

Curriculum redesign for competency based education: Redesigning baccalaureate social work curriculum

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REDESIGNING OUR MAJORS SYMPOSIUM
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Presentation outline

- Competency-based education
- The BASW program
- The redesign process
- Insights on curriculum redesign process and implications for competency-based education

Competency-based education

First, some background ...

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

- ❖ Most of the 20th century, policy on social work education was more content-driven.
- ❖ By the end of the century, the amount of content needed to meet accreditation grew considerably, leaving little room for programs to innovate.
- ❖ No studies were made to assess how content of social work education related directly to practice.
- ❖ “anxiety about the existentialist challenges of the profession” (Holloway, Black, Hoffman, & Pierce, 2008)

2008, 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards (EPAS)

- ❖ Requisite student competencies comprised of interrelated practice behaviors as the organizing principle of curriculum design.
- ❖ Competency-based education

Competency-based education

- ❖ Shifting the focus from what students should be taught to an emphasis on what practitioners should do
- ❖ Shift from an “input” curricular orientation to an “outcomes” student competency orientation.
- ❖ For professional education, *competence* is the hallmark of effective preparation (Holloway, Black, Hoffman, & Pierce, 2008)

Definition of terms

Competence

- ❖ EPAS defines competencies as “measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values and skills” (EP 2.1).
- ❖ “threshold” concept – demonstrating competence one crosses the threshold separating the novice from the competent practitioner

Behaviors

- ❖ measurable indices of interrelated knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive & affective processes associated with particular competencies;
- ❖ behaviors (serve to operationalize competencies)
- ❖ A demonstrated ability to execute a set of interrelated and comprehensive practice behaviors is taken as evidence of having acquired the competency

2015 EPAS competencies

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
2. Engage diversity and difference in practice
3. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
5. Engage in policy practice
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
7. Assess with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
9. Evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

Implications of a competency-based education

- ❖ Provides flexibility in the curriculum
- ❖ Elevates the profession's ability to exercise accountability and transparency
- ❖ a profession's characteristic form of teaching and learning is its signature pedagogy (Schulman, 2005)
- ❖ Dimensions of professional practice – knowledge, skills, values, cognitive & affective processes

The Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) curriculum

BASW Program

- ❖ BASW program started in the 1930s
- ❖ BASW serves as the foundational professional degree in social work.
- ❖ The BASW program “aims to educate undergraduate students for generalist social work practice in a variety of social-service settings, and teach students to serve as change agents with urban, oppressed populations, while enabling members of these populations to act on their own behalf ” (School of Social Work, BASW Program Information, para. 1, n.d.).
- ❖ Impacted program; lower division and transfer students apply a year before their Junior year

BASW Curriculum

- ❖ **Junior year:** introductory courses in social work, practice courses, policy courses (one of which is a GWAR class), human behavior and the social environment, and courses on gender and social differences
- ❖ **Senior year:** two semester of field education, practice courses, research course, elective courses on child welfare and gerontology
- ❖ Study abroad in Germany & Hong Kong
- ❖ CSL course (research)

Redesigning the BASW curriculum

Situational factors behind curriculum redesign efforts

Redundancies in the curriculum

EPAS 2015 core competencies

Reaffirmation/reaccreditation of the BASW program in 2018

Increasing poverty and inequality in the Bay Area and beyond

Changing demographics

Redesign process

1. deep assessments of student learning through capstone projects;
2. a faculty retreat where both tenured and adjunct faculty collectively analyzed results of the deep assessments, reflected on the strengths and challenges of the BASW curriculum; and created new curricular road map;
3. data-collection from alumni;
4. engagement with a university-wide faculty learning community; and
5. working with external consultants facilitate the redesign process

Results

- ❖ Deep assessments of student learning through capstone projects
- ❖ Draft road map of the BASW program
- ❖ Alumni survey
- ❖ Data-collection instruments for accreditation/reaffirmation
- ❖ Mentoring of lecturers on competency-based education

Insights on the redesign process

Learning to balance accreditation requirements and creativity in curriculum design

- ❖ Competency-based education provides some latitude to be innovative in how we ensure the BASW curriculum enables students to meet the nine competencies.
- ❖ Draft BASW road map reflects how the courses and field education – the two interrelated components of the curriculum – contribute to the development of the required competencies for professional practice.

The redesign process helped clarify intentional redundancies in the curricula that build on the competencies while avoiding unintentional redundancies that obscure the learning outcomes for each course.

Competency-based education requires some redundancies in course content and materials as a way to further hone students' competencies. The redesign process allowed us to identify unnecessary redundancies in the curriculum.

Situating the curricula within a particular historical, social, and political context (Gonón Ortíz, 2014)

The curriculum thinking workshop allowed us to map out who are learners are and the compelling societal issues we face at the current juncture. Within this context, we identified threshold concepts and the disciplinary knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes within social work.

**Using collaborative
approaches between
social work educators
and community
partners in
curriculum redesign
(Wilson, 2014)**

Our on-going redesign process include consultations with community partners, other social work educators, faculty learning community, alumni, and students.

Incorporating
emancipatory and
interpretative
perspectives to
curriculum revision
(Ring, 2014)

Competency-based education entails a curriculum redesign that addresses the dimensions for professional practice (knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes). The competencies not only enable students to “solve” social issues but, more importantly, to think more critically about these issues and challenge social and economic injustice and oppression.

Recognizing the complexities involved in curriculum redesign (Burgess, 2004)

Redesigning the BASW curriculum involves multiple stakeholders. It entails balancing different needs and demands: being responsive to the political and socio-economic context; addressing the competencies needed for professional practice (and what the accrediting body requires); and trying to be creative in how we design our courses and field education. We are learning to understand both the process and content of curriculum redesign.

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Thank you!

Questions?