

2015 Social Work Competencies for Generalists

From the Educational Policies and Standards (EPAS) authored by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

The following competency language is utilized for the entire BSW Program and MSW foundational courses (SW 600, SW 601, SW 603, SW 610, SW 620 and SW 690)

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Social workers understand frameworks of ethical decision-making and how to apply principles of critical thinking to those frameworks in practice, research, and policy arenas. Social workers recognize personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values. They also understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social workers understand the profession's history, its mission, and the roles and responsibilities of the profession. Social Workers also understand the role of other professions when engaged in inter-professional teams. Social workers recognize the importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective. Social workers also understand emerging forms of technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice.

Social workers:

- make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context;
- use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations;
- demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;
- use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and
- use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power.

Social workers:

- apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;

- present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and
- apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

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

Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights. Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected.

Social workers:

- apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels; and
- engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.

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

Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice. Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. They also understand the processes for translating research findings into effective practice.

Social workers:

- use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research;
- apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings; and
- use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Social workers understand that human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, are mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. Social workers understand the history and current structures of social policies and services, the role of policy in service delivery, and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers understand their role in policy development and implementation within their practice settings at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels and they actively engage in policy practice to effect change within those settings. Social workers recognize and understand the historical, social, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy. They are also knowledgeable about policy formulation, analysis, implementation, and evaluation.

Social workers:

- identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services;
- assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services;
- apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.

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

Social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers value the importance of human relationships. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand strategies to engage diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may impact their ability to effectively engage with diverse clients and constituencies. Social workers value principles of relationship-building and inter-professional collaboration to facilitate engagement with clients, constituencies, and other professionals as appropriate.

Social workers:

- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies; and
- use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

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

Social workers understand that assessment is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in the assessment of diverse clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand methods of assessment with diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers recognize the implications of the larger practice context in the assessment process and value the importance of inter-professional collaboration in this process. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may affect their assessment and decision-making.

Social workers:

- collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies;
- develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies; and

- select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies.

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

Social workers understand that intervention is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are knowledgeable about evidence-informed interventions to achieve the goals of clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to effectively intervene with clients and constituencies. Social workers understand methods of identifying, analyzing and implementing evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals. Social workers value the importance of inter-professional teamwork and communication in interventions, recognizing that beneficial outcomes may require interdisciplinary, inter-professional, and inter-organizational collaboration.

Social workers:

- critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies;
- use inter-professional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes;
- negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies; and
- facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals.

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

Social workers understand that evaluation is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Social workers recognize the importance of evaluating processes and outcomes to advance practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes. Social workers understand qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness.

Social workers:

- select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes;
- critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes; and
- apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

2015 Social Work Competencies for Advanced Generalists

Authored by the Grand Valley State University School of Social Work Faculty

The following competency language is utilized for the MSW Advanced Generalist courses (everything beyond the foundational level courses)

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Advanced Generalist social workers demonstrate ethical and professional interactions based upon training in multiple evidence-based and best-practice perspectives at all levels of practice. They use current and emerging technology as appropriate to engage with others to effect social change. Advanced Generalists engage in self-reflection and seek collegial critique of their professional skills and integrate this feedback regularly into autonomous practice. They analyze complex, multi-dimensional situations and utilize ethical frameworks to guide their interactions with constituents. The Advanced Generalist embraces holistic and collaborative inter-professional relationships in which the contributions of each profession are combined to optimize outcomes. They are committed to lifelong learning and critical thinking, and understand the social environment is constantly evolving and they must evolve as well.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- critically evaluate professional supervision from colleagues regarding practice effectiveness to develop a professional identity and optimize professional use of self;
- engage in self-reflection that deepens their understanding and implementation of professional values, ethics and boundaries;
- resolve ethical dilemmas encountered in practice situations by applying a multi-systemic understanding of social work values; and
- critically evaluate the use of technology to engage with others and make their practice more efficient and effective.

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Advanced Generalists consistently examine the consequences of systemic oppression and their impacts of implicit bias on all populations served and their social environments. They assess the strengths of all cultures from an empowerment perspective to effectively advocate with and on behalf of all client populations. Advanced Generalists structure interventions to increase the choices and opportunities of all populations, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or disadvantaged. They translate their knowledge of ecological systems into culturally responsive services and service delivery systems, utilizing well-developed self-awareness to recognize the influences of their own cultural backgrounds and manage the influences of their personal biases and values Advanced Generalists understand and respect their constituents' points of view. They understand diversity as comprising multiple perspectives, and strive to achieve inclusiveness and respect for differences of all types.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- develop and implement interventions that incorporate different perceptions of social problems and issues across diverse cultures and initiate proactive strategies to address discrimination;
- recognize the roles of language and communication style in promoting and sustaining oppression at all levels; consistently use non-oppressive, empowering language;
- identify and challenge systemic forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. Provide

leadership that affirmatively contributes to the development and growth of culturally responsive practices; and

- recognize and effectively manage or eliminate personal biases and oppressive behavior in personal practices and spheres of influence.

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

Advanced Generalist social workers advocate for fundamental human rights and justice. They examine the impact of historical legacies, global interconnections, economic systems, and the political context which impacts human rights. Advanced Generalists critically synthesize theories of human need and social justice to promote justice and human rights and stand in solidarity with disenfranchised groups. They create strategies and advocate for change so that goods and services are distributed equitably; and civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural rights are recognized and protected.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- critically evaluate historical contexts, global interconnections, economic systems and political contexts that impact the human rights of all;
- engage with constituents to jointly analyze create and advocate for practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice; and
- provide leadership in advocating for human rights and social, economic and environmental justice.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

Advanced Generalist social workers are educated to function as responsible consumers, producers and evaluators of research. They think critically about the protection of vulnerable populations and are culturally sensitive when designing and evaluating research processes. Advanced Generalists critically evaluate published research and outcome studies to identify strong evidence-based practices for use with constituents. They design systematic, reflexive research consistent with ethical standards and informed by multi-disciplinary sources.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- generate conclusions based on research that promote linkages between research and theory, practice, and policy;
- formulate and articulate implications for research, practice and policy to advocate for constituents based upon the synthesis of research; and
- produce professional reports demonstrating intellect, integrity, honesty and justification for conclusions and contribute to the knowledge base of social work practice.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Advanced Generalist social workers consume, produce and evaluate social policy. They theorize how human rights, social justice, and social welfare are directed and influenced by both private and public policies at all levels. Advanced Generalists discern emerging trends, anticipate consequences, apply their understanding of the myriad influences that impact policy, and actively engage in change strategies to help shape efforts to provide for the common good.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- develop, implement and evaluate policies at the organizational level;
- provide leadership in shaping emerging organizational policies that impact systems and constituents;
- integrate into practice the connection between social welfare policies, human rights, and social and economic justice.

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

Advanced Generalist social workers engage with, and on behalf of, diverse constituencies as a fundamental component of autonomous social work practice. Engagement with constituents based upon strengths and excellent professional judgment forms a critical underpinning to successfully address issues or problems. An understanding of systemic barriers, oppression, and often conflicting interactions between multiple systems is critical to the ability of the advanced generalist practitioner to effectively engage with others.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- develop professional relationships to engage with constituents in a collaborative, strengths-based approach; and
- adapt best practices to engage key stakeholders across all systems.

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

Advanced Generalist social workers design and utilize interactive assessment processes grounded in collaboration and partnership with constituents. They understand constituents are multidimensional and that change emanates from a holistic, culturally-grounded, empowering assessment. Advanced Generalists differentiate their assessments through an examination of human behavior in the social environment, and include a variety of perspectives from significant others involved with the constituent.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- analyze constituent issues from a multi-systemic framework and mutually identified goal areas and best practice intervention strategies; and
- design and implement evidence-based assessments that embody holistic and culturally- grounded approaches.

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

Advanced Generalist social workers are autonomous professionals who develop interventions using knowledge of human behavior and the social environment as well as evidence-based/best-practice approaches to advocate and intervene for various constituencies.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- autonomously plan and intervene with constituents in practice settings, utilizing inter-professional approaches; and
- utilize advanced practice roles implement evidence-based practice approaches to intervene with constituencies.

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

Advanced Generalist social workers embrace formative and summative evaluation as critical to effective and efficient service delivery. They design and/or apply models of research and evaluation and select appropriate processes to evaluate engagement, assessment and/or interventions. Advanced Generalists demonstrate understanding and self-awareness of their socialization to various beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, and biases that may affect their professional judgment about research and evaluation.

Advanced Generalist social workers:

- analyze and implement evaluation instruments;
- apply evidence-based methodologies to evaluate efficacy and efficiency of practice outcomes; and
- integrate evaluation outcomes into practice to continuously improve effective approaches with constituents.