



### **AACS Certification Designation – What best fits my practice experience?**

As part of the certification application process, applicants will identify the designation they seek – *Certified Clinical Sociologist* or *Certified Sociological Practitioner* – in their application/portfolio materials. To help the applicant make this decision the following discussion covers working definitions of applied sociology, clinical sociology, engaged public sociology, and sociological practice.

According to the Commission on the Accreditation of Programs in Applied and Clinical Sociology standards (CAPACS 2017), applied sociology is the utilization of sociological theory, methods, and skills to collect and analyze data and to communicate the findings to understand and resolve pragmatic problems of clients. In contrast, clinical sociology is the application of a sociological perspective to the analysis and design of intervention for positive social change at any level of social organization. The CAPACS standards define sociological practice as an umbrella term that encompasses applied, clinical, and engaged public sociology.

The definition of applied sociology above is a refined version of the more detailed definition proposed by former American Sociological Association (ASA) presidents Peter H. Rossi and William Foote Whyte. Rossi and Whyte state that “applied sociology uses sociological knowledge and research skills to gain empirically based knowledge to inform decision makers, clients, and the general public about social problems, issues, processes, and conditions so that they might make informed choices and improve the quality of life” (1983). Applied sociologists engage in evaluation research, needs assessment, market research, demographic analysis, and social life indicators. In short, “the heart of applied sociology is social research” (Perlstadt 2006).

A more in-depth definition of clinical sociology comes from the work of Jan Fritz. According to Fritz, clinical sociology is a creative, rights based and interdisciplinary specialization that seeks to improve life situations for individuals and collectivities (2008). Clinical sociologists work with systems to assess situations and avoid, reduce or eliminate problems through a combination of analysis and intervention (Fritz 2008). Clinical analysis is the critical assessment of beliefs, policies, or practices, with an interest in improving the situation (2014). Clinical sociologists may be a sociotherapist, group facilitator, teacher/trainer, organizational consultant, community consultant, or mediator. The key to clinical sociology is the concept of intervention, that is, the act of facilitating social change (Lehnerer 2003).

Public sociology, as introduced by Michael Burawoy, is a “repackaging” of applied and clinical sociology (Lehnerer 2008). Burawoy, in his role as ASA president, intended to bring sociology back to its practice oriented roots in two ways. One, he wanted to make “professional sociologists” aware of the importance of moving beyond an academic audience to a non-academic audience (2004). And, two, he wanted to emphasize the importance of using sociology to promote dialogue with these non-academic

publics about issues that affect the fate of society (2004:104). Engaged public sociology, as it applies to certification, means that the applicant moves beyond a dialogue with a non-academic public and is engaged in sociological practice – applied or clinical.

### References

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