CSWE Commission on Accreditation Competency Assessment

An Overview of Competency Assessment in Social Work Education

A Presentation for the Council on Higher Education Accreditation

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Competency-Based Social Work Education

- Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being.

Competency-based education is an outcomes-oriented approach to curriculum design. The goal of the outcomes approach is to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice. In EPAS, social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies and component behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes

Competencies

- **Competency 1:** Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

- **Competency 2:** Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

- **Competency 3:** Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

- **Competency 4:** Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

- **Competency 5:** Engage in Policy Practice

- **Competency 6:** Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- **Competency 7:** Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- **Competency 8:** Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- **Competency 9:** Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Holistic competency dimensions of competency and corresponding behaviors

- Each competency is comprised of four dimensions: **Knowledge, values, skills and cognitive and affective processes**

- Each competency has corresponding **behaviors** for demonstration in real or simulated practice

Basics of Competency Assessment

- Competence is perceived as holistic, involving both performance and the **knowledge, values, critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment that inform performance**. Assessment therefore must be multi-dimensional and integrated to capture the demonstration of the competencies and the quality of internal processing informing the performance of the competencies.

- **Assessment is best done while students are engaged in practice tasks or activities that approximate social work practice as closely as possible.** Practice often requires the performance of multiple competencies simultaneously; therefore, assessment of those competencies may optimally be carried out at the same time

Components of the Competency Assessment Plan

Programs must assess student competence at the generalist level for undergraduates and at both the generalist and specialized levels for master's programs

- A description of the assessment procedures that detail when, where, and how each competency is assessed for each program option.

- At least two measures assess each competency. One of the assessment measures is based on demonstration of the competency in real or simulated practice situations.

- An explanation of how the assessment plan measures multiple dimensions of each competency, as described in EP 4.0.

- Benchmarks for each competency, a rationale for each benchmark, and a description of how it is determined that students' performance meets the benchmark.

- An explanation of how the program determines the percentage of students achieving the benchmark.

- Copies of all assessment measures used to assess all identified competencies

Setting benchmarks

Using data for program evaluation

Currently, programs set their own competency benchmarks based on the past performance of their students, changes made in the curriculum, and other relevant factors.

- The program provides its most recent year of summary data and outcomes for the assessment of each of the identified competencies, specifying the percentage of students achieving program benchmarks for each program option.

- The program describes the process used to evaluate outcomes and their implications for program renewal across program options. It discusses specific changes it has made in the program based on these assessment outcomes with clear links to the data.

Assessment Measures

Common Assessment Measures are:

- Field Practicum Performance Evaluations

- Standardized Exams

- Course-embedded assignments

- Portfolios

- Oral Comps/Exit Interviews

Observations about Competency Assessment

- Programs typically set benchmarks of between 80-95%

- Balance between setting appropriate outcome measure benchmarks and the overall percentage of students achieving those benchmarks

- Assessment of competence is not just an assessment of students' abilities; it's also an assessment of how effectively the program prepares graduates for practice