

Theme: Prospects, methodology, research and innovatory practice in social work education

Title: Developing, Revising, and Administering Comprehensive Examinations to Evaluate Students' Understanding of Social Work Competencies

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Despite recent efforts to create examinations to evaluate students' acquisition of core social work competencies, forced-choice tests are sometimes criticized as being simplistic, reductionist, biased, and prone to misuse (Bogo, Rawlings, & Johnson, 2013; Drisko, 2014). Effective multiple-choice exams can measure broad learning, mastery of complex concepts, and higher-order competencies. They can also be easily administered and analyzed. However, the creation of valid exam items and plausible response distractors requires skill in exam construction and familiarity with the concepts being measured. To address these and other challenges, this presentation will introduce a process for developing, revising, and administering exams designed to evaluate students' understanding of social work competencies. Two exams were constructed, pilot-tested, and administered to master's students in a United States School of Social Work. Items from both exams were assessed for explicit links to core competencies and refined if necessary prior to pilot-testing and official administration.

The aim of this presentation is to acquaint participants with the lessons learned from this process, including the advantages and challenges. For example, the process of developing and implementing comprehensive exams revealed student apprehension about performance and discontent about exam delivery, although some students indicated that the experience was beneficial. Other challenges included scheduling and timeline issues; difficulty in training, engaging, and incentivizing faculty in the process of item-writing; difficulty in addressing multidimensional competencies; and deciding how many items per competency to administer. Multiple-choice exams require ample time, training, and coordination to assure valid and reliable measures of core social work competencies. Frequent and transparent communications are required to prepare student and faculty stakeholders for exam administration.