

# **The potential for social change in social work. Starting BaSW-students' commitment to social change**

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Since social work is a value-based profession committed to principles of human rights and social justice (Hare, 2001), it is assumed that a certain 'ideological infrastructure' is required of individuals seeking to join the profession (Weiss et al., 2005; Biggerstaff, 2000). In this regard, several scholars attribute a principal role to the process of professional socialization by social work education (e.g. Ryan et al., 1995; Weiss et al., 2004). As yet, a number of studies suggest that values and attitudes of social work students are somewhat at odds with the principles of the profession. One concern is the rather weak commitment of students to the 'social change/action' and macro-oriented practice (e.g. Weiss, 2006). Also, scant attention has been addressed to the question whether social work students entering the programmes have different values and attitudes, compared to their peers. In this presentation, we look at the potential for social change/action in social work, by investigating starting BaSW-students' involvement in voluntary work, their history of and willingness to undertake social and political actions, and their willingness to achieve the profession's goals (in short: micro- vs. macro-oriented goals). Based on quantitative survey-data collected on 960 starting BaSW-students during Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study in Flemish university colleges, findings indicate rather low rates of involvement in voluntary work and of the willingness to undertake social and political actions – although a comparison with their peers on these indicators turns out slightly in favour of the SW-students. Furthermore, in line with previous research (e.g. Weiss et al., 2002), social work students prefer individual-oriented (including the control function) over macro-practice goals of social work. Further multivariate analyses show significant differences within the student population and show a significant effect of the level of secondary education on the students' commitment to macro-practice.