

School of Social Work MSW Program Assessment Plan

The Illinois State University School of Social Work began re-developing the assessment plan for the BSW and MSW programs in 2009 as a team approach. The School leadership and faculty decided that a *performance-based, naturalistic approach* to assessment was the best approach. We feel that to truly assess students' competency on any practice behavior, we must assess more than just knowledge. We must assess performance of behavior that *demonstrates* competency.

With performance-based assessment, we feel that students use critical thinking to bring together their knowledge of the theoretical material with application to real or simulated client cases. We can truly assess their competency of using their knowledge, skills, and values for practice through experiential demonstration or an applied product.

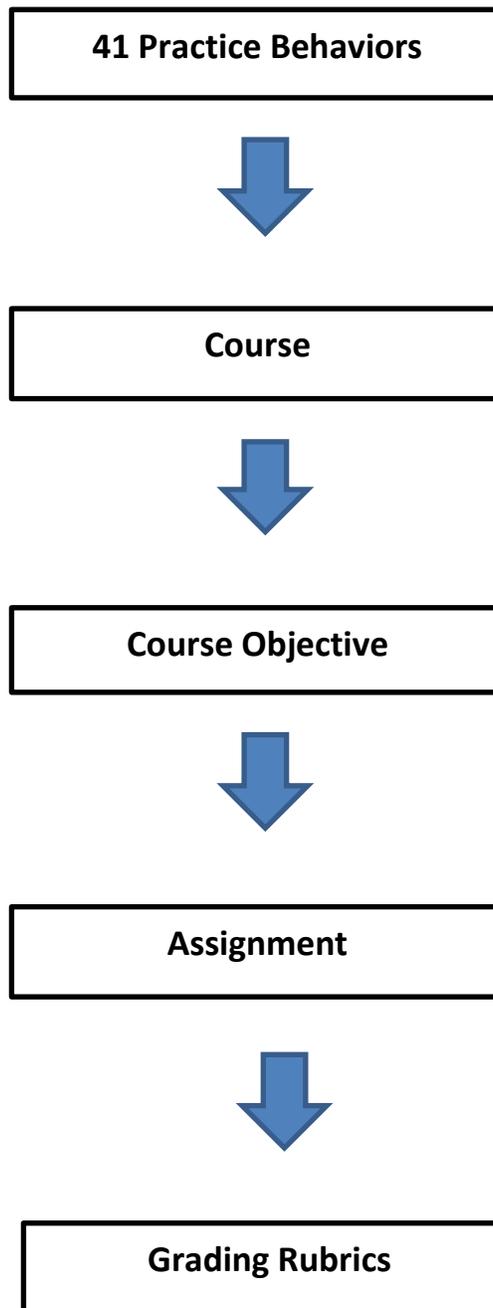
We have chosen naturalistic measurements because we feel that the most natural and integrated measurement occurs when the major assignments that are embedded in each course across the curriculum are used to assess student competencies. Major assignments in each course typically require students to integrate their knowledge obtained from the course to applied return demonstration of skills or the development of a product applied to a real or simulated client case. Rather than developing measurement procedures that are external and super-imposed on the course content or on students, we feel strongly that naturally measuring students' competency with the assignments that we require to fulfill the course, demonstrate their competency for the content of the course. We believe that this type of naturalistic measurement is much more integrated and valid for students' experience. We also believe it is much more proximal to observing and measuring the competencies necessary in the "real world".

The first year of development of the assessment plan involved faculty contributing to the curriculum mapping process. The School of Social Work employs equal and shared governance for development and implementation of the curriculum. The programs are overseen by five sequence committees including Practice Sequence, HBSE Sequence, Policy Sequence, Research Sequence, and Field Sequence. All courses are assigned to a sequence committee and all faculty members automatically sit on the sequence committee to which their courses belong. One faculty member serves as a chair to the committee. The curriculum mapping process developed from the sequence committees with the faculty who teach the course contributing their expertise to the mapping process.

Each Sequence Committee developed a matrix for where each competency is performed and measured in the sequence courses. Each sequence started with the list of the 10 EPAS competencies and the 41 Practice Behaviors. Each faculty member mapped which practice behaviors were emphasized in a measureable way in their courses. The next level of mapping occurred at the course objective level. At least one course objective is required for any practice behavior that occurs in a course. The next level included identification of assignments that fulfilled measurement of an objective. As each course objective is the operationalization of the practice behavior in the course, each course objective must be measured in some way by an assignment. The last level of curriculum mapping included the development of grading rubrics for each assignment. The following is a flowchart of the process:

10 EPAS Competencies





Description of Measurements

The discussion below first describes each measurement instrument or tool and then secondly describes the process of how data is collected with the measurement/instrument.

Quantitative Measurement from Naturalistic Assignments on EPAS competencies :

Description of measurement:

As the Sequence Committees were mapping the curriculum to identify key assignments for measurement, we intentionally identified key assignments across the curriculum to assure that students' performance was measured with multiple assignments at multiple points through their development. Each practice behavior is measured by no fewer than two assignments and many are measured by numerous assignments. Assignments were also identified that advanced the student through three levels of competency. The first level of assignments (Level 1) are assignments that require students' demonstration of competency applied to simulated client material. The second level of assignment (Level 2) requires students to apply content to an actual client case from field practicum but in written form through the Integrated Thesis assignments (BSW level) or Case Assessment/Presentation assignment (MSW level). The third level of assignment (Level 3) is a measurement of students' behavioral demonstration of the competency with actual clients from field practicum as rated by their field instructors.

Level 1 measurement: Assignments at Level 1 (application to simulated case material) are individualized to each course. Each assignment has a corresponding grading rubric to operationalize the aspects of the assignment.

Level 2 measurement: Assignments at Level 2 (written application of content to actual field clients) include the major Integrative Theses (BSW) or Case Assessment/Presentation and Paper (MSW) and journal recordings to specified topics that are produced in the field seminar class. The intent of these assignments are to determine whether students are able, at the conclusion of the program, to apply critical thinking skills and to integrate and synthesize the content from required social work courses into practice skills and behaviors with clients from field practicum.

The Integrative Thesis assignment serves as a vehicle for measuring outcomes in our program and to identify areas in need of improvement within our curriculum. We feel that BSW students manage this major assignment better if it is titrated into two sections or theses. Students complete Integrative Thesis I which covers content on HBSE and Practice content in the fall semester. Integrative Paper II is completed in the spring semester and covers Policy and Research. MSW foundation and advanced students produce this product at the end of field as a comprehensive and integrated paper.

Level 3 measurement: Assignments at Level 3 (evaluated behavioral demonstration with actual field clients) includes the evaluation from field practicum. The field program uses an Integrated Learning Contract/Evaluation tool for field practicum. Each of the course objectives are connected to the EPAS competencies. Field instructors, as the experts on the agency and clients, complete the evaluation on students based on the performance they observe.

Process of measurement:

At the beginning of the semester, each instructor is given an electronic excel data sheet with students' names and the assignments pre-populated in the spreadsheet. Each instructor records the scores for each assignment at the end of the semester and returns them to the School Director.

The data is recorded and examined in two ways. The first method of recording and examining the data is with the course assignment as the unit of analysis. Mean scores for assignments are recorded by cohorts of students. Cohorts are identified by the graduation year for BSW or MSW students or the completion of the foundation curriculum for MSW foundation students. This allows the faculty to examine how students performed in each individual course

on a particular assignment. Faculty can determine if adjustments may be indicated in course content by students' performance on the particular assignment.

The second method of recording and examining data is with the students as units of analysis. Each student in the cohort is listed alphabetically on an excel data sheet. Assignments for each practice behavior and each competency are listed across the top. Each students' score is recorded on each assignment and a mean across all assignment for each individual students is established for each practice behavior. Then the percentage of students that achieved a level of performance above the benchmark is reported for each practice behavior and ultimately each competency.

The benchmarks for all three programs, BSW, MSW Foundation, and MSW Advanced, are established at 80%. Our goal is that 80% of students will score at or above the 80th percentile on each practice behavior. This benchmark was established in that it is conceptually consistent with the thresholds for performance within the School of Social Work. The grading scale on rubrics for each course identify that 90% and above is a A work, 80% and above is B work, and 70% and above is C work. The University requires that all MSW students must maintain a 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale which is a B average. The benchmark for competency for MSW student performance is consistent with the University standard.

The School of Social Work GPA standard for retention of BSW students is 2.5 on a 4.0 scale which is the equivalent of a C+. The faculty voted to require a slightly higher benchmark for BSW students in that we feel that work with vulnerable populations requires performance that is at the "B" level of work.

The School of Social Work collects data from several other instruments that measure student self-efficacy, students' evaluation of the implicit curriculum, and alumni surveys that are analyzed and used for program renewal. These instruments largely collect information regarding students' or partner' opinions and satisfaction with their experience. These data are not used to report student competency in order to maintain validity to truly measuring competency which we have articulated as performance-based. These data are valuable and used in comprehensive feedback to ongoing program improvement but are not, in our opinion, measurement of student competency.

The following are additional instrument used for program evaluation and renewal.

Student Self-Efficacy Measurement

Description of measurement:

An additional, summative measurement that the School of Social Work collects is a final self-efficacy rating from students as they graduate from the program. The survey instrument instructions explain that students should not put their names on the survey in order to ensure their anonymity. Students are asked to rate on a 4-point Likert scale how prepared they feel on the 10 EPAS competencies as well as questions regarding the implicit curriculum. The survey also asks for their feedback on the implicit curriculum such as their experiences with academic advisement and field advisement, how well cultural competence is modeled in the program, and how well student development needs are attended to.

Process of measurement:

The program director schedules a meeting, typically over a lunch hour for senior BSW students on the one day of the week they are on campus to participate in two classes. Lunch is provided for students in between the two classes and the exit survey is distributed to the students.

The Director distributes a similar exit survey to the MSW graduating students however this is done at one of the field seminar classes near the end of the semester when the Director would also be distributing the course evaluations of the course instructor.

Alumni Surveys

Description of measurement:

The School of Social Work participates in the University alumni survey that occurs at 1 and 5 years post-graduation. In addition to the standard University questions, the School of Social Work adds 13 questions that ask graduates to rate their level of preparedness to be competent in 13 EPAS areas (EPAS 2.1.1 through 2.1.10 a-d). This feedback helps us gauge how alumni evaluate their preparation once they are out in employment.

Process of measurement:

The University Assessment Services distributes the only alumni survey that is used at Illinois State University. During the 2001-02 academic year, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (PIR) facilitated a coordinated revision of the instrument to reduce the number of redundant surveys being sent to alumni. The first comprehensive Alumni Survey was administered in 2002. University Assessment Services (UAS) assumed responsibility for the survey during the 2003-04 academic year and administers the annual survey each April. Now, the Alumni Survey is administered online.

Formative-Qualitative Program Feedback through Focus Groups (Implicit Curriculum)

Description of measurement:

Each year the Programs have held forums with students at all levels to receive feedback as to what is working well with their educational experience in the School of Social Work and what suggestions for improvement they can provide. This was formerly conducted by the Program coordinator in the BSW program; however, this has been conducted as a Program Chat through Center for Teaching and Learning Technology for the past 2 years in the BSW program. The MSW Program has traditionally held a “Town Hall Meeting” each year in which the students are free to share information about their experience with the Director. During the 2012-13 year we switched this to being a CTLT-facilitated experience so students could have complete anonymity in their comments. The semi-structured discussion is organized around the following four questions:

What about this program helps you learn?

What about this program makes it more difficult for you to learn?

If you could suggest improvements for this program, what would they be?

What can students in the program do to improve its effectiveness?

Process of measurement:

The Program director schedules a time that is convenient for students, which is usually over a lunch hour with lunch provided. The program director sends out several emails beginning about a month prior to the date of the chat and emphasizes that attendance is voluntary and input is shared anonymously to the faculty. No faculty members are present during the chat as these are facilitated by staff from the Center for Teaching and Learning Technology. About a week

prior to the date, the program director also visits each class of students to also remind them of the date. Once the chat is complete, the CTLT facilitator organizes the notes and themes of discussion into a report for the Director of the Program. The Director of CTLT meets with the Director of the School to explain and deliver the printed report.

Formative-Qualitative Survey Measurement of the Field Program

Description of measurement:

The Director of Field receives systematic feedback on students' experience in their field agency. The students complete an evaluation of their field agency regarding how responsive they were to students' learning needs and how well-prepared they feel from their experience. The survey includes 4 questions asking for a Likert rating and 12 open ended questions for students to give brief responses.

The Director of Field also distributes a survey to field instructors to rate their experience of working with the field program. This instrument has 14 open ended brief response questions asking for feedback from field instructors on their experience working with the field program.

Process of measurement:

The Director of Field distributes the instruments to students and field instructors by email. Both surveys are returned to the Director of Field.

The largest part to the assessment plan is the measurement of competencies by the naturalistic assignments embedded in each course. The results are examined in the following semester by the faculty. The Director of the School synthesizes the data into two methods for the faculty review and discussion. The first method that scores are examined is with students as the

unit of analysis. This allows the faculty to see the percentage of students that achieved the benchmark of each competency, thus examining the performance of the cohort within a given semester and ultimately across the entire program. The second method to examine the data is using each course as a unit of analysis. This allows the faculty to “drill” specifically into each course to examine how many students achieve the benchmark for competency within the course. This allows the faculty to see if there are any needs for revisions in a course in very close time proximity. If a course produces low grades on a specific competency as measured by a naturalistic assignment, the professor is able to adjust the course content to strengthen student achievement in the next semester of delivery.

The faculty review for the competency measurement occurs in the sequence committee meetings each semester for the preceding semester’s courses. Review at this level has several advantages. This allows for greater input of eyes and ideas from colleagues who teach in the same content area. The supportive team approach reduces defensiveness that an individual faculty may have about low performance or a need to adjust a course. Another advantage of looking at the course with a team approach is that horizontal and vertical integration of content can be better managed. This reduces the likelihood of gaps or redundancy in content between courses taught at various levels in the curriculum. Once each of the 5 sequence committees exam their data, a summary report with recommendations for adjustment is reviewed at the department curriculum committee. This level of review is important to assure continued horizontal and vertical integration across and among the five sequence areas.

The feedback from the student self-efficacy instrument, the annual alumni survey, and the qualitative-formative focus groups are examined by the entire faculty at the first faculty meeting of each academic year. The data from the preceding year is organized and synthesized by the

Director over the summer so that feedback can be given at the first faculty meeting in August prior to the start of the fall semester. This allows faculty to review any implications for changes they need to be made for the coming year.

The feedback from the field program instruments including the student evaluation of their field sites and field instructor's evaluation of the field program are reviewed by the Director of Field Program and the Director of the School. Once this occurs in the summer following the academic year, the discussion is presented to the field sequence committee in the first meeting of the fall semester.

Additional feedback occurs with the Community Advisory Board. General summary data is provided to the advisory board particularly to solicit their ideas on areas that need to be strengthened for competency when students graduate. Finally, the summary scores are posted on the School website to inform the public about performance of students in the program.