

## Competencies ....What? Why??

The Council on Social Work Education, CSWE, is the accrediting body of all schools of social work in the United States. In 2008 CSWE adopted a competency based education framework which moved from a model of curriculum design focused on content (what students should be taught) and structure (the format and organization of educational components) to one focused on student learning outcomes. An outcomes oriented approach refers to identifying and assessing what students demonstrate in practice. (CSWE draft EPAS 2014)

There are 10 core competencies for undergraduate and graduate students. Each competency is operationalized into specific practice behaviors. The practice behaviors for the undergraduate and foundation year graduate students reflect a baseline level of knowledge, values and skill development. The practice behaviors for the second year students reflect the expectation of a deepened grasp and execution of social work knowledge values and skills. This framework establishes thresholds for overall professional competence.

Competency based is about the process. Competencies are large skill sets which are broken down into practice behaviors. Practice behaviors reinforce one another from basic to advanced as learning progresses. (Council on Education for Public Health, 2011.) Competence is not trained behavior but thoughtful capabilities and a developmental process (Barrie and Pace 1997; Chappell 1966.) An individual social work student's level of competence is seen as developing and dynamic, changing over time in relation to continuous learning.

The advantage of a competence based social work education is that both the Field Instructor and the student are clear on what needs to be taught and learned, and they can give input and feedback on the tasks assigned. Specific competencies provide direction for designing and implementing learning experiences and allow students to apply them in different contexts.