

Running head: COMPARING THE LCSW AND LPC LICENSES

A Side-By-Side Comparison of the LCSW and LPC Licenses:

A Technical Report for NASW/Texas

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Introduction

Purpose of the Report. On July 26, 2007, the executive director of the National Association of Texas/Texas Chapter (NASW/Texas Chapter) asked if a study could be conducted relating to a side-by-side comparison of the Texas Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and the License Professional Counselor (LPC) credentials. We volunteered to conduct the study. The executive director indicated that the NASW/Texas Chapter office receives many questions concerning the training, reimbursement, and other issues relating to the LCSW and LPC credentials and that a side-by-side comparison would be useful to the Texas Chapter office.

Scope of the Report. In efforts to address the questions that the NASW/Texas Chapter office receives about the LCSW and LPC credentials, the following aspects of the two credentials will be organized into four sections: Definition of Licenses, Education, Post Degree Supervision, and Miscellaneous. Tables will be presented for three of these sections summarizing findings. This report does not comment qualitatively on the actual practices or job functions of clinical social workers and professional counselors in Texas.

Limitations of the Report. It needs to be stated at the onset of this report that the material presented is limited to LCSWs and LPCs in Texas; no other states' clinical social work or professional counseling laws, statutes, rules, or regulations were reviewed. Additionally, this report is limited by a dearth of scholarly literature on this subject. In fact, no peer reviewed articles could be found concerning a comparative analysis of Texas LCSWs and LPCs. Furthermore, no peer reviewed literature could be found concerning the actual practices or job functions of Texas LCSWs and LPCs.

Definition of Licenses

The Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in Texas. According to the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (TSBSWE; Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners, 2007), clinical social work is defined as:

A specialty within the practice of social work that requires the application of social work theory, knowledge, methods, ethics, and the professional use of self to restore or enhance social, psychosocial, or biopsychosocial functioning of individuals, couples, families, groups, and/or persons who are adversely affected by social or psychosocial stress or health impairment. The practice of Clinical Social Work requires the application of specialized clinical knowledge and advanced clinical skills in the areas of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, conditions and addictions, including severe mental illness in adults and serious emotional disturbances in children. Treatment methods include the provision of individual, marital, couple, family, and group therapy and psychotherapy. Clinical social workers are qualified to use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), and other diagnostic classification systems in assessment, diagnosis, and other activities (p. 1).

Recently, the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners updated the definition of clinical social work (TSBSWE, 2008). It now states:

A specialty within the practice of master social work that requires the application of social work theory, knowledge, methods, ethics, and the professional use of self to restore or enhance social, psychosocial, or biopsychosocial functioning of

individuals, couples, families, groups, and/or persons who are adversely affected by social or psychosocial stress or health impairment. The practice of Clinical Social Work requires the application of specialized clinical knowledge and advanced clinical skills in the areas of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, conditions and addictions, including severe mental illness in adults and serious emotional disturbances in adults, adolescents and children. Treatment methods include, but are not limited to, the provision of individual, marital, couple, family, and group psychotherapy. Clinical social workers are qualified to use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes, and other diagnostic classification systems in assessment, diagnosis, and other practice activities. The practice of clinical social work is restricted to either: (a) a Licensed Clinical Social Worker; or (b) a Licensed Master Social Worker under clinical supervision (p. 1).

Due to the recent change in the *Rules Relating to the Licensing and Regulation of Social Workers* (TSBSWE, 2008), all social workers are recommended to review them at their earliest convenience.

The Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Texas. According to the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors (TSBEPC; Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, 2005) website, professional counseling is defined as:

The practice of professional counseling is defined as the application of mental health, psychotherapeutic, and human development principles to facilitate human development and adjustment throughout the life span; prevent, assess, evaluate,

and treat mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders and associated distresses that interfere with mental health; conduct assessments and evaluations to establish treatment goals and objectives; and plan, implement, and evaluate treatment plans using counseling treatment interventions that include: a) "counseling" which means assisting one or more clients through the therapeutic relationship, using a combination of mental health and human development principles, methods, and techniques, including the use of psychotherapy, to achieve the mental, emotional, physical, social, moral, educational, spiritual, or career-related development and adjustment of the client throughout the client's life; b) "assessment" which means selecting, administering, scoring, and interpreting instruments designed to assess an individual's aptitudes, attitudes, abilities, achievements, interests, personal characteristics, disabilities, and mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders and the use of methods and techniques for understanding human behavior that may include the evaluation, assessment, and treatment by counseling methods, techniques, and procedures for mental and emotional disorders, alcoholism and substance abuse, and conduct disorders, but does not include the use of standardized projective techniques or permit the diagnosis of a physical condition or disorder; c) "consulting" which means the application of scientific principles and procedures in counseling and human development to provide assistance in understanding and solving current or potential problems that the person seeking consultation may have with regard to a third party, including an individual, group, or an organization; and d) "referral" which means evaluating and identifying needs of a counselee to determine the advisability of referral to other specialists,

informing the counselee of such judgment, and communicating as requested or deemed appropriate to such referral sources (p. 1).

Education

Degrees. For clinical social work, the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree, accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, usually is the required degree for licensure. However, the TSBSWE does specify that the M.S.W. degree accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the Doctor of Social Work (D.S.W.) degree, or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in social work is required for the LCSW; doctoral degrees must be acceptable to the TSBSWE. It should be noted that the CSWE only accredits Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) and M.S.W. degrees; they do not accredit doctoral degrees in social work. The M.S.W. degree is the most common qualifying degree for the LCSW credential.

The degree requirements are a bit more diverse for licensed professional counselors. The TSBEPc specifies that “a graduate degree in counseling or related field on at least the master's level” (TSBEPc, 2006, p. 17). A graduate degree in a counseling related field is defined as “a mental health discipline utilizing human development, psychotherapeutic, and mental health principles including, but not limited to, psychology, psychiatry, social work, marriage and family therapy, and guidance and counseling. Non-counseling fields include, but are not limited to, sociology, education, administration, and theology” (TSBEPc, 2006, p. 1).

Semester hours. While no specific semester hour requirement is listed for the M.S.W. or a doctoral degree in social work (D.S.W. or Ph.D.), the typical M.S.W. degree is approximately 60 semester hours. An exception to this are advanced standing programs. Advanced standing M.S.W. programs typically have over 30 semester hours, but less than 60 semester hours, and are for students with a CSWE accredited B.S.W. degree. While there is a great deal of variance in

doctoral education in social work, the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE; Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work, n.d.), states that there is no set curriculum or number of semester hours in doctoral education in social work. However, such programs are usually located in departments or schools of social work where M.S.W. degree programs, accredited by CSWE, are also located. Additionally, GADE (2003) stated that doctoral course work normally requires two years of full-time study or the equivalent before the dissertation begins.

For professional counseling, the TSBEPC (2006) specifies that the graduate degree, at least on the master's level, must have "at least 48 semester hours" (p. 17). For mental health counseling and marriage and family counseling programs that are accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the accrediting body for professional counseling programs, states that such programs involve a minimum of 60 semester hours of graduate course work is required.

Curriculum. The curriculum requirements for the M.S.W. degree are specified by the CSWE (2003), the organization that accredits B.S.W. and M.S.W. degree programs. Specific foundation areas to be included in the M.S.W. curriculum include: social work values and ethics, human diversity, populations-at-risk, social and economic justice, human behavior in the social environment, social welfare policies and services, social work practice, research, and a practicum/internship of at least 900 clock hours. The M.S.W. advanced practice curriculum includes course work relevant to clinical practice; for example, psychopathology, assessment and treatment of adults, assessment and treatment of children and adolescents, couple/family therapy, group therapy, program and practice evaluation, and so forth. Some programs may also have

additional course work relevant to a substantive area of practice; for example, gerontology, school social work, criminal justice, medical social work, and so forth.

Concerning professional counseling, curriculum requirements tend to vary by state; however, they tend to be consistent with the CACREP accreditation standards for mental health counseling; 60 semester hour CACREP accredited mental health counseling programs tend to be the most similar to academic programs in clinical social work. Nevertheless, in Texas, the curriculum requirements include at least one course in each of the following areas: an orientation to professional counseling; normal human growth and development; abnormal human behavior; appraisal or assessment techniques; counseling theories; counseling methods and techniques; research; life style and career development; social, cultural, and family issues; and a practicum/internship of at least 700 clock hours. The curriculum may also include prescribed and elective course work relevant to counseling practice such as courses in counseling adults, counseling children and adolescents, group counseling, counselor supervision, and so forth. Additionally, the curriculum may have additional course work relevant to a substantive area of practice, such as community counseling, mental health counseling, couple/family counseling, school counseling, and so forth.

Please see Table 1 below for a summary of the above statements.

Table 1: Education

	LCSW	LPC
Degrees	A master's or doctoral degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program. Qualifying Degrees: M.S.W., D.S.W., Ph.D.	A master's or doctoral degree in counseling or related field (e.g., in Texas: psychology, psychiatry, social work, marriage/family therapy, guidance counseling). Qualifying Degrees: M.Ed., M.A., M.S., M.S.W., Ed.D., Psy.D., M.D., Ph.D.
Semester Hours	Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree programs have a minimum of 60 semester hours. Advanced standing M.S.W. programs typically have over 30 semester hours, but less than 60 semester hours; advanced standing M.S.W. programs are for students with a CSWE accredited Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) degree.	Master of Science (M.S.), Master of Arts (M.A.), or Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree programs have a minimum of 48 semester hours. CACREP accredited mental health counseling; and marital, couple, and family counseling programs must have a minimum of 60 semester hours of graduate studies.
Curriculum	The M.S.W. foundation curriculum includes: Social Work Values and Ethics Human Diversity Populations-at-Risk/Social and Economic Justice Human Behavior in the Social Environment (Micro to Macro) Social Welfare Policies and Services Social Work Practice (Micro to Macro) Research Practicum/Internship (900 Clock Hrs. Min.) The M.S.W. advanced practice curriculum includes course work relevant to clinical practice (e.g., psychopathology, assessment and treatment of adults, assessment and treatment of children and adolescents, couple/family therapy, group therapy, program and practice evaluation, etc.), and may have additional course work relevant to a substantive area of practice (e.g., gerontology, school social work, criminal justice, medical social work, etc.).	The curriculum must include at least one course in the following: Professional Orientation Normal Human Growth and Development Abnormal Human Behavior Appraisal or Assessment Techniques Counseling Theories Counseling Methods and Techniques Research Life Style and Career Development Social, Cultural, and Family Issues Practicum/Internship (700 Clock Hrs. Min.) The curriculum also includes prescribed and elective course work relevant to counseling practice (e.g., counseling adults, counseling children and adolescents, group counseling, counselor supervision, etc.), and may have additional course work relevant to a substantive area of practice (e.g., community counseling, mental health counseling, couple/family counseling, school counseling, etc.).

Post Degree Supervision

Prerequisite license. According to the TSBSWE (2007), the prerequisite license for the LCSW is the Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) license. The qualifications for the LMSW include a doctoral degree in social work, or a M.S.W. degree accredited by the CSWE, and a passing score on the intermediate level social work examination administered by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB; Association of Social Work Boards, 2006). According to the TSBEPC (2006), the prerequisite license for the LPC is the Licensed Professional Counselor Intern (LPC-Intern) license. The qualifications for the LPC-Intern credential include for the applicant to have a graduate degree as defined above (see the “degrees” section above), and to have successfully passed all required examinations. The required examinations include the Texas Jurisprudence Examination published by the State of Texas and the National Counselor Examination (NCE) published by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC; National Board of Certified Counselors, 2007a).

Supervision plan. Applicants for both the LCSW and LPC are required to have a supervision plan on file and approved before formal supervision begins towards the applicant’s respective licensure goal (TSBEPC, 2006; TSBSWE, 2007).

Hours and time frame. Applicants for the LCSW are required to have 3,000 clock-hours of full-time clinical employment experience over a minimum of two years, but lasting no more than four years. During the supervised clinical employment, the applicant must have received 100 clock hours of face-to-face supervision from a TSBSWE Approved Supervisor; the Approved Supervisor is required to be listed on the supervision plan that is on file and approved by the TSBSWE prior to the onset on supervision. Lastly, for the LCSW applicant’s supervision

to be valid, it must have occurred within five years from the date of application for the LCSW (TSBSWE, 2007).

Applicants for the LPC are also required to have 3,000 clock hours of supervised work experience in the provision of counseling services. The supervised experience for the LPC may be obtained over 36 months at 20 hours per week, but cannot be obtained in less than 18 months. The LPC Intern must have a one hour session with their TSBEPD Approved Supervisor each week during the supervision process; the Approved Supervisor is required to be listed on the supervision plan that is on file and approved by the TSBEPD prior to the onset on supervision. Lastly, the supervised experience must include at least 1,500 clock hours of direct counseling contact with clients (TSBEPD, 2006).

Examination requirements. Once applicants for the LCSW have met the administrative (i.e., application and so forth), educational, and supervision requirements; they are required to take and pass the advanced clinical examination published by the ASWB. Additionally, LCSW applicants must pass the Texas Jurisprudence Examination published by the State of Texas. There are no further examination requirements for LPC applicants (TSBEPD, 2006; TSBSWE, 2007).

Please see Table 2 below for a summary of the above statements.

Table 2: Post-Degree Supervision

	LCSW	LPC
Prerequisite License	Applicants must be a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW).	Applicants must be a LPC Intern with a temporary license.
Supervision Plan	Required	Required
Hours and Time Frame	3,000 clock-hours of full-time clinical employment experience over a minimum of two years, but within a maximum of four years. 100 hours of face-to-face supervision over the course of the supervised experience with a Board approved supervisor. The supervised experience must have occurred within five calendar years from the date of application.	3,000 clock-hours or 36 months at 20 hours per week. The supervised experience must not be less than 18 months in length. One (1) hour per week supervision from a board approved supervisor over the course of the supervised experience. The supervised experience must include at least 1,500 clock-hours of direct client counseling contact.
Examination Requirements	The Advanced Clinical Examination published by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). The Texas Jurisprudence Examination published by the State of Texas.	The National Counselor Exam published by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC). The Texas Jurisprudence Examination published by the State of Texas.

Miscellaneous

Continuing education requirements. According to the TSBSWE (2007), LCSWs must complete 30 clock hours of continuing education during their 24 month licensure renewal cycle. The TSBSWE defines a clock hour as 60 minutes of attendance and participation in an acceptable continuing education experience. As a part of the required 30 clock hours during each biennial renewal period, a minimum of six clock hours must be in professional ethics and social work values (TSBSWE, 2007). According to the TSBEP (2006), LPCs must complete 24 clock hours of continuing education during their 24 month licensure renewal cycle. The TSBEP also defines a clock hour as 60 minutes of attendance and participation in an acceptable continuing education experience. Concerning continuing education relating to ethics, the TSBEP (2006) states “every other year, a licensee must complete at least three hours of continuing education directly related to counselor ethics issues” (p. 28).

Clinical certifications. Both clinical social work and professional counseling have many certifications, offered by many organizations. Only the major and more established certifications are listed for each profession here. Possibly the oldest of certifications (since 1960) offered in social work is certification by the Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW). The ACSW is offered by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and signifies the holder’s qualifications to offer general social work services (NASW, 2008a). The equivalent in professional counseling is the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential (NBCC, 2007a). The NCC has been offered by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) since 1983, and signifies the holder’s qualifications to offer general professional counseling (NBCC, 2007b). Social workers and professional counselors who are interested in the ACSW and NCC should visit the websites cited above (NASW, 2008a; NBCC, 2007b).

Concerning specialty certifications, many exist for clinical social work and for mental health counseling; however, as mentioned above, I will focus on the most “respected,” major, or the more established of those credentials. In clinical social work, the NASW offers the Qualified Clinical Social Worker (QCSW; NASW 2008b) and the Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW; NASW, 2008c) credentials. Certification as a QCSW signifies that the holder of the credential has “met national standards of knowledge, skill and experience in clinical social work practice and who have agreed to abide by the NASW *Code of Ethics*, the NASW *Standards for the Practice of Clinical Social Work*, and the NASW *Continuing Education Standards*” (NASW, 2008b, ¶ 1). As quoted from the NASW website, applicants for the QCSW must: 1) have a current membership in NASW; 2) have earned a master's degree in social work from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE); 3) document two years (3,000 hours) postgraduate supervised clinical experience in an agency or organized setting, supervised by an experienced clinical social worker; and 4) hold a current state social work license or certification based on an examination that requires a MSW or DSW/Ph.D. in social work and demonstrates a body of knowledge that qualifies them to practice social work, or are a current member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers (NASW, 2008b).

The most advanced certification offered in clinical social work by the NASW is the DCSW credential. Certification as a DCSW signifies that the clinical social worker is “recognized by the social work profession as [a provider] of behavioral health care. The NASW Diplomate in Clinical Social Work is the highest distinction bestowed on clinical social workers. NASW Diplomates are listed in the NASW Register of Clinical Social Workers, both in the CD-ROM version and online version (www.socialworkers.org/register)” (NASW, 2008c, ¶ 1). As quoted from the NASW website, applicants for the DCSW must: 1) have a current NASW

membership; 2) a master's or doctoral degree in social work from a university accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE); 3) documented five years of postgraduate clinical social work experience; 4) completed 20 hours of clinical course work; 5) provided professional evaluations that validate their interpersonal skills, clinical practice skills, and ethical standards of social work practice from an MSW supervisor and social work colleague; 6) a current membership in the Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW) or hold a current state clinical license; and 7) have agreed to adhere to the *NASW Code of Ethics*, *NASW Standards for the Practice of Clinical Social Work*, and *NASW Standards for Continuing Professional Education*, and are subject to the NASW adjudication process (NASW, 2008c).

Another long standing clinical social work credential is the Board Certified Diplomate (BCD) in Clinical Social Work offered by the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work (ABECSW; American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2007a). According to the ABECSW, the BCD signifies that a clinical social worker, who is conceptualized as a mental health/healthcare professional, is qualified to practice advanced clinical social work which includes “assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, intervention/treatment, evaluation of outcomes, and case management” (ABECSW, 2007b, ¶ 3) relating to mental disorders, behavioral disorders, and serious emotional disorders across all ages. As quoted from the ABECSW website (ABECSW, 2007c), applicants must meet the following criteria: 1) master's (or doctoral) degree in social work with coursework and fieldwork focused on direct practice; 2) five years/7,500 hours of post-graduate clinical social work practice, including 3,000 hours under supervision (1,500 hours supervised by an advanced clinical social worker); 3) licensure at the highest clinical level available in each state in which you practice, unless exempted by law or by regulations of workplace; 4) currency of practice (3,000 hours in the past 10 years, including 300

hours in the year prior to applying); 5) 40 hours of clinical continuing education in the past three years; and 6) two evaluations of your practice, one by an advanced clinical social worker; the second may be by an advanced clinical social worker, psychiatrist, or clinical psychologist.

In clinical mental health counseling, the equivalent specialization in professional counseling to clinical social work, the NBCC offers the Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) credential. The CCMHC specialty credential “attests to the educational background, knowledge, skills, and competencies of the specialist in clinical mental health counseling” (NBCC, 2008, p. 2). As quoted from the NBCC website (NBCC, 2007c), applicants must meet the following criteria: 1) they must hold the NCC credential; 2) 60 semester hours of graduate coursework including: theories of counseling, psychotherapy, and personality; abnormal psychology and psychopathology; human growth and development theory; career development; professional orientation and ethics for counselors; research; appraisal; and social/cultural foundations; 3) the academic course of study must have included 9 to 15 semester hours of clinical training in supervised practica/internship relevant to the practice of clinical mental health counseling; 4) a minimum of two years of supervised post-master’s clinical practice which includes 3,000 hours of direct client contact in a clinical setting with 100 hours of face-to-face clinical counseling supervision over two years; 5) a passing score on the Examination of Clinical Counseling Practice (ECCP); and 6) must submit an audio or video tape of a clinical counseling session for review following receipt of a passing score on the ECCP.

Please see Table 3 below for a summary of the above statements.

Table 3: Miscellaneous

	LCSW	LPC
Continuing Education Requirements	LCSWs must complete 30 clock-hours of continuing education during each 24 month period. A clock-hour shall be 60 minutes of attendance and participation in an acceptable continuing education experience. As part of the required 30 clock-hours, a licensee must complete a minimum of six clock-hours of continuing education in professional ethics and social work values during the biennial renewal period.	LPCs must complete 24 clock-hours of continuing education during each 24 month period. A clock-hour shall be 60 minutes of attendance and participation in an acceptable continuing education experience. Every other year, a licensee must complete at least three continuing education directly related to counselor ethics issues.
Clinical Certifications	Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW) by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Qualified Clinical Social Worker (QCSW) by the NASW Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW) by the NASW Board Certified Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (BCD) by the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work (ABECSW)	National Certified Counselor (NCC) by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) by the NBCC

Conclusion

While this document is not a comprehensive comparison of clinical social work and professional counseling in Texas, it does serve as a starting point for students, professionals, and others to assess the differences between LCSWs and LPCs in Texas. Readers of this document are advised to carefully read the rules/regulations published by the TSBSWE and the TSBEP. Additionally, this document is not a substitute for advisement or communication with the respective licensure boards, certification bodies, and professional associations discussed in this document. Lastly, readers should note that licensure boards, certification bodies, and other credentialing groups may change the requirements for their respective credentials from time to time; consequently, this document will without doubt, become dated over time.

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