

THE “SOCIAL WORK” PERSPECTIVE

As an orthodox religious person, it can be an isolating experience when you hear a progressive perspective presented as if all social workers should agree. In the classroom, it can become especially difficult when peers and professors recognize only one perspective as valid on issues like abortion, birth control, and traditional family.

It is important to note that some social work academic environments are respectful. Often, misunderstanding and lack of exposure to an orthodox perspective are at the root of perceived disrespect. Still, lack of respect for people of orthodox religious backgrounds is a significant concern and drives some gifted individuals to leave the profession.

Self-advocacy can produce greater tolerance and respect. However, it is not always easy to find the right words and approach to show that the “social work” perspective needs to recognize orthodox religious people as from a diverse background.

This brochure will offer suggestions on self-advocacy in hopes of providing a starting point. Feel free to contact CSWNA to share your feedback and/or experience!

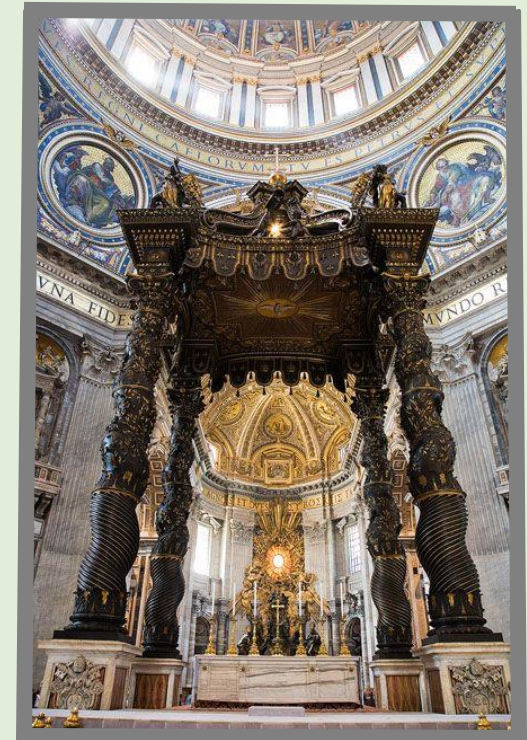


**Catholic Social Worker's
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I Deserve Respect

**Bringing your unique perspective
to the social work academic
environment as an orthodox
religious person**



PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ORTHODOX SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

- **CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES.** Before defending your orthodox religious perspective, assess the situation. Are you in class? What are you putting at risk (grades, field education evaluation)? What kind of relationship or rapport do you have with the person to whom you are talking? Can you remain respectful of those who might respond in disagreement? Is this better 1:1, by e-mail, or as a group? Recognizing the best opportunities to speak up is crucial
- **CHOOSE YOUR LANGUAGE.** Frame your message to meet your audience. With what buzz words is your audience already familiar? Can you re-frame your message in these terms? What words can be used to bring about awareness of your negative experience in the most gracious way? How much of your message is realistic for the audience to understand (is it too complex)? As with any self-advocacy, language is extremely important
- **CHOOSE TO BE POSITIVE.** Self-advocacy is difficult and messy. Learn from opportunities when you spoke or did not speak. When you

did speak: Who was receptive to you? What parts of your message were well-received? What questions that you could not answer should you research further? When you did not speak: What would you have said and what is a signal for you to speak next time? What held you back and why was your silence understandable? Find the positives in your experience as an orthodox person in a progressive environment, and take it one opportunity to speak at time.

PRACTICAL TIPS & LANGUAGE THAT MAY HELP

1. Get to know the person who is invalidating the orthodox perspective. Especially in class, decide whether a professor is generally open to feedback.
2. Frame your perspective in terms of religious diversity. Social workers generally are “for” rather than “against” diversity and tolerance of any kind.
3. Talk about yourself or people you know personally who have had positive experiences in orthodox religions.
4. Ask them what their experiences are with orthodox religion. For some, their knowledge may come from the media and other incomplete sources.

5. Premise with statements like “I don’t intend to take up a lot of class time.” It acknowledges that you wish to fit in your comments appropriately.
6. Appeal to the objectivity that should be the standard in any academic environment. You could say “Even if most agree, let’s consider these views.”
7. Ask people to find strengths in the orthodox perspective; recognize people who are listening and learning from you.
8. Remind people of the positive aspects of organized religion, especially its past and present aid to those in need.
9. Document your experiences if you feel discriminated against and identify a trustworthy person to go to if necessary.
10. Get support by connecting with others who have similar experiences, like CSWNA.

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