (e.g., National Association of Social Workers, National Alliance for Mental Illness), think tanks, trade associations, community and grassroots organizing agencies, community development corporations, labor union chapters, issue coalitions, directly in electoral campaigns

Strategy 5: influencing policy agendas and policy decision-making by elected officials

Settings: Offices of elected officials, in public agencies with the potential to influence lawmakers (e.g., those with a legislative liaison function)

Strategy 6: influencing policy agendas and policy decision-making by government agencies

Settings: Any of those listed in 4 and 5.

Domain 3: Holding professional and political staff appointments

Strategy 7: working on policy through civil service or other professional positions

Strategy 8: serving as political appointees

Settings: Local, state, Native American tribal, or federal government offices (e.g., administrative settings within the Veterans Administration, in the legislative affairs office of an executive branch agency at the state or federal level)

Strategy 9: working for elected officials

Settings: Offices of local, state, federal, Native American tribal officials; elected officials, such as mayors, county commissioners, city council members, legislative caucuses. State and federal elected officials often have both district and capitol offices, so distance from D.C. or the state capitol doesn't preclude this work.

Domain 4: Engaging with electoral campaigns

Strategy 10: working on campaigns as volunteers or paid staff

Settings: Candidate campaigns (either as a primary placement or as a secondary placement, where an agency loans you to a campaign for part of your time).

Strategy 11: seeking passage or defeat of ballot initiatives or referenda

Settings: Issue campaigns, placements with advocacy groups that are spearheading the campaign, organizations listed in strategy 4 above

Strategy 12: educating voters about policy issues that are part of candidate or issue campaigns

Settings: Organizations that do advocacy work, organizations listed in strategy 4 above

Strategy 13: influencing which candidates run for elected office

Settings: Local or national political parties, town committees, political leadership groups, political action committees

Domain 5: Running for and holding elected office

Strategy 14: running for elected office

Strategy 15: holding elected office

Settings: In any office, particularly those in campaigns or the offices of elected officials.

Field Instructors/Practitioners and Faculty/Field Educators

The social work literature offers an array of models for implementing political content in social work internships. Schools that are successful in establishing and nurturing political social work internships report that creating a culture of social justice and advocacy within the school was helpful in increasing student interest and preparedness (Pritzker and Lane 2014). Creativity in setting up new models for field placements is a must, including use of technology, block placements, stipends, or financial supports for those who need to move or commute long distances. Many programs offer split placements or multiple placements where students can simultaneously focus on micro skills in one placement and macro skills, including political skills, in another. Engaging those who are successful in these placements to serve as field instructors for the students coming behind them is often key in making political placements stable and sustainable.

The list mentioned above provides examples of the breadth of settings that have the potential to provide political content for students. If you are a current practitioner in one of these settings, consider serving as a field instructor and introducing a student to these activities. If you are a faculty member or field educator, consider ways to make these opportunities more visible in your program.

Social Work Education: In and Out of the Classroom

Relevant coursework and the exposure available in a social work program through extracurricular opportunities can help students forge a path to a political social work career. Social work programs may offer students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members the opportunity to learn from panel discussions, issue information seminars, visits from candidates and elected officials, general encouragement to vote and participate in advocacy, or voter registration and engagement activities. In fact, when faculty formally discuss ways to encourage students to vote, the program is more likely to encourage student participation in a range of election-focused activities (Pritzker and Burwell 2016). The range of political learning opportunities discussed in this paragraph can help students, faculty, and community participants build their political knowledge, skills, and networks.

In the authors' experiences, some students have a hard time identifying professional role models who engage in political social work, or picturing the kinds of professional positions one might pursue that focus on political social work. This is one reason that we opened this textbook with a discussion of five different domains in which political social workers regularly practice, and why we chose to incorporate profiles of political social workers practicing in an array of positions and contexts. We hope that you find these resources helpful to you in carving out your own path or in mentoring students or early career practitioners. We also encourage you to look for examples of social workers involved in political social work in your local community or state. Reach out yourself to practitioners who are creating policy change and ask them to come talk with your student groups, classes, NASW meetings, etc. Encourage them to serve as adjunct instructors or field instructors in schools of social work.

If these opportunities do not exist in your context—or you would like to see more such opportunities—advocating for them and/or jumping in to help bring them to fruition is a great way for you to build political social work skills and find others who share your interests. The Council on Social Work Education (2015) has accreditation standards that govern every social work program in the USA. Interestingly, one of these standards calls for students to be able to have opportunities to organize on behalf of their interests. This offers an important way for students to help create learning opportunities that support their future career paths. In the case study below, a group of Ohio State University College of Social Work students describe how they did exactly this in pursuit of more political social work training.

CASE STUDY: Advocacy by Ohio State University Social Work Students

As told by Nathaniel (Nate) Cindrach and Rebecca (Becky) Phillips Fig. 15.1:

CAMPAIGN SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS
SAVE THE DATE

Humphreys Institute
FOR POLITICAL SOCIAL WORK

**CAMPAIGN
SCHOOL**
for Social Workers

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

Our political system needs social work skills and ethics at the table.

If a career in politics or running for office could be in your future—you won't want to miss this training!

- Dates: Friday, October 27 & Saturday, October 28
- Time: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
- Location: NASW Ohio, 400 W. Wilson Bridge Rd., Suite 103 Worthington, OH 43085

MORE INFO AND REGISTRATION DETAILS COMING SOON!

NASW OHIO CHAPTER
National Association of Social Workers

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

Fig. 15.1 Ohio Campaign School for social workers

In March 2016, Nate attended the 2-day Campaign School for Social Workers run by the Humphreys Institute at the University of Connecticut, along with three of our classmates, at the recommendation of Professor Njeri Kagotho. At the time Nate was a second year MSW student. By the end of the 2 days, we were convinced that this experience would benefit our classmates at Ohio State University (OSU) and strengthen our macro curriculum. We reached out to the Director of the Humphreys Institute, Tanya Rhodes Smith, who offered us guidance to bring the Campaign School to Ohio.

When Nate returned to OSU, he relayed his experience to Becky, a first year student in the MSW program also very interested in political social work.

(continued)

We decided to work together to bring the Campaign School to OSU, helped by the fact that Becky was a first year student and would remain connected to the department after Nate graduated in May. Becky and her peers reached out to the department with some suggestions for how to better meet the needs of students interested in political and advocacy social work. As a result, the department hosted several panel discussions, during which we cited the Campaign School as a specific opportunity for students. We gathered support from faculty and staff, including the Events Assistant Manager of OSU's John Glenn College of Public Affairs, and NASW's Ohio chapter Executive Director, Danielle Smith. Becky was able to leverage her position as Secretary of the College of Social Work Student Association to advocate for and subsequently plan an event focused on activism. The event was standing room only. Dean Tom Gregoire attended, highlighting the interest in and importance of this area of social work.

Becky's leadership position also helped to secure higher-level staff support for the idea of bringing the Campaign School to OSU, as well as a meeting with the Dean. In this meeting with the Dean, we asked for funding and logistical support and discussed potential barriers. One of the big concerns he raised was the importance of not appearing to have a partisan political agenda. The university's governmental affairs office would need to be on board. We assuaged these concerns by relaying that the Campaign School's goal is to prepare social workers to run for and hold public office, regardless of political party. In Becky's role as an intern at NASW Ohio, she helped facilitate communication between the Humphreys Institute, OSU, and NASW Ohio. During NASW's Advocacy Day, she specifically presented about the Campaign School as a way of getting more involved in this aspect of social work.

Ultimately, final approval for the event was given by OSU CSW (and the department of governmental affairs) in April 2017, just about a year after our advocacy started. The first (of many, we hope) Ohio State University Campaign School for Social Workers was held in October 2017, and was a great success.

We encourage other students interested in advocacy to get involved in leadership opportunities both within your department and the university in general. Working with your state's NASW chapter can be helpful if they are engaged in political/advocacy work. And don't be afraid to speak with your department's administration. As we advocated, we focused on maintaining professionalism and assuming positive intent. Talk with other classmates and bring your concerns to the department's attention as a group—there is power in collective voice. It is in our field's Code of Ethics to engage in social justice, which includes politics and advocacy—remember that and don't be afraid to point it out.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Creating Change Within Your Program

Thinking back to the skills you have learned throughout this book and consider how you might implement change within your social work program or university.

1. What is one change you would like to implement within your program/university? Define the long-term goal.
2. Who is the target or targets of the change effort?
3. What tactics would you use to be successful? As Nate and Becky describe above, make sure to consider who might be your allies, including fellow students, faculty, administrators, and community members or groups.
4. How would you evaluate your efforts? How would you know you have been successful?

Preparing for Political Social Work Through Continuing Education

Continuing education (CE) courses are available to social workers across the country to help them continue their learning throughout our professional careers. Continued attention to maintaining and updating skills meets the ethical requirement in the NASW Code of Ethics (2017), Section 4.01(b), which states:

Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.

In addition to this ethical responsibility to continue to learn and develop, many social workers are also motivated to take continuing education in order to maintain licensure (Association of Social Work Boards n.d.). While the requirements vary, in general, this coursework offers an opportunity to retain and refresh your skills but also to develop competency in new areas. We encourage all practitioners, whether licensed or not, to use continuing education to develop your political social work skills. Courses offered for CE credit which may enhance your political social work skills include:

- Advocacy
- Budgeting and raising money
- Communication and social media
- Community practice
- Ethics
- Evidence base of key policies
- Issues such as environmental justice, political justice, or social justice

- Leadership
- Self-care
- Supervision
- Updates on current policies

If there are none available, we encourage you to advocate for related content with your continuing education providers. They may not know there is an audience for this content unless you request it.

Section 4: Addressing Potential Challenges

As you consider your social work career path and the role which political engagement may play in it, we also want to honestly acknowledge some possible challenges you may encounter. We do this not to intimidate you—but in the hope that through discussing these challenges, you become more prepared to navigate them successfully. Some of these challenges are more perception than reality, but even the perception that they exist can be a barrier. Overall, we expect that these challenges will lessen with more integration between social work and political work. Specifically, the increased integration we envision includes more social workers in political roles, more political social workers publicly identifying as such, and more political social workers making themselves available as role models and mentors to future social workers. These shifts can help broaden the view of the profession both inside and outside of social work (Hill et al. 2010).

FURTHER REFLECTION: Challenges You Might Encounter

Take a moment to consider your ideal career path. What are some challenges you see that might inhibit your path? What information would you like to know to help you navigate these challenges?

In this section, we reflect upon seven commonly cited challenges that students or practitioners might face in seeking a career that incorporates political engagement. These are: policy and political content in social work education, identifying potential positions, competition with those from other disciplines, issues around licensure, accessing political networks, common characteristics of the specific political positions, and issues related to supervision and interprofessional practice.

Lack of Policy and Political Content in Social Work Education

Research suggests that many social work programs have room for improvement in terms of providing hands-on opportunities for students to develop political knowledge and participation (Pritzker and Burwell 2016; Pritzker 2017). For example,

25% of social work programs that responded to Pritzker and Burwell’s survey did not offer any structured election-related educational opportunities leading up to the 2012 presidential election. In another example, nearly one-third of BSW and MSW programs did not expose any of their students to voter registration efforts in a one-year period leading up to a presidential election (Pritzker 2017). When relevant opportunities are available to students, they are often done in an ad hoc way (such as discussions in classrooms led by faculty at their discretion) or when requested by student groups.

Some social work programs express concerns about offering educational opportunities specifically related to political social work. These include fears that they will be seen as violating policies such as the Hatch Act (even if it doesn’t actually apply to their setting), state law, or university policy (Pritzker and Lane 2014). Faculty, administrators, and students should be mindful and specific in the ways in which they manage these opportunities. Note, for example, how the students and administration at Ohio State University in the case study earlier in this chapter navigated concerns about appearing partisan. As discussed elsewhere in this book, the legal line between partisan and nonpartisan activities leaves substantial room for engaging students in political social work. Furthermore, both the National Association of Social Workers (2017) Code of Ethics and the CSWE (2015) accreditation standards identify political ideology/political beliefs as a dimension of diversity that social workers must understand and respect. Engaging students around political social work therefore produces an additional benefit: Discussion of diverse ideologies and opinions within social work programming and curricula increases student interest, understanding, and motivation for action (Rosenwald et al. 2012; Galambos 2009).

Identifying Potential Positions

Jobs that include significant political or policy content are rarely reserved for social workers. As a result, any of the political social work positions identified earlier in this chapter, within each of the five domains, are unlikely to have the words “social worker” in the title. Without a staff member who has direct ties to the social work profession, these jobs may not be listed on social work job boards. (One exception to this is the Macro Social Work Network of the Connecticut NASW chapter.) As a result, social workers seeking full-time political social work positions need to be industrious and creative in finding potential positions.

You will often need to look for job postings in places that target not just social workers, but other disciplines as well, e.g., graduates from Masters of Public Policy, Masters of Public Administration, and law schools, or those with undergraduate majors in political science, sociology, or communications. Some good places to look for postings of political jobs might include:

- Your local NASW chapter
- [Idealist.org](https://www.idealists.org/)
- [usajobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov/)

- Websites of advocacy organizations and networks
- Your local political party organizations
- Organizations that help specific groups of people get elected to office

As you consider political social work positions, consider that in this realm, the duties of the job and the structure of the organization are often as important as the job title. What would you get to do in this position, and what opportunities are there to move up or to develop skills that will help you in future positions?

Competing and “Selling” Yourself as a Social Worker

As discussed in the previous section, as you enter into the application process for a political social work position, you likely will find yourself competing with people from a variety of educational backgrounds. Both within the profession and among the general public, perceptions of social work tend to emphasize the profession’s role in direct practice, not its strengths in preparing policy practitioners (Hill et al. 2010). As a result, you should expect to have to describe how you have been effectively prepared by your social work education and experience. We encourage you to prepare to be able to “sell” the qualifications you bring as a social worker; that is, to connect the skills you learned in your social work education to the work at hand.

Social Work Skills as an Asset to a Political Setting

Your social work degree is an asset to a political setting, but you will need to do the hard work of helping your potential employer to realize this and to dispel some myths and misconceptions about the field. In Torey Powell’s political social worker profile, he shares his experience selling his current employer on the merits of his social work degree in preparing him for his position in the federal government. You also may have to (politely) reframe a social work degree away from stereotypes that we are exclusively therapists or child welfare employees.

Through your job search process—and in your subsequent career—you have the opportunity to be an ambassador for the profession! Carmela Isabella, BSW, MSW, describes one of her experiences:

I was [working] on a campaign and at one of the events someone asked me where I went to school for my political science degree. When I told the woman I had a bachelor and master’s degree in social work, her jaw nearly dropped to the ground. She was in awe about why I was there. I explained to her that I was on the campaign because this particular candidate does not want to cut funding for veterans, senior citizens, school funds, people with disabilities, etc. I think this was a wake-up call for this woman because most people have stigmas regarding social workers. They forget that there is more to the profession than removing children from a home.

As you begin your job search process, be prepared to highlight the many ways in which a social work degree and your specific skills and experiences make you a good fit for political positions. In fact, the skills and experiences you have can,

Table 15.1 Social work skills used in campaigning and holding office

Skills	Used in campaigning		Used in holding office	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Communication skills	149	60	89	39
Active listening	141	57	70	31
Forming and maintaining coalitions	49	20	43	19
Conflict management/resolution	26	11	62	27
Bargaining and compromising	15	6	54	24

better prepare you for these positions than your peers from other disciplines. Carolyn Treiss, a MSW with a law degree, tells us, “I use my social work skills more than legal skills in my legislative work.” Consider, for example, what you learned in your MSW program that might not be taught in a public policy or political science or business program.

Below, we outline some examples of the assets social workers bring to political settings:

1. Social work teaches you how to consider problems and challenges differently than other disciplines do. We focus on finding strengths, assessing individual and community needs, looking at the ways policies affect individuals and communities, and working with people from diverse backgrounds.
2. Social work education is built on a liberal arts foundation, which means that you have been taught content ranging from individual development to policy, from research to working within organizations. Every social worker should come out of their BSW or generalist MSW education with a solid foundation in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. What better preparation could there be for work in political settings?
3. Training in meeting the client where they are is very helpful in deftly working with constituents, community partners, or legislators, as well as with managing employees.
4. The depth of content on oppression, diversity, and related issues in social work education makes social workers exceptionally well prepared to engage with constituents from a variety of backgrounds, manage a diverse workforce, and communicate with stakeholders who are different in background or perspective from your own.
5. Social work education tends to heavily emphasize critical thinking, research, and writing. Highlight those skills and provide examples where needed.
6. Social work education has a heavy experiential component, so every social worker has experienced hundreds of hours of hands-on, closely supervised internships in real-world settings.
7. Social work education includes an emphasis on skills critical to success in the political arena that are not taught or emphasized in other disciplines, including active listening, engagement, communication, collaboration, etc.

8. Social workers possess an awareness of systems and how they connect, overlap, and intersect to impact individual and community well-being. Our grounding in systems theory helps us to effectively navigate politics and political systems, and prepares us well for understanding the implications of policy decisions and legislation.

One of the authors of this book has extensively studied the experiences of social workers who run for and hold office. Table 15.1 shows which skills most commonly taught in social work programs were most useful to a sample of social workers who had run for office, both as they campaigned for and held office (Lane 2011). These findings underscore how relevant the communication and active listening skills emphasized in social work education are to campaigning for office, and in some cases, also for holding elected office.

“Selling” Your Social Work Skills

We hear from social workers at all stages of their careers, from students to those who have practiced or taught for years, that it can be uncomfortable to discuss your own accomplishments. We fully understand this discomfort, but want to encourage you to practice “selling” yourself. Laura Bartok, a BSW and MSW trained social worker who has worked in many political jobs—and has run for state representative—advises political social workers: “You have to get good at telling people confidently who you are, what you’ve accomplished, and what you’re capable of! Recognize what you’ve done, whether or not you want recognition for it.”

Below, we identify a set of recommendations for ways to share—and sell—the assets you bring to the table, informed by our communications with political social workers who have successfully secured professional positions. You may find these recommendations helpful not only for pursuing full-time political social work positions, but also in pursuing any of the other career contexts discussed in Section 2 of this chapter.

Make sure that your written materials, especially your cover letter and resume, are understandable to potential employers who are unfamiliar with social work or social work education. Discuss internships instead of field placements, eliminate acronyms, and replace jargon with more clear language. Even if you think of some of the acronyms you use as being well-known, they may not translate to different settings. These kinds of language choices can make it easier for someone outside of social work to understand the skills you bring to the table.

Whenever possible, ask nonsocial workers and/or professional social workers already in political positions to look at your written materials to make sure they translate well to a broader audience. Keep this concern about translation in mind as you think about examples you are considering using to answer interview questions. If no one outside of the social work profession would understand them, they should not be included in your materials.

When describing the work you have done in social work and nonsocial work jobs, field placements, and volunteer opportunities, highlight this work in a way that the employer is likely to see as relevant. This is not limited to social work or direct

Table 15.2 Translating your social work experience

Before	After
Presented at weekly case conference of service providers	Created concise description of ongoing work and presented to other agency professionals on a weekly basis
Completed field placement at OASAS center	Completed 500 internship hours at a public agency that works with individuals who have substance use disorders
Completed required paperwork	Documented services provided and presented results as needed in agency and legal settings
Processed referrals to other agencies	Communicated with public and nonprofit agencies to find best services for agency clients
Completed biopsychosocial assessments	Met with new agency clients to assess their needs and fit for agency services
Provided EBP to students with ADHD, BPD, and low EQ	Researched best services for students facing a variety of barriers to their learning and implemented services to help them succeed
Built rapport with consumers utilizing the advanced generalist practice model	Created meaningful relationships with agency clients using a variety of evidence-based practices
Participated in advocacy efforts toward legislation serving the TBI community	Supported individuals who have had traumatic brain injuries by attending rallies and meeting with members of Congress to express the importance of helping this community
Acted as a case manager for individuals with an ASD diagnosis	Met with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder to plan and monitor their goals in order to help them live independently
Facilitated culturally competent community development through rebranding the mission of DSNI	Held meetings to encourage neighborhood residents build a network with one another
Completed program evaluations from a trauma-informed perspective	Researched the effectiveness of services offered by a nonprofit organization serving trauma survivors
Designed a DBT resource packet for the residential SMI population at PT	Constructed a resource guide of coping skill strategies and worksheets for individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness for a private residential mental health treatment center
Competent in micro, mezzo, and macro settings	Worked effectively with individuals, families, groups, and communities

policy experience. Political employers often also look for the kinds of skills and experiences, like conflict resolution and crisis management, which are critical in political settings, even if gained in other settings. For example, picture a social worker who worked for 4 years during college as a gas station attendant, handling intoxicated customers late at night. Picture another social worker who spent several years managing a busy parking lot, regularly dealing with irate people in tense situations. On first glance, these two experiences may not seem at all relevant to policy or social work, and are the kinds of experiences one might leave off of a political social work resume. However, in both cases, these social workers have clear experience demonstrating strong interpersonal relationship and communications skills,

conflict management skills, and the ability to remain calm and professional in very stressful situations—each essential and easily translatable to the political realm. These work experiences, combined with social work training, can be a great package for the right political setting. Look at the job description and tailor both your resume and cover letter to the specific skills and tasks of the job description. Think back to the types of social work skills we just identified as assets to political settings. Which of these is the potential employer looking for, and how can you highlight them?

In your written materials and your interviews, discuss the work you have done in terms of the job description, using terms commonly used in that area. Table 15.2 provides some examples of ways to translate your social work experience into language relevant to jobs in political settings.

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE: Political Social Work Job Application

Find a political social work position in your area. Draft a cover letter and resume tailored to that job. Trade these documents with a friend or colleague and give each other constructive feedback on ways to translate your skills to a broader audience.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Practice Interview

Conduct a practice interview with a friend, colleague, or mentor. Include some variation of the following challenging questions in your interview—these are questions that you may well be asked in a real interview.

- Why did you decide not to be a social worker anymore?
- Why did you decide not to use your degree?
- Why does a social worker want this job?
- What did you learn in your social work education that prepares you for this job?

When you finish, switch roles, so you both have a chance to interview and be interviewed. When both are completed, talk about which questions you felt confident answering, and which questions you need to practice.

Licensure

Social work licensure has existed since 1980, in order to accomplish a range of goals. These include protecting social work clients from mistakes and ethical lapses and reinforcing the meaning, title, and status of the social work profession (Donaldson et al. 2014). Currently all 50 states and the District of Columbia have social work licensure laws, although nationally, 38% of practicing social workers

are licensed (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). The requirements around licensure are varied across states, which can lead to confusion for students and professionals. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the nonprofit organization that oversees licensure in all 50 states, DC, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and all 10 Canadian provinces, estimates there are 172 different license titles in 62 jurisdictions. Just three of these jurisdictions in the USA offer a license specifically for macro practice, the license most likely to encompass full-time political social work practice. Political social workers can hold a variety of other licenses, or none at all. Licensing complexity across jurisdictions creates particular complications for social workers who want to work in multiple jurisdictions, move jurisdictions, or who want to be able to move between direct and macro practice in their professional career. Some social workers may find the licensing process to be out of reach due to these complexities, its time-consuming nature, and associated costs.

Political social work practice and macro social work practice more broadly have been affected by many aspects of the licensure process (Hill et al. 2010). Many authors argue that macro social work has been marginalized in social work, in part due to the ways in which licensure emphasizes direct practice or clinical social work in many states (Donaldson et al. 2014). Social work students may take less macro coursework because of an emphasis on course content that prepares students for clinical licensure exams. Licensure exam topics are generally micro-oriented, as are the practice areas of the social workers who tend to participate on social work licensure boards. Whether deliberately or not, the content of licensure exams has the power to affect the actions of both students and the profession. Interestingly, however, despite these concerns, Pritzker and Applewhite (2015) found that 96.8% of the social workers in their sample of macro social workers passed their generalist licensure exam on their first try.

Over one-third of the macro social workers in this sample possessed no social work license. Based on this finding, Pritzker and Applewhite (2015) argue, “The aggregate impact of individual decisions not to pursue licensure may well be the reinforcement of the message that macro practice is not an essential part of the social work profession” (p. 198). While in most states, a social work education alone allows you to call yourself a social worker, in some states, one cannot identify as a social worker without a social work license (a form of title protection). As a result, macro social workers who do not pursue a license in such states are left outside of the profession, despite their social work education. Texas is one example of this, with the following language included on the Frequently Asked Questions page on the website of the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners:

Licensure is required [in Texas] if you identify yourself as a social worker by using titles or initials that create the impression that you are qualified or authorized to practice social work. This includes using any title containing the words “Social Worker”.... You are exempt from licensure if you do not represent yourself to the public—directly or indirectly—as a social worker and do not use any name, title, or designation indicating authorization to practice social work (Texas Health and Human Services 2013).

Unlike many direct practice positions, however, a social work license is not a professional requirement in many macro settings. In Pritzker and Applewhite's (2015) study, only one-third of the studied macro social workers worked in a position where a license of any sort was required; fewer than 50% of this subset of positions required a social work license. In some cases, individuals working in political contexts may be told that they are ineligible for licensure by licensing boards who do not see their work as social work and even explicitly challenge them as not performing social work (personal communication, K. Hill, June 13, 2017).

What do these challenges mean for social workers interested in political careers? Make sure that you are familiar with your state's licensure laws. Consider whether licensure should be a step in your career path, and if so in what form makes the most sense for you. Discuss this with your mentors and other social workers engaged in political careers. Keep in mind that in some states, licensure is necessary for you to later supervise social work students in their field placements (New York State Department of Education Office of the Professions 2010). In addition, know the rules in your state about title protection. If your state allows you to identify yourself as a social worker, please do and continue to do so as you move forward in your career! The profession needs social workers in political settings to be more visible. Finally, consider advocating for changes in your state's licensure laws that will make it easier for political social workers and other macro practitioners to thrive within the profession. Does your state need macro licensure? Would a better system of transferring licensure from one state to another be helpful? We encourage you to learn the current issues around licensure, and stay involved in the conversation (Hill et al. 2010).

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE: Licensure Exam Content

Review the outlines for the four exams administered by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB): <https://www.aswb.org/resources/?c=exam-content-outlines>. What content do you see here that relates to political social work? What portion of the overall exams relate to political content? If you have already taken the licensure exam, what content was related?

Once you've reviewed the exams, identify the regulatory board for your area (or the area in which you would like to practice) and its rules. What license would be appropriate for you at this stage? Do you need a license to practice as a social worker in your state?

Accessing Political Networks and Mentoring

In politics, networks are critical. They help connect you with open positions and help you identify allies who can help you achieve your campaign goals. They even may help you feel more capable of accomplishing your work and navigating difficult situations you experience in practice (Pritzker and Barros Lane *in press*). The

challenge for social workers is that our profession is often underrepresented in political networks.

Many people discuss the process of getting jobs in the political world as a sort of an “old boys’ club.” It can be true that many types of political positions are shared through informal networks and recommendations as commonly as through formal job postings. While this is not the case for civil service positions, it is likely to be true for campaign positions, political appointee positions, and in the offices of elected officials. Therefore, finding ways to break into these networks is important for social workers.

In areas where political social work has a solid foundation, including the regions served by the University of Connecticut, the University of Houston, and in the District of Columbia/Maryland/Virginia area, social workers are active in the political world. As a result, social workers have to do less of the “selling” discussed above. This accomplishes two things: making the informal networking of the political world available and accessible to social workers and increasing the likelihood social workers will be considered for political positions. The early social workers who opened the door to these networks have left it open and encouraged those behind them to follow them through the door.

In many cases, these social workers have laid the groundwork for subsequent social workers through formal or informal mentoring. You may be lucky enough to have found mentors in your social work education and/or career already. These are people whose feedback you respect, and who are willing to make themselves available to you to help connect you with available opportunities, read through your application materials, and help you deal with professional dilemmas and guide career decisions. They are often key to our career advancement. Each of the authors of this book value the role that we have played in serving as mentors to new social workers exploring their potential career paths, which allows us to pay forward the mentorship that we have received (and continue to receive) ourselves. In fact, we are each incredibly honored to have each been able to help mentor some of the incredible social workers profiled in this book. If you have experienced faculty members or field instructors who have shown a particular interest in your career interests, do not be shy in reaching out to them and asking them for advice and mentorship.

Your mentors may be social workers, involved in politics, or both. Where such networks exist, one way to find mentors is through existing networks of political social workers in your area, such as the Association of Macro Practice Social Workers in Minnesota, a Macro Social Workers Network, Education and Legislative Action Network, the PACE committee of your NASW chapter, your chapter of the Macro Social Work Student Network, or another activist social work group. If these groups exist, we recommend that you get involved, introduce yourself to those in the network, invite them out for coffee, and ask their recommendations to increase your likelihood of future opportunities. If these formal networks do not exist, you may need to do the hard work of beginning to lay the groundwork for informal networks in your community or state. Through your own network building, you can help increase the networks available to future social work students and practitioners. While working in political settings, you have the opportunity to highlight ways in

which social workers can contribute to political settings (Pritzker and Barros Lane [in press](#)). In addition, you can help bring other social workers into these environments; for example, by serving as a field instructor or supporting and recommending other social workers when they apply for jobs.

Position Characteristics: Salary, Job Security, and Work-Life Balance

Political social work positions vary significantly in the type of position, time requirements, and level of responsibility involved, so it is difficult to make blanket statements about salaries, job security, or work-life balance.

In some cases, salaries are quite minimal; for example, serving as a member-advocate for NASW is voluntary, with no compensation. However, while entry-level campaign positions tend to be low-paying, top-level consultants in large campaigns can make a significant amount of money. Similarly, the salaries for elected officials may range from voluntary to six-figure salaries depending on the position and geographic context. Salaries for many political social work positions in nonprofits may be comparable with other macro positions, which often are in the top tier of nonprofit jobs.

The job security of political social work positions also depends on the type of organization in which you are working, and may also be affected by whether you are a member of a union (most common in nonprofit or civil service positions). Often jobs in campaigns or political appointments lack job security. You may be concerned about this if you need to be able to plan for the future or make long-term commitments. Depending on the nature of the campaign, jobs with an advocacy or electoral campaign may come with a specific end date. However, these jobs may come also with the potential of moving on to other positions after the campaign has ended. For example, a newly-elected official is likely to choose her office staff from those who excelled on the campaign. This should be part of the discussion in your hiring process. In some cases, staff may be permitted to work a number of campaigns at once (as long as each campaign manager is aware of your commitment to each candidate), or to work for a campaign through a consulting firm. Working through a consulting firm can enable campaign staffers to have more job security as well.

Work in a part-time legislature may face a similar dynamic. While some legislative staff are year-round, full-time, others are hired on for the intense period during the legislative session. When the session ends, so does the job. At the same time, new political positions, such as on electoral campaigns, often open up soon the session ends, leading some political staff to jump from one time-limited position to another, until they seek and are hired into a more permanent position.

Jobs with elected officials or as a political appointee generally specify that your job is connected to the person who hired you. As a result, if that person is asked to step down or loses an election, your job ends too. Similarly, elected officials only serve for as long as their constituents continue to elect them, or until a term limit

goes into effect. In practice, however, the power of incumbency means that these officials are likely to be re-elected. Job security then is not as tenuous as it may seem from the outside. Settings that offer more secure positions include nonprofit organizations that do advocacy work and civil service positions. Civil service positions, which encompass a significant number of political social work jobs, are among the most stable positions in the US workforce.

When considering a political social work position, like any other potential job, do your research. Positions for local, state, or federal government are generally required to publicly list salaries of officeholders. Research online and through your networks to see what an appropriate salary is and what is commonplace in terms of negotiating for moving on to another position after the one for which you are applying ends. Be sure you understand your salary, benefits, and any issues related to job security, and have these in writing. Some political social work positions are paid in nontraditional time frames (for example, a flat rate for an entire campaign, or per week), so make sure you fully know what you are agreeing to.

To be clear, these issues of salaries and job security can pose challenges when it comes to thinking about work-life balance. We know, for example, that having young families is a part of decision-making in political careers for some women (Sanbonmatsu et al. 2009). The long hours required on campaigns and in some part-time legislatures can lead to staffers who are younger, with fewer concerns about balancing long hours with their other personal commitments. It also can be challenging to balance a professional full-time direct practice job with volunteer interests in political social work.

At the same time, the authors have seen social workers across all domains (including those profiled in this book) who find ways to balance their political work with their personal obligations as partners, parents, and caretakers, and with other professional obligations. If you are interested in considering how you might incorporate any particular position—or volunteer opportunity—with your other interests and responsibilities, we recommend connecting with someone who holds that position or a similar one. Invite them for coffee, and ask how they manage these competing interests in their lives. This may even spark the beginning of a helpful mentoring relationship. You may also find the self-care section at the end of this chapter helpful in thinking about ways to promote work-life balance while engaging in political social work.

Issues Related to Supervision and Interprofessional Practice

As is true for social workers in diverse settings, in many political settings, you may find yourself the only social worker in the organization. Political social work is heavily interprofessional—you *will* be working with professionals from many different backgrounds. This may pose challenges for some of you, as you learn to work with colleagues, supervisors, and/or employees who were trained in different philosophies and different professional ethics (Pritzker and Barros Lane [in press](#)). At times, you may find that approaches to management in political settings

may differ from the ideals you learned about in your social work classroom or your real-world experiences in your field placements. If this is the case for you, we encourage you to seek outside mentorship to help support you. There are several existing models of ways to do this, including as part of supervision groups or cohorts (Hill et al. 2010).

Social workers can make a difference in political settings through supervision and management that takes into account diversity and difference. As a supervisor, your social work skills can help you manage these environments effectively. As a staffer, they can guide you in helping your organization pre-empt difficult situations that may arise.

FURTHER REFLECTION: Addressing Challenges

For each of the challenges you listed in your reflection at the beginning of this section (or any others that have come to mind as you read this section), assess: (1) Is it truly a challenge? (2) What strategies can you engage in that will lessen the challenge?

Discuss your reflections with a colleague, friend, or mentor. What other ideas or assistance can they provide to guide you in navigating these challenges?

Section 5: Reassessing Yourself: How Have You Grown?

At the beginning of this book, we asked you to assess yourself as a political actor. Specifically, we asked you to assess yourself in terms of a number of key factors that inform how people behave politically: political knowledge, political skills, political ideology, prior political activity, and whether individuals have ever been recruited into political action. While these concepts are all predictors of political action, they are also all changeable. An individual can expand knowledge, skills, and activity; can shift ideology in light of new knowledge and experiences; and can be recruited into action even if this has never happened before.

We now encourage you to revisit where you stand in terms of each of these concepts. We invite you to retake six self-assessments. After you take these self-assessments, reflect back on the answers you gave at the beginning of this book and now. Has some aspect of you as a political actor changed during this course? If so, why do you think that is? If not, why not? You may wish to come back to these assessments again in a year (or five) to see whether or how your political self has changed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Measure Your Own Political Activity

Take the civic engagement quiz here: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Final_Civic_Inds_Quiz_2006.pdf.

Has your political activity changed over the course of the book? What would you like to do to further develop in this area?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Test Your Political Knowledge

Take some sample questions from the U.S. Citizenship Civics Test: <http://civiceducationinitiative.org/take-the-test/>. Has your political knowledge changed over the course of this book? What would you like to do to further develop in this area?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Test Your Political Skills

Take the following Political Skills Inventory (Ferris et al. 2005):

Instructions: Using the following scale, please place a number in the blank next to each item that best describes how much you agree with each statement about yourself:

1 = *strongly disagree*

2 = *disagree*

3 = *slightly disagree*

4 = *neutral*

5 = *slightly agree*

6 = *agree*

7 = *strongly agree*

1. ____ I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others. (NA)
2. ____ I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me. (II)
3. ____ I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others. (II)
4. ____ It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. (II)
5. ____ I understand people very well. (SA)
6. ____ I am good at building relationships with influential people at work. (NA)
7. ____ I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others. (SA)
8. ____ When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do. (AS)
9. ____ I have developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work who I can call on for support when I really need to get things done. (NA)
10. ____ At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected. (NA)
11. ____ I spend a lot of time and effort at work developing connections with others. (NA)
12. ____ I am good at getting people to like me. (II)

(continued)

13. ____ It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do. (AS)
14. ____ I try to show a genuine interest in other people. (AS)
15. ____ I am good at using my connections and network to make things happen at work. (NA)
16. ____ I have good intuition or “savvy” about how to present myself to others. (SA)
17. ____ I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others. (SA)
18. ____ I pay close attention to peoples’ facial expressions. (SA)

Has your overall score or subscale score on Networking ability (NA), Interpersonal influence (II), Social astuteness (SA), or Apparent sincerity(AS) changed over the course of the book? What would you like to do to further develop in this area?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Explore Your Own Political Ideology

Use the Pew Research Center’s Political Typology Quiz: <http://www.people-press.org/quiz/political-typology/>. Has your political ideology changed over the course of the book? What would you like to do to further develop in this area?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Explore Your Experience with Political Recruitment

Over the course of the book, have you been asked by anyone to participate in political activity? Have you asked anyone else to participate in political activity? What would you like to do to further develop in this area?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Social Work and Politics

At the very beginning of this book, we asked you to consider which political activities you planned to do in the future, and which you thought social workers were obligated to do. We encourage you to also revisit this assessment, considering which of these activities will be incorporated into your next steps.

Answer the following questions created by Rome and Hoehstetter (2010). Check the box in the first column if you plan to do this in the future, and the box in the second column if you think social workers should do this action. Tally your answers for each column.

Activity	I <i>plan</i> to do this in the future	Social workers <i>should</i> do this
Vote in federal elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work for pay on campaigns for candidates of my choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage others to vote on Election Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Share my political opinions with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take an active role in relation to issues that affect me personally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote in state elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read, listen to, or watch the news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refuse to vote to demonstrate dissatisfaction with certain elements of the political system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer for political campaigns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donate money to causes that are important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow the progress of legislation that interests me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer with interest groups (NASW, EMILY's List, NRA), civic organizations (local nonprofit, community group), or a political party (Republican, Democrat)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep track of how my legislators vote on issues that interest me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participate in political rallies, marches, protests, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voice my opinion on policy issues to media markets (radio, newspapers, TV, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take an active role in relation to issues that affect my clients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participate in civil disobedience when unjust laws or policies are enacted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact elected officials about issues that affect my clients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs) to organize and engage in politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write/deliver testimony to elected and/or appointed political bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote in local elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donate money to political campaigns and/or parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss current policy issues with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take part in concerts or supporting events that are associated with a cause (such as "Race for a Cure") and raise awareness and donations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choose to spend my money on products, organizations, or businesses that support my personal beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact my local elected official(s) about issues that concern me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact my state elected official(s) about issues that concern me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact my federal elected official(s) about issues that concern me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage and/or help others register to vote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Been appointed/seek appointment to a political position or government office (i.e. local commission, government board)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run for local office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run for state office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run for federal office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total (0–33)		

Section 6: Self-Care in Political Social Work

Throughout this book, you have had the opportunity to learn about the many positive ways that engaging in political social work can benefit communities and promote social justice. In many ways, the work environment for political social workers is completely energizing. As both authors of this book, as well as the political social workers profiled here, can attest to, the work in many political social work positions is often exhilarating. No two days are ever the same, you get to engage with decision-makers and communities constantly, you often get a seat at the decision-making table, and you have the opportunity every day to engage with meaningful issues that affect real people.

At the same time, over the course of this book, we have discussed an array of challenges that political social workers face in their practice. You may work in highly stressful situations, with long hours, often in organizational cultures that don't promote self-care. You will certainly face ethical challenges, be faced with uncomfortable situations and conversations, and sometimes you may feel as if your own values are being challenged. You will have to step outside of your comfort zone, and may at times find yourself receiving critical media attention and criticism even from the people on whose behalf you are trying to work. While we hope that you have many policy wins, the reality is that you will also face losses. Some of those losses—whether in an electoral campaign or in your inability to stop a harmful piece of legislation—may feel extremely painful.

As these challenges negatively impact your physical, emotional, and mental health, self-care will be an important tool. Self-care is “the utilization of skills and strategies by social workers to maintain their own personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual needs while attending to the needs and demands of their clients” (Newell and Nelson-Gardell 2014). So often in social work, self-care is talked about in a clinical context, as a tool to help social workers protect themselves from burnout (exhaustion due to the constant demands of the work environment), compassion fatigue (emotional and psychological exhaustion that stems from regular use of empathy), and secondary traumatic stress (being vicariously traumatized through exposure to others' trauma experiences) (Newell and Nelson-Gardell 2014). As we conclude this textbook, the authors want to underscore that self-care is also critical in political social work, as we too experience these challenges. Being an effective political social worker requires that you make the time and space to take care of your own well-being. Often, this is no different than the self-care we talk about in other social work practice settings: identifying a set of activities that help keep you centered, healthy, and happy.

There is no one-size-fits-all way to carry out self-care as a political social worker, but it begins with self-awareness, which Tanya Rhodes Smith calls “the single best predictor of leadership success” (personal communication, July 11, 2017). Knowing yourself, your strengths, what sustains you, and what drains you will help you prioritize self-care in your practice. While sometimes the organizational culture in political settings makes self-care seem like a weakness, try to remember that engaging in self-care will actually help you to be more effective in your work (Saturno

2016). Identify a specific set of realistic techniques as you face difficult situations—perhaps these involve exercise, hobbies and recreational activities, religious activities, spending time outdoors, time with family and friends, alone time, or even sleep. Leave work at the office when it is at all possible to do so—this may entail silencing your phone and/or shutting off email notifications for as long as you can get away with.

Sometimes, however, the rhythms of political social work make even these techniques feel near impossible. “Budget Week” in a state legislature can require staffers to pull multiple all-nighters to prepare for votes on hundreds of amendments to the state budget. The final weeks of a campaign can require seemingly endless cross-state or cross-country travel to make sure that the candidate is making as much direct contact with voters as possible. In preparation for situations like these, reflect both on how you can act preventatively to protect yourself before these particularly stressful times come and identify specific strategies that will help you cope with these stressors when they inevitably arise (Redick 2016).

In these kinds of circumstances, self-care may no longer realistically entail long runs and a full night’s sleep. Instead, keep it simple and realistic. Avoid self-care goals that you will be unable to meet, thus potentially creating another source of stress for you. Simple self-care goals could be as small as making sure you eat breakfast, whatever it may be, and taking two minutes during the day to watch a brief YouTube video that makes you laugh. For political social workers who are regularly surrounded by political news, taking even a brief break from social media can be beneficial. If you are someone who enjoys journaling, bring your journal to work with you and give yourself even just 5–10 minutes in a day to write in your journal.

Another way to take care of yourself as a political social worker is to find a support system from other social workers engaged in similar work. Where possible in your work environment, find like-minded colleagues who share your passions and commitments. For some of you, it may feel as if there aren’t other social workers who can relate to your experiences, but try to widen your lens. Perhaps you are the only social worker in the South Dakota legislature—but you can connect with social workers in other state legislatures using resources like NASW PACE’s list of social workers in state and local office (see Resources at the end of this chapter). The Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work is another helpful resource for political social workers interested in building connections with other social workers working in political settings. Your state NASW office may be a good source of support or connections. Seek out other political social workers, for consultation, mentorship, but also for a safe place to process some of your experiences with others who can relate. It also might be necessary to find a support network of people who are not connected to the political world to help create some distance between yourself and the work.

Self-care involves knowing when to say “no,” drawing personal boundaries so that you have the capacity to bring your whole self to your work when it is necessary. This can feel challenging when your boss is a politician to whom you might feel uncomfortable saying “no,” or when so many of your contacts during the day come from constituents to whom you or your boss are accountable. As one of the

authors writes this, she thinks of a former student who was a staffer for a freshman (brand new) state legislator during his first-term. As the legislator worked late nights and weekends throughout the state's legislative session in order to keep up with the new context, the new materials, and the new demands from his district's constituents, he expected the same from his staff, leaving the exhausted staffer hesitant to ask to carve out any personal space. Another state legislator had a rule for staff in her office during the legislative session: No one goes home until the last person is finished with their work. While this created a strong sense of camaraderie and support among her staff, it also left exhausted staff feeling unable to set personal boundaries. Even at those times when maintaining boundaries seems impossible, reflect on ways to can carve out small moments for yourself. Walk extra slowly to the bathroom or water cooler, or park a little farther away from your office in the morning so that you can spend a few more minutes on your walk listening to a meditation app or music that soothes you. When you do get a day off, try to respect your own boundaries and take that time to yourself.

You also might find opportunities to practice your advocacy skills with your colleagues, in order to encourage rethinking of office policies that lead to less-than-effective work in the long-run. As a social worker in a legislative setting, one author often found herself advocating for staff on a regular basis. When you have the skills to advocate and if you are in a position with the power to do so, you can help to make workplaces as supportive of workers as possible. When you are in a position of power, you also can be mindful of the messages you send to staff members who have less power than you. If you choose to “unplug” and encourage those around you to do so, you send a message that personal self-care is important and should be prioritized. It can be a badge of honor to be the busiest, most important, most sleep-deprived person in an office, but it does not have to be.

On a final note, at several points throughout this book, we have referred to the importance of passion and motivation in guiding the work of political social workers. In Chap. 4, we discuss “the power of passion for a cause”—the power that social workers bring to political change efforts through working on behalf of causes they care deeply about. In Chap. 5, we asked you to engage with Simon Sinek's Golden Circle, and to think about your own motivations to engage in political action. We included these discussions because they are important components of making change happen, but also because regular reflection on your own motivations for the political work that you do is also an important tool for self-care. When you are faced with losses, or even just not achieving the outcomes you hoped for, it can be rejuvenating to step back and make sure that you continue to put energy behind your passions. Even when you are successful, this reflection offers a good opportunity for you to continue to consider how and why you engage in this work. Remembering why we do what we do—and the great meaning and importance attached to working toward rights and justice for vulnerable populations—can help us to refocus even on the hardest days.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS: Develop a Self-Care Plan for Your Political Social Work Practice

Develop a realistic self-care plan, in which you address specific strategies for preventing and managing the stressors that you may face in a future political social work job of your choice. Think in terms of simple steps that you can take even when stress levels are at their highest.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Your Political Social Worker Profile

As a final exercise, write a political social work profile of yourself in 5 years modeled on the profiles in this book. What will you be doing? What will your goals be?

Resources

Article

Richards-Schuster, K., Ruffolo, M. C., Nicoll, K. L., Distelrath, C., Galura, J., & Mishkin, A. (2016). Exploring challenges faced by students as they transition to social justice work in the “real world”: Implications for social work. *Advances in Social Work, 16*(2), 372–389.

Historical Resources

Jane Addams: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1931/press.html

Hull House: http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=new/subsub_index_ptt&chap=82

Settlement Houses: <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/settlement-houses/>

Jobs/Field Placements

Legislative Field Placements: <http://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/field-placement/legislative-field-placements-social-works-impact-on-policy/>

The Hill: <http://thehill.com/resources/classifieds/employer>

Idealist: <https://www.idealist.org/en/?type=ALL>

National Association of Social Workers Political Action for Candidate Election (PACE): <https://www.socialworkers.org/pace/state.asp>

Partnership for Public Service’s Go Government (civil service resume tips): http://gogovernment.org/how_to_apply/write_your_federal_resume/create_your_resume.php

Political Social Work Jobs: <https://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/choices/choices2.asp#Politics>

Social Work Licensing Requirements: <https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Social-work-licensing-requirements-9.17.pdf>

Social Work Today: <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/septoct2007p44.shtml>

United Nations positions: <https://unjobs.org/organizations>

Federal positions at USA Jobs: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

Other websites

Association of Macro Practice Social Workers: <http://www.ampsw.org>

Ask A Manager: <http://askamanager.org>

Coalition for Policy Education and Practice: <https://www.cswe.org/Centers-Initiatives/Initiatives/The-Coalition-for-Policy-Education-and-Practice-in> or go to <https://www.cswe.org> and in the menu click “Centers & Initiatives” then in the right hand sidebar on the left hand side of the landing page click “The Coalition for Policy Education and Practice in Social Work” under “Initiatives.”

Influencing Social Policy: <http://influencingsocialpolicy.org/>

Macro Social Work Student Network: <http://www.mswn.org/>

Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work: <http://politicalinstitute.uconn.edu>

National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter’s macro group: <http://naswct.org/about/committees-networks/>

National Network for Social Work Managers: <https://socialworkmanager.org/>

New Social Worker: <http://www.socialworker.com>

Policy Conference 2.0: <http://www.influencingsocialpolicy.org/conference/>

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