Developing the School of Social Work's capacity to assess student learning using Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policies and Standard (EPAS) competencies and skills

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Developing the School of Social Work’s capacity to assess student learning using the Council of Social Work Education’s (CSWE) Educational Policies and Standards (EPAS) competencies and skills

Donna M. Weinreich, PhD

Objectives

The purpose of this project was to develop sustainable capacity for assessment within the School using CSWE competencies and skills. Competencies and skills, as put forth by the 2008 CSWE EPAS, are the foundation for measurement, data collection and analysis. The project has three goals:

1. Implement a student focused and managed assessment portfolio that is based on the CSWE educational policies and standards;
2. Train peer coaches to monitor and assist students in the best use of the student portfolio and StudentM atrix as ways to demonstrate critical thinking and horizontal and vertical integration of course content and skill attainment (Table 1 provides an example), and
3. Use the data generated by the StudentM atrix to continue the development of the Student Outcome Assessment System and enhance the development of useful mechanisms by which faculty can monitor the suitability and utility of the curriculum structure and course content.

Goal 1 is to implement a student focused and managed assessment tool, the StudentM atrix.

Goal 2 is intended to provide support and reliable information to students as they begin the process of developing portfolios and using the StudentM atrix tool to structure and organize their portfolios in iWebfolio.

A major aim of this project is to orient students to critically think about the horizontal and vertical integration of their work and to not only be able to identify where in their courses it occurs, but also produce an artifact that demonstrates their mastery of it.

Process

**StudentM atrix.** Beginning with cohorts entering the School of Social Work in Fall 2011, students were provided the StudentM atrix. As they made their way through their courses of study it was expected that they identify and record CSWE competencies and skills, and the artifacts that demonstrate their mastery. The StudentM atrix tool was piloted during the academic year 2011-2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>skill/competency</th>
<th>course #</th>
<th>semester</th>
<th>assignment/activity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>use research evidence to inform practice</td>
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**Peer coaches.** Peer coaches (two BSW and two MSW students) were trained to provide support and direction in the completion of the StudentM atrix as well as feedback about the face and construct validity of the StudentM atrix.

Peer coaches were guided through the development of a focus group protocol to get feedback on students’ experiences with the StudentM atrix and portfolio.

A sample of 20 BSW and 20 MSW students was to be drawn from enrollments in social work classes in the spring semester 2012 to participate in focus groups; focus group data was to be analyzed and a report provided to faculty.

**Capstone course.** A required capstone course in the semester prior to graduation was developed. During this course, faculty of record will assist students as they complete their portfolios and personal statements and assign a course grade.

Accomplishments

**Goal 1.** The StudentM atrix was provided to incoming cohorts of graduate and undergraduate students beginning in April 2011. The first cohort of graduating students (seniors and MSW students) will be turning their matrices in April 2012.

**Goal 2.** Four students were hired as peer coaches into the project, two undergraduate and two graduate students. One graduate student is in the interpersonal practice concentration, and one graduate student is in the policy, planning and administration concentration.

Three focus groups were conducted in Fall 2011 and a report was provided to faculty.

The capstone course is moving through the course approval process.

**Goals 3.** Students presented their focus group results at the February 2012 faculty meeting. Discussions have begun between students, faculty, staff and administration with the hope that the culture of the School will begin to change.

**The good, the bad, and the ugly**

**Lessons learned.** Very little went as planned in this project:

- it took longer to hire interested students,
- focus groups were not conducted by peer coaches, but by a research methods class,
- peer coaches became frustrated with the non-responsiveness of their peers who were expected to maintain a StudentM atrix, and
- the pilot of the capstone course (an elective) did not have any enrollment.

This tells me we have quite a way to go ...

Acknowledgements

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