

Dear ACOSA Members

The task of developing competencies for masters level social workers in Community Organization and Social Administration might best start with an understanding of why and how we do this work; what are the shared understandings that guide the development of competencies; and how can the many programs that educate social work community organizers and social administrators in the US, and across the world, best make use of the material we accumulate to strengthen their educational programs.

A. Why and how we promote community organization and social administration

The goals of ACOSA (attached with additional revisions) and the ACOSA statement prepared for and presented to the NASW Congress, "Reaffirm, Revisit, and Reimagine the Social Work Profession in the Next Decade", (also revised and attached), provide a preamble for our work toward identifying competencies. It is especially important to include our international connections in our "goals" and "next decade" statements as we now have international representation on our board and encourage the association with international members and educational programs.

Items D, E, F, and G of the attached ACOSA decade statement (Reaffirm, Revisit, And Reimagine. . .") provide, I believe, justification for our continued effort to expand and impart knowledge about community organization and social administration.

These two documents are a good preamble for our work in identifying competencies.

B. Shared Understandings that Guide our Work Toward Identifying Competencies

It seems there are two items we need to consider in order to have shared understandings toward identifying competencies. The first is how we define competencies. The second relates to the values, processes and change outcomes that together shape the purpose of the work we do.

1. Definition of Competency.

CSWE identifies competencies as "measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills". I have reviewed many definitions of "competencies". Some use additional words including attitudes and judgment. On their website the Social Work Managers (<https://www.socialworkmanager.org/standards.php?id=competencies>) use "knowledge and skills" to define the 16 competencies they elaborate. We may not wish to add to CSWE's definition, however, I would support adding the word "judgment". Calling our competencies "measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, *judgments*, and skills" points us, I believe, more in the direction of professional engagement in our work and the evaluation of it, and less in the direction of some technical outcome or behavior.

2. The Purpose of Community Organization and Social Administration Social Work: Values, Processes, and Change Outcomes

In this section I will describe three areas I believe can provide arenas for consensus building for ACOSA. One is the *basic values* from which we work. The second relates to the *basic processes that describe our work*. The third is the *change outcomes we are working toward*. Although we are not the only ones who have written about these issues, Marie Weil and I have included discussion of these issues in our recent book, *Community Practice Skills: Local to Global Perspectives* (2009). Many of our colleagues (e.g. Rothman, Mizrahi, Ohmer & DeMasi, Fischer, Johnson-Butterfield, Smock, Reisch, Midgley, Healy, and many more), provide additional rich material that can contribute to this effort to build consensus.

a. Basic Values

The NASW CODE identifies service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence as values practiced by social workers. Weil and I add seven additional values for people working with community-based organizations:

- Interdependence
- Empowerment Practice
- Reciprocity
- Partnerships and Mutuality in Work
- Citizen and Community Participation
- Human Rights and Social Justice
- Structural Analyses and Approaches (work toward changing programs, policies, and root causes, not just manifestations of problems) (Gamble and Weil 2009:67)

b. Basic Processes

In the early publications of the *Journal of Community Practice* Marie Weil outlined the processes identifying how we work as organizing, planning, development and change. It was understood that each of these more specific processes required the basic activities of engagement, planning, intervention and evaluation, with a focus on participatory methods. With increased understandings of social, economic and environmental problems, and in order to emphasize the direction of change, (much along the ideas presented by Stephen Kauffman from Widener in our earlier discussion this year about ACOSA's future), we have updated the processes as organizing, planning, *sustainable* development and *progressive* change (2009:10-17). Whether working in community-based organizational development and management, grassroots community organization, local and regional program planning, policy practice, local or regional economic development, coalition building and leadership, environmental restoration and protection, human rights abuse prevention, or a range of other arenas, these four processes will almost always be part of the repertoire of social work community organization and social administration. We understand that some educational programs prefer organizing curriculum around the more basic processes of engagement, planning, intervention and evaluation.

c. Change Outcomes that we Work Toward: Improved Human Well-being

Why do we do this work and why do we work so hard to make sure others will follow in our path? If we review the article titles in the *ACOSA Journal of Community Practice* from its inception in 1993, there seems to be a strong emphasis on empowering members of communities and organizations to improved well-being for individuals, families and communities.

The 50th Anniversary Publication of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), *Human Well-being: The Challenge of Continuity and Change*, (1978, Jerusalem, Israel), focused its attention on human well-being. Believing that the changes in population, political freedom and economic potential could pave the way for a more common focus and interest in human well-being, the Conference Organizing Committee, representing more than a dozen countries, raised a myriad of hopeful perspectives. In his preface to the publication, John B. Turner said, The authors of these papers, without a common framework for use in their preparation have explicitly and implicitly called for the rejection of governmental policies whereby the "have-nots" are treated as misfits; policies which too often blame or punish them for their plight; policies which call for administering to the poor but not relinquishing them from their poverty; policies which use resources to care for but which are not shared with people on a pro-redistributive basis. The counter side of their rejection is an appeal to transfer the social welfare business or enterprise from a residual orientation into a human investment and development framework (1978, 1).

In the more than 30 years since its publication the world has gone through extensive population, political and economic changes unimagined by the ICSW Conference Organizing Committee. Perhaps we can encourage social work to reopen a dialogue on the definition, research promotion and evaluation of human well-being. To that end we introduced definitions of well-being in *Community Practice Skills*. We drew from a wide range of perspectives to develop definitions of social, economic, political and environmental well-being (AWID 2009; Center for Human Rights Education 2009; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2009; Ife 2008; Max-Neef 1992; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD 2007, 2009; UDHR 1948; Reinventing Progress 2009; UNDESA-Millennium Development Goals Indicators 2009; UNDP 2000; UNDP 2003; Shiva 2005, 2010; WiserEarth 2009). Those definitions are as follows:

1. Social well-being is the ability of all people to have access to the supports and opportunities provided by social institutions and relationships. In other words, everyone should have access to supportive families, neighborhoods, and communities. Everyone, women and men, girls and boys, should have the opportunity to engage in education, recreation, cultural organizations, spiritual institutions, and political organizations. Families, neighborhoods, and communities must have supportive health, welfare, educational, security (i.e. basic human needs), and political organizations to help them continue to reinvest in future generations as described by Couto and Guthrie (1999).

2. Economic well-being means that all people have opportunities to achieve a wide variety of livelihoods and that wages should pay enough to meet a family's needs for shelter, food, health care, and transportation (assuming these basics are not provided by public services). Livelihoods encompass all the striving people do for themselves, their families, and their communities. Economic well-being requires equitable economic and exchange systems as well as information, infrastructure, and building systems. Economic systems---the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities and services---should include opportunities for paid and unpaid work and asset development. The exchange systems relate to how we place value on particular commodities and services, including such things as parenting, volunteering to plant trees in a neighborhood park, or taking food to housebound neighbors, and the reciprocal patterns of activities we

develop to trade services and commodities. All of these strivings are essential to civilizations, yet economic formulas often undervalue or exclude entirely the value of some of them.

3. **Political well-being** means that all people should have freedom to associate, speak, vote, and participate in the governments that make policy for them. As noted in the *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles*, “Social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives” (IFSW/IASSW 2009).

4. **Environmental well-being** means having clean water and air, and access to natural resources, ecosystem services and the beauty of nature. It means that present generations must not live beyond the resources in the biosphere, and must restore, to the extent possible, damage to air, water, soil, fisheries, forests and other species (Adapted from Gamble and Weil, 2009:23).

These definitions are presented as a beginning understanding of individual and community well-being but need more local specificity based on the positive or negative influences of cultural and historical factors in some communities. People in communities or organizations, working together to describe a future in which all the residents’ or members’ needs are incorporated, can develop benchmarks to measure their efforts to meet such needs. The benchmarks are then used to evaluate the direction of their progress toward well-being. Some communities and organizations on local and regional levels already do this.

Is there consensus among ACOSA members about the general change outcomes that we work toward? Could we consider improved human well-being as *the*, or *a*, critical change outcome we expect to result from our work?

C. How Social Work Educators Worldwide Might Make Best Use of ACOSA Competency Standards

While the competencies we work to define will most likely be made use of in the United States, it seems important to make our work accessible and useful to educational programs outside our borders as well. The use of technology to expand ideas from one part of the globe to another makes it possible for all of us to learn more from each other.

In the material I have reviewed it was clear that there are many different ways to organize a list of competencies for ACOSA. Many educational programs with a community organization and/or social administration curriculum in the US have already revised their list to comply with the EPAS standards. There is a great deal of variety in the way educational programs are organized to teach community organization and social administration content. I don’t know if someone has such an up-to-date list or has done analysis around types of curriculum designs for teaching community organization and social administration. Some programs, for example, organize their educational curricula around the basic change processes defined as engagement, assessment, planning for intervention, intervention and evaluation, with intervention expanded to cover a range of arenas (e.g. community organization, planning, policy practice, etc.). Others seem to organize their curricula based on creative leadership roles for the task and process skills needed for designing, expediting and implementing community-based programs. Still others

focus on organizing, planning, development and policy practice and the roles and skills needed in these components to bring about community change. There may be more similarities than differences in these programs however, each program is packaged slightly differently. I suspect these differences are due in part to the strengths of the faculty in a particular institution and the political reality of a collaborative leadership and faculty group available to support the macro curriculum.

In order to accommodate the variety of ways we seem to package our teaching programs, and with the recognition that some programs in international settings may have even more creative ways to organize effective educational programs, I am proposing two levels of competencies. The first level would incorporate the EPAS requirements and would outline the basic or core competencies for ACOSA. The second level would be a range of supplemental competencies outlined in more specific detail for educational programs to select depending on their curriculum emphasis and structure. To that end I am suggesting the use of two lists of competencies that are attached:

1. The first list, intended to be the basic or core competencies, is adapted and expanded from the University of Pittsburg School of Social Work EPAS/COSA competencies prepared recently for their reaffirmation.
2. The second list of supplemental competencies is based on the knowledge and value competencies from Weil, Gamble and MacGuire (2009), to which I added judgment and skill practice behaviors. This list considers both community organization and social administration. In examining supplemental competencies programs might also consider the 16 competency areas identified by the Social Work Managers, located at the following web site. (www.socialworkmanager.org/standards.php?id=competencies)

I hope this material is helpful to you and to the other ACOSA leaders, past and present, who will have opportunity to weigh in on how we might best accomplish this task. Thanks so much for the opportunity to contribute.

Sincerely,
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Attached Documents:

1. Memo to Tracy and Sondra
2. ACOSA Goals and Focus for the Decade
3. ACOSA_EPAS Core Competencies based on U of Pitt EPAS-COSA Matrix
4. ACOSA Supplemental Competencies