Learning Agreement Guide

MSW Advanced Edition



OVERVIEW

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Social Work education is competency-based. 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.

The framework for competency-based education includes a focus on the assessment of the student's ability to **demonstrate** the competencies rather than only on the assessment of inputs (such as coursework and resources). Social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies, with specific observable behaviors for each competency. The overall objective of the practicum is to demonstrate competency for entry level generalist practice as identified in the nine social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and our social work program recognize a **holistic view of competence**; that is, the demonstration of competence **is informed by the holistic dimensions of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations.**

LEARNING AGREEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

The Learning Agreement is developed collaboratively by the student, practicum instructor, and faculty practicum liaison. The Agreement will describe how the student will specifically apply the competencies in observable ways within the internship setting. The completed Learning Agreement then represents the student's specific objectives for the internship.

Observable behaviors are listed below each competency. In the subsequent text boxes, please describe the specific activities the student will complete at the internship setting for each observable behavior listed. These activities should provide opportunities for mastery of each competency, demonstrated and informed by the holistic dimensions of knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with general examples of activities for the observable behaviors listed under each competency to assist in supporting your development and creation of site-specific activities.

The activities associated with a specific observable behavior can look very different in working with different populations and settings. Faculty Practicum Liaison, Practicum Instructor and student should make every effort to assure a learning plan for all competencies and observable behaviors. In the rare occasion that a particular competency/observable behavior appears completely unavailable at that site, the Faculty Practicum Liaison should collaborate with the student and field instructor to explore the ways in which that competency may be mastered in the setting. Please consider demonstration of the behavior through simulation as a possible alternative prior to an "N/A" being utilized.

COMPETENCY 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behaviors

Clinical social workers understand that professional relationships and professional ethics are the foundation of clinical practice. Clinical social workers recognize the importance of the therapeutic relationship, the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives, the professional use of self with clients, and adherence to ethical guidelines of professional behavior. Clinical social workers understand their role and the role of other professionals on interprofessional teams and the ethical use of technology for clinical social work practice. Clinical social workers understand and apply ethical standards and model the ethical use of treatment modalities in practice.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Apply ethical decision-making skills to issues specific to clinical social work, including responding to ethical dilemmas.

b. Develop, manage, and maintain therapeutic relationships with clients that reflect understanding of relationship dynamics, including power differentials.

EXAMPLES:

- Demonstrate the ability to resolve complex ethical dilemmas in clinical practice from multiple perspectives.
- Review agency's policy manual and apply the NASW Code of Ethic to identify points of opposition, agreement and points not addressed by agency policy.
- Identify ethical dilemmas that may arise during organizational planning and formulate responses that are consistent with NASW Code of Ethics.
- Use self-reflection and seek feedback from practicum instructor about personal strengths, limitations and challenges in clinical practice.
- Recognize and avoid dual relationships, discuss with practicum instructor in supervision.
- Identify how personal and professional values impact work within the organization/community.
- In both oral and written communication, demonstrate sensitivity to level of expertise and understanding of intended audience and convey ideas in a manner that is sensitive to the level of knowledge and degree of sophistication of others.
- Appropriately adjusts choice of words in communicating with different groups (e.g., board members, clients, professional colleagues).
- Identify and discuss relationship dynamics with clients as well as discuss them and challenges with power differentials with practicum instructor.
- Evaluate the ethical and appropriate use of technology to facilitate practice outcomes with individuals, families and small groups.
- Become familiar with the use of various technological platforms (computers, databases, GIS, social media, etc.) to advance effective client outcomes and agency governance and protocol efficiency. Review agency technology policies and process it during supervision and/or apply it to a case.

COMPETENCY 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Clinical social workers build on the generalist foundation competency to advance human rights and social, racial, economic and environmental justice through their clinical practice. They 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. Clinical social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice, as well as strategies for promoting social and economic justice and human rights. Clinical social workers identify and integrate strategies for practice that recognize with clients the oppressive structural barriers present in their lives and work to ameliorate the impact of those structural dynamics on the client system.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Identify systemic and structural barriers in placement and work settings that bar specific groups from full societal participation and examine how social inequality operates at the macro, mezzo and micro level of society, as well as within multiple social work service contexts.

b. Demonstrate an understanding of systemic and structural oppression and their effects on those with dominant and subjugated identities and integrate this knowledge into direct clinical practice with individuals and families.

EXAMPLES:

- Understand specific contributions of social work in achieving agency mission and goals.
- Understand agency, local, state and federal guidelines for addressing oppression and discrimination and apply it to a case/example and identify underserved needs of population served by agency.
- Identify and describe forms and mechanisms of discrimination and oppression that adversely affect client systems.
- Identify groups/classes of clients who are disproportionately represented in systems (e.g., African Americans in the child welfare and legal systems), who receive substandard treatment, who are given particular diagnoses, etc. and discuss with field instructor the ways in which these things can/should be addressed systemically.
- Help clients reflect upon/sort out experiences in which discrimination and oppression play a role.
- Function in multiple macro roles (e.g., community planning, community organizing, administration, program development, and evaluation, policy analysis, legislative advocacy, etc.) that promotes empowerment with in the capacity and context of the community organization.
- Use knowledge gained in the classroom regarding systemic and structural oppression to help direct clinical practice with clients, discuss identified barriers with practicum instructor and solicit feedback on ways to help eliminate these barriers.
- Identify and use methods of practice that are designed to work against systemic and structural oppression.
- Elicit information from clients regarding the ways in which they have been oppressed and use that information to inform practice in a way that combats those oppressors.

COMPTENCY 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Practice

Clinical social workers build on the generalist foundation competency to further understand how anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion can be pursued to combat injustice in clinical practice and in the lives of those they serve. The dimensions of ADEI 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. Clinical 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. Clinical social workers understand and integrate into their assessments and interventions the effects on clients of oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation, as well as privilege, power, and acclaim.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Explore with clients the meanings they attribute to their various social identities, such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender, etc.; how their understanding of who they are interacts with dominant societal perceptions of the self; and the effect these identities and perceptions have on their lives.

b. Demonstrate an understanding of systemic and structural oppression and their effects on those with dominant and subjugated identities and integrate this knowledge into direct clinical practice with individuals and families.

EXAMPLES:

- Recognize societal conditions that contribute to individual psychopathology and intervenes at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.
- Demonstrate knowledge of and critically analyze ethical issues arising in community organization practice, and identify barriers that prevent services from reaching target population and proposes change in service delivery.
- Expand use of basic engagement skills to include understanding of culturally specific norms, customs, and values regarding interpersonal interaction.
- Engage in continuing education to develop specialized knowledge and understanding of the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions of major client groups served.
- Demonstrate knowledge of when and how to address issues of diversity in clinical practice.
- Explore culturally relevant issues when conducting assessments and planning interventions.
- Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups.
- Apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values and recognize when personal biases may impact/influence ability to serve client.
- Identify and manage personal values and distinguish them from professional values that guide practice.

COMPETENCY 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Clinical social workers use quantitative and qualitative research methods, multi-disciplinary sources, and multiple ways of knowing to advance the science of social work and to inform and evaluate the efficacy of their clinical practice. Clinical social workers use ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches in building and applying knowledge. Clinical social workers are knowledgeable about evidence-based interventions, best practices, and the evidence-based research process. Clinical social workers use a critical perspective in applying evidence-based practice in assessment and intervention with clients, participate in the generation of new knowledge through research and practice, and use research methodology to evaluate practice.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Use research methodologies from varied perspectives to identify and critically examine clinical interventions and/or outcomes for particular client systems, problems, and settings in ways that are culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive.

b. Evaluate the strengths and weakness of multiple theoretical perspectives and differentially apply them to client situations.

EXAMPLES:

- Evaluates strategies for conducting survey research and selects strategy that is most likely to yield best return rate.
- Attend seminars/conferences to garner most current information from experts in a specialized area of practice.
- Stay up to date on practices with client population served by agency/population of special interest by reviewing professional literature, attending conferences, searching web resources, etc.
- Stay abreast of developing trends in specialized area of clinical practice and advocate for implementation of promising, innovative practices with practicum instructor.
- Present analysis of an agency policy and makes recommendations with practicum instructor.
- Review literature to identify intervention(s) supported by empirical evidence.
- Integrate findings from multiple studies re particular problem/ diagnosis to develop most effective intervention strategy.
- Evaluate service delivery systems to ensure that target population is being reached and make recommendations in supervision to practicum instructor to improve service accessibility.
- Design culturally sensitive evaluation strategies including use of measures validated with specific population(s) served and obtaining feedback from minority clients as stakeholders.

COMPETENCY 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Clinical social workers understand that both client systems and social service delivery systems are affected by policy implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. Clinical social workers help clients to understand the impact of policy on their wellbeing, including, as appropriate, the political nature of policy. Clinical social workers engage in policy analysis within their practice settings, help clients to resist internalization of self-blame for social and economic circumstances that reflect policy decisions at the mezzo and macro level, and empower clients to advocate for policy change.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Understand social welfare systems and policies, the impact of policy on clients and communities, and the skills of policy analysis.

b. Analyze policies at the agency level and advocate for agency policies that enhance client access and the delivery of effective services.

EXAMPLES:

- Identify both formal (laws, polices, etc.) and informal structures (discrimination based on race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) that impact members of target population.
- Demonstrate knowledge of federal and state statutes and local policies that provide mandate, funding, and boundaries for agency services.
- Understand the policymaking process at the local, state, and federal levels and demonstrate the ways advocates can influence it.
- Identify impact of political, social, economic, and cultural forces on services delivered by agency.
- Assess the impact of a program design upon the interests of minorities and oppressed groups and proposes indicated changes to insure equitable service delivery.
- Assess and diagnose community needs and assets in ways that gather information, increase participation, and strengthen social diversity.
- Anticipate development of barriers to service delivery (e.g., budget cuts, negative publicity re target population) and proposes strategies to prevent disruption of services.
- Select appropriate strategies with field instructor in supervision for advocacy (organized protests, letters to official and legislators increasing community awareness via media, etc.).
- Demonstrate the capacity to plan and advocate for needed agency policy changes on behalf of a client group, community, or organizational interest.
- Analyze how agency policy accommodates/fails to accommodate diversity in the community and proposes appropriate changes in policy with practicum instructor.
- Read and research agency policies related to access and service delivery paying attention to how they have evolved and discuss with practicum instructors' ways in which advocacy for access and delivery of services can be increased.
- Use knowledge gained in the classroom to assist in analyzing the policies of the agency related to access and delivery of services.

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

Clinical social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of clinical social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Clinical social workers rely on advanced clinical knowledge to build relationships with clients' systems and interprofessional partners. They possess a clinically-informed understanding of reasons why clients might be motivated or hesitant to engage in services and they demonstrate a range of clinical skills that allow them to effectively engage those they serve.

LIST SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES/TASKS THAT ALLOW YOU TO DEMONSTRATE COMPETENCY

a. Use clinical concepts and skills that reflect an understanding of the importance of the clinical relationship; the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, including the therapeutic relationship; and the need for safe, accepting spaces for implementing a full range of social work interventions.

b. Effectively engage a wide range of interprofessional partners and collaterals in promoting client goals and client well-being.

EXAMPLES:

- Evaluate relevance of multiple theories of human behavior (psychodynamic, object relations, cognitive behavioral, family systems, person-centered, social learning, multicultural theory, etc.) in understanding a particular client or group.
- Recognize need for and develops support or educational services for families or communities of primary clients, contributes social work's unique person in environment perspective in multidisciplinary teams.
- Apply preparing skills prior to engagement activities at the micro, mezzo and/or macro levels and process it during a supervisory session and/or apply it to a case/example.
- Use a variety of interpersonal skills (e.g., active listening, clarification, verbal following, summarizing, etc.) to develop collaborative relationships with colleagues, stakeholders, board members, potential funding sources, and clients.
- Convey respect for and appreciation of individual, family, and group diversity.
- Demonstrate ability to engage involuntary and hostile clients.
- Gather information from others working with client in order to create an understanding of existing services, treatment plans and needs.
- Review case files/records of client(s) to decrease repetition of services, increase knowledge of what needs they have already identified and/or treatment goals met.
- Elicit feedback and input from field instructor as well as other professionals involved on client's history and presentation in preparation for working with client.

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

Clinical social workers understand that assessment is an ongoing component of clinical relationships and apply a wide array of bio-psycho-social-spiritual theories to their understanding of diverse clients and their social environments. Clinical social workers draw upon theories, frameworks, and models of human behavior, as well as information from clients, collaterals, and other professionals, to develop a rich, strengths-based understanding of the people they serve and the challenges they experience. Clinical social workers also reflect on their own reactions to the client system and consider the effects of environmental contexts in the processes of assessment and intervention planning.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

a. Use a range of clinical perspectives and theoretical frameworks to understand client strengths and needs.

b. Develop a broad understanding of client systems that integrates psychological, cultural, social and political lenses.

EXAMPLES:

- Gather appropriate information regarding symptoms, duration, and onset to apply diagnostic criteria.
- Assist with data collection, analyses, and preparation of reports.
- Identify gaps in information and conflicting or confusing information.
- Evaluate relevance of multiple theories of human behavior (psychodynamic, object relations, cognitive behavioral, family systems, person-centered, social learning, multicultural theory, etc.) in understanding a particular client or group.
- Analyze theoretical basis for treatment models utilized in practicum setting.
- Identify emerging social problems and challenges faced by agency's clients and discuss with practicum instructor in supervision possible proposals of modifications in service delivery to address these concerns.
- Use empathy to respond to feelings within client's awareness and to bring to the client's attention feelings and meanings below the surface for assessment.
- Find mutual goals to engage involuntary clients.
- Develop and revises treatment plans based on the evolving assessment of client's needs, problems, strengths, and capabilities.
- Identify and integrate evidenced-based standardized assessment instruments in the development and implementation of treatment planning.
- Understand that problems may be defined at multiple levels (individual, family, community, society) and problem definition influences intervention.
- Accurately perceive cues that suggest need for in-depth exploration of particular issues and be able to create clinical recommendations to client systems based on information gathered.

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

Clinical social workers demonstrate that intervention is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals and families. Clinical social workers apply evidence-based interventions to help achieve the goals of client systems. Clinical social workers integrate theories of human behavior and the social environment in implementing interventions with client systems. Clinical social workers use a critical perspective in identifying, analyzing and implementing evidence-based interventions to achieve client system goals. Clinical social workers engage in interprofessional teamwork, and communication in developing and implementing interventions, and demonstrate effective interdisciplinary, interprofessional, and interorganizational collaboration.

OBSERVABLE CHANGES:

a. Initiate and implement strengths-based treatment plans and contracts, based on appropriate human behavior theory, and selectively apply and integrate evidence based practice methods to meet these goals.

b. Collaborate with client systems to define therapeutic goals and treatment outcomes that address micro, mezzo and macro systems.

EXAMPLE:

- Develop intervention strategies that utilize client's natural support network (e.g., religious leaders, elders, healers, etc.).
- Stay up to date on practices with client population served by agency/ population of special interest to student by reviewing professional literature, attending conferences, searching web resources, etc.
- Identify areas of high risk (e.g., medical problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, child maltreatment, involvement in gangs, victim of domestic or other violence) for clients served by agency and explore with field instructor appropriate interventions to be delivered in practice.
- Appropriately select from a variety of theoretical and/or practice models to implement intervention strategies.
- Use a variety of intervention skills from multiple treatment models (CBT, DBT, narrative therapy, systemic family therapy, solution focused therapy).
- Apply and articulate social work values, ethical standards, and principles unique to interpersonal interventions involving diverse populations and settings.
- In process recordings, reflect on the emotions and thoughts that arise in working with each client (or client system) and consider similarities and differences in student and client systems.
- In treatment plans and process recording identify interventions that involve different use of self to meet different clients' strengths, challenges and context.
- In process recording and supervision discussions, identify issues that trigger countertransference and plan for how to use this to promote the therapeutic relationship rather than interfere with it.
- Apply knowledge of group process to identify sage of current functioning of an agency or community task group and identify crucial leadership skill at this stage in group development, discuss with field instructor in supervision.
- Articulate decision process used in selecting a particular intervention for an individual client, and monitors client progress and alter interventions accordingly with guidance from field instructor.
- Compare efficacy of various intervention strategies used with an individual, family, or group at different stages of the intervention process.

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

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

OBSERVABLE CHANGES:

a. Use a critical perspective and multiple methods for developing and implementing ongoing evaluation methods for clinical practice.

b. Work collaboratively with client systems and community stakeholders to identify and apply outcome measures that reflect client and agency goals and desired outcomes.

EXAMPLES:

- Demonstrate advanced knowledge in critically analyzing and monitoring, and evaluating intervention program processes and outcomes.
- Present rationale for selecting a particular group or single subject design to monitor progress toward treatment goals.
- Demonstrate the use of appropriate evaluation methods to assess and improve organizational operations and/or client systems.
- Evaluate relevance of multiple theories of human behavior (psychodynamic, object relations, cognitive behavioral, family systems, person-centered, social learning, multicultural theory, etc.) in understanding a particular client or group.
- Implements a group design with a treatment group with guidance from practicum instructor.
- Apply evaluating and ending phase skills during evaluation and/or termination activities at the micro, mezzo and/or macro levels and process it during a supervisory session and/or apply it to a case/example.
- Continuously evaluate intervention, not only at termination, but also throughout process, and be able to evaluate results that test the efficacy of interventions used and monitor successes, failures, and progress in achieving outcomes.
- Develop continuous evaluation strategy that is linked to the initial assessment and intervention plan, and critically evaluates the relationship between the agency's mission statement, agency objectives, and actual service delivery, and report results of outcome evaluations to practicum instructor and others as advised by practicum instructor.
- Monitor and evaluate activities using techniques that assess activities and outcomes, raise critical consciousness, motivate participation, and contribute to improvement and changes.

A variety of Learning Agreements from social work programs across the country were reviewed in addition to the competencies and learning activities from our own students at WSU as part of the development of this Guide. We would like to acknowledge review of, and in some cases have adapted, documents from the publicly available websites of University of Michigan School of Social Work, Social Work Program of Ramapo College of New jersey, Whitney M. Young School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh, Warner Pacific College, Western Illinois University, University of Montana School of Social Work, University of Northern Iowa, Salem State University, University of New England, USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck, and Northern Central University.