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# Golden Research Thoughts

**GRT**

## ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: THE INDIAN MODEL



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### ABSTRACT:

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) which is popular in this paper, the author discusses assessment of student learning in light of advancing accreditation benchmarks. The author describes the Indiana Model—a comprehensive approach that incorporates: (a) a Course-Learning Objectives (CLO) classification framework to sort out and break down the aggregate exhibit obviously learning goals tended to in an educational modules, (b) an immediate Assessment of Student Learning framework to show understudy learning results, and (c) a circuitous Assessment of Student Learning framework to accommodate the viewpoints

of purchasers and different partners. Whenever incorporated, the three frameworks might be utilized for educational modules examination and development, appraisal of understudy learning, and program assessment especially as far as understudy learning results. The proposed coordinated way to deal with understudy learning evaluation addresses both college and expert accreditation standards.



**KEYWORDS :**Assessment, student learning, curriculum analysis, social work education, accreditation.

### INTRODUCTION :

Many schools and departments of social work struggle with issues related to curriculum analysis, program evaluation, and assessment of student learning. Accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) require programs to “specify the outcome measures and measurement procedures that are to be used systematically in evaluating the program, and that will

enable it to determine its success in achieving the desired objectives” (Commission on Accreditation [COA], 1994). The recently adopted Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) suggest that academic programs become even more active in assessment and evaluation. Consider Accreditation Standard 8: Program Assessment and Continuous Improvement:

- The program has an appraisal plan and methods for assessing the result of every program objective. The arrangement determines the estimation strategies and techniques used to assess the result of every program objective.

The program implements its plan to evaluate the outcome of each program objective and shows evidence that the analysis is used continuously to affirm and improve the educational program (CSWE, 2001).

National and regional university accreditation associations have also become more rigorous in their requirements for the assessment of student learning out-comes. All university regional accreditation bodies emphasize the assessment of student learning and the incorporation of quality improvement principles in educational and program evaluation.

Many social work programs throughout the country have begun to consider the means to assess student learning. Indeed, most programs are sincerely motivated to develop and implement processes by which to evaluate progress toward accomplishment of their mission and goals, including those that refer to student learning, and then to use the results to improve outcomes. The issues may be captured in the question: “How do we assess students' learning in an efficient manner that coincides with accreditation standards, helps us improve the quality of our curriculum and instruction, and enables us to document optimal student learning outcomes?”

In this paper, the author addresses this question by describing:

- The elements of a Course-Learning Objectives (CLO) classification system that facilitates organization and analysis of the total array of course learn-ing objectives addressed throughout a social work curriculum.
- A direct Assessment of Student Learning system to document student- learning outcomes.
- An indirect Assessment of Student Learning system to gather consumer and stakeholder generated information.
- The means by which the Course-Learning Objectives (CLO) classification, and the direct and indirect Assessment of Student Learning systems may be integrated to contribute to the evaluation of academic programs, assessment of outcomes, and as part of the means by which to address CSWE and university accreditation standards.
- The implications of the comprehensive and integrated approach for social work programs.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

Social work deans, program directors, and faculty members are likely to confront numerous challenges as they implement processes for assessing student learning and educational effectiveness. Faculty may anticipate dilemmas such as the following:

- At a time when programs are asked to do “more with less,” programs may lack sufficient resources to support extensive assessment processes. Personnel are needed to develop and administer instruments, and to collect and analyze data. Higher costs may be expected during developmental phases when the program determines an assessment philosophy and decides what, how, and how much to assess. Administrators may anticipate the need for release time for personnel undertaking these activities. Some programs might benefit from faculty and staff development programs that address the topic and methods of assessment and evaluation. Finally, programs may need to invest in

some equipment (e.g., scanners, computers) and computer software programs through which to organize and analyze data.

- Within some university contexts, social work educators may be successful in implementing a sound assessment process but lack authority or resources to use findings for decision-making.
- Individuals or committees that implement assessment programs face questions related to the validity, reliability, and relevance of assessment processes and outcomes. Assessment approaches that rely primarily or exclusively upon student (i.e., consumer) feedback may be strongly challenged—especially if the results are used more to evaluate personnel performance than to assess student learning and program quality. At a time when social work students are being confronted with multiple roles (e.g., parent, full-time worker, caregiver of older parents), demanding learning environments may influence the way courses, instructors, and the overall quality of the program are perceived. Nonetheless, when both direct and indirect assessment processes are used and the findings converge, serious challenges to the accuracy and utility of the information are less likely.
- Social work educators should anticipate how various stakeholders might interpret and use assessment findings especially during the early phases. For instance, some university administrators may be quite uncomfortable with assessment results because they sometimes highlight significant issues and lead to difficult decisions. Some officials may find it easier, safer, or more comfortable to deny, minimize, or ignore findings that call for decisive, unpopular, or costly action.
- Within many academic contexts, programs “compete” with one another for resources (e.g., funding from the university, “faculty lines,” or even students). At times, negative assessment findings place a program at a disadvantage vis-a-vis other programs that engage in little, if any, assessment or evaluation activities. Directors and faculty members should consider how, for example, higher administration might respond to a program that implements a strong assessment system that yields negative findings about student learning. In some contexts, programs may be recognized and credited for conducting assessment, and providing encouragement and resources to make improvements based upon the findings. In other circumstances, unfavorable results may be used to punish the program that conducted the assessment activities. During the early phases of implementation, such punitive responses send a clear message that genuine assessment is unsafe and probably unwanted.

During the next decade or two, social work programs will face many challenges. Certainly, demands for greater accountability will continue to increase. Various stakeholders will expect answers to questions such as the following: Do your students learn what you say you teach? Does your faculty genuinely help students learn? Does your curriculum truly meet CSWE and university accreditation standards? Are your learning expectations and experiences progressively more intellectually, academically, and professionally challenging? In other words, do you expect more of seniors than you do of juniors, and more of juniors than you do of sophomores? Do you require more of MSW students than you do of undergraduates, and more of MSW concentration students than MSW foundation students?

Social work educators will also be asked to produce evidence of their program’s effectiveness in pursuing its mission and accomplishing its goals. In attempting to provide such evidence, they may be challenged from various sources. Higher administration, students, parents, and some organizations (e.g., legislatures and social service agencies) may demand more and better indications of program quality and effectiveness. Some faculty colleagues may also question the purposes, validity, reliability, and relevance of the assessment processes—particularly if the results are used primarily for personnel evaluation decisions (e.g., for promotion and tenure decisions) rather than for enhancing faculty development or improving program quality and educational effectiveness.

We suggest that the Indiana Model—which incorporates both direct and indirect processes, and integrates Course Learning Objectives Classification and Assessment of Student Learning systems—represents a strategy by which to address some of these questions. We fully recognize that data obtained exclusively from direct or from indirect forms of assessment have finite value. As important as the consumer voice might be, and as appealing as a valid and reliable standardized examination might be, feedback from one source alone is simply insufficient. Indeed, we strongly recommend the use of multiple indicators of both an indirect and direct nature in order that findings may be subject to multidimensional consideration.

All social work schools and departments have goals and objectives. Whether explicit or implicit, their missions, visions, values, and goals become manifest by the words and the actions of the faculty and staff. Some goals are highly abstract (e.g., statements of mission and vision) and others are quite descriptive and operational (e.g., course learning objectives). The goals of BSW, MSW, or doctoral programs (i.e., program objectives) tend to fall approximately in the middle—not as abstract as a school or university mission but not as descriptive or operational as individual course learning objectives.

Ideally, all goals and objectives should reflect conceptual congruence and logical interrelationships. A review of a curriculum, for example, should readily reveal connections from the most abstract to the most descriptive goals and objectives, and vice-versa—from the most concrete to the most general. Optimally, a reviewer should be able to link all individual course-learning objectives to at least one program objective, at least one school or departmental goal, and at least one dimension of the organizational mission. Conversely, several lower level goals and objectives (sub-goals) for each highly abstract goal should be apparent. This is, of course, a daunting challenge. However, it is worth undertaking because the major indication of an organization's success or failure centers upon the degree to which it achieves its goals and objectives. Optimally, when students achieve a course-learning objective, their learning should simultaneously contribute to the achievement of one or more program objectives and some aspect of the school or departmental mission. To support this claim, however, each course-learning objective must clearly link to and support higher-level goals and objectives.

A course-learning objectives (CLO) classification system represents a means by which social work programs may analyze their curriculum in light of higher-level goals. For example, suppose a school of social work offered educational programs leading to the BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. degrees. Each program offers several classroom or practicum courses, or other educational experiences that address several learning objectives. A school that offers a full continuum might offer 50 or 60 distinct courses or seminars, each of which might have seven to 12 learning objectives. Collectively, the school might have as many as 500 or 600 discrete course-learning objectives.

Ideally, all professors, students, and relevant stakeholders should carefully read and reflect upon the meaning and implication of each learning objective offered in all courses and seminars. A simple “eyeballing” process can be extraordinarily revealing! However, a formal classification system facilitates organization and systematic analysis. A small group of faculty and stakeholders could classify each discrete learning objective according to higher-level program objectives, school goals, and other relevant factors. Computer software programs (e.g., database, spreadsheet, or some statistical packages) may facilitate the classification process and, of course, contribute to subsequent data analysis.



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