

VALUING A DIVERSE WORLD

From its inception, social work has dealt with diverse people. Historically, social workers served the poor and oppressed, and those who were discriminated against by the larger society on the basis of race, gender, religion, behavior or other factors. Although today social work serves persons from all classes and walks of life, it retains a special mission to serve the poor, oppressed and disenfranchised as reflected in the School's mission.

As we move into the 21st century, **Valuing a Diverse World** becomes even more essential for effective social work practice, in the United States and around the world. Not only is our world becoming more diverse, we recognize that our diversity is something to be valued. Diversity is reflected in the composition of American society – we are a nation of many different historical, cultural and racial origins, of diverse political and religious views, and of various socioeconomic classes and behavioral norms. This diversity is reflected in the composition of the social work profession itself, requiring us to understand and work effectively with persons different than ourselves in all aspects of social work practice.

Diversity is reflected also in the increasingly global connections among peoples throughout the world. Political, socioeconomic, and technological changes are bringing us all closer together such that events in our country impact people throughout the world just as events in other parts of the world impact us. Thus, we take **Valuing a Diverse World** quite literally to mean that we must be competent to deal with diversity throughout the global community.

Diversity is not seen in isolation, however. Although we want to learn to appreciate difference, we do not lose sight of the fact that we are all part of the human family. Just as our differences distinguish us and add value to the human experience, our shared humanity and commitment to the well-being of the larger community binds us together.

At the Mandel School we believe **Valuing a Diverse World** is a life-long developmental process in which we continuously strive for a better understanding of ourselves and those we serve. Competence in dealing with diversity begins with ourselves and the particular background and experiences we bring to our work, and includes the biases and “veils” as well as the strengths that arise out of our differences. To work effectively with persons different than ourselves we need also to understand others – people from other racial, ethnic and cultural heritages, and people whose values, beliefs and experience are different than our own. Central to this is an understanding of structural and institutional discrimination and oppression based on differences.

To be an effective practitioner in a diverse world, however, social workers must be more than self-aware and knowledgeable of other groups, they must be competent in interpersonal skills and intervention methods suited to the particular client group with whom they are working. Thus, at the advanced levels of competency students are expected to learn intervention methods and techniques suited to the particular client populations they will be working with at their selected level of social work practice (direct practice, management, community development).

We recognize that it is impossible for any social worker to be thoroughly knowledgeable about all of the different ethnic and cultural groups they are likely to encounter throughout their career. Thus, competence in **Valuing a Diverse World** includes the ability to develop new competence as needed. This involves learning to recognize when new competencies are needed, knowing how to develop the requisite new competencies, and implementing the competencies effectively.

We believe the ability of **Valuing a Diverse World** is best developed in a climate where students and faculty come together as a community of learners. Faculty and students work proactively to create a place where students can safely explore sensitive issues of values and beliefs, and work to develop positive personal and professional identities which take into account their personal uniqueness.

Valuing a Diverse World involves six levels of learning, four which occur primarily in the foundation curriculum and two in the advanced or concentration curriculum:

Student Learning – Foundation Level

Level 1. (self-awareness) Personal and professional awareness of one's own cultural values and biases, and how these impact

one's ability to work effectively with others.

Knowledge: has knowledge of his/her own racial and ethnic heritage, socioeconomic class, gender and sexual orientation, and how it personally and professionally affects his/her understanding of self and others; is aware of the impact of racism, discrimination and oppression on his/her beliefs and values; is aware of his/her social impact on others in interpersonal situations.

Values: recognizes the need to develop personal and professional competence in working with persons different than oneself; recognizes the need for honesty and personal integrity in developing one's professional self; subscribes to the profession's code of ethics as it relates to nondiscrimination.

Skills: is able to give and receive constructive criticism and feedback from others; is able to take various perspectives; is able to integrate one's values, beliefs and behaviors

Possible Assessment Activities: describes and analyses one's own identifications and experiences; invites constructive critical feedback; interacts openly with peers and the instructor; comes to an initial assessment of his/her diversity-related experiences and identifies areas for future growth.

Level 2. (knowledge of diversity; knowledge of oppression) Understands the worldviews of persons of difference, particularly persons of African-American and Hispanic origin, women, the poor and underclass, gay men and lesbians, and other populations as individual learning needs require. Understands how social and institutional factors historically have influenced patterns of inequity among diverse groups.

Knowledge: understands how cultural, economic, political dynamics, and other differences affect human development and social behavior; understands how social and institutional factors historically have influenced patterns of inequity among diverse groups; is aware of the cultural bias implicit in theories of human behavior; in particular is knowledgeable with persons of African-American and Hispanic origin, women, the poor, and gay men and lesbians; understands individual and group strengths and resources.

Values: understands that there are many cultures and many worldviews and recognizes the strengths that exist in all cultures; appreciates the strengths and personal resources of members of diverse groups; recognizes the heterogeneity within groups and the need to individualize each new situation; acknowledges that cultural and other differences have an impact on social work services.

Skills: knows how to use resources to develop knowledge of groups different than one's own; able to take the perspective of people of difference and state how it may influence one's personal identity, understanding of the world, and views toward help giving and help receiving.

Possible Assessment Activities: performs a critical comparative analysis of the history, life experience, and worldview of a group different from his/her own, with an awareness of commonalities and differences and shows how these factors may impact an individual or group's development and their ability to use social work services; based upon learning needs becomes actively involved with persons of difference outside the educational or professional setting so knowledge of difference is more than academic.

Level 3. (skills of engagement) Develops skills in engaging persons of diverse cultures and groups.

Knowledge: understands the cultural biases implicit in traditional intervention methods and approaches; understands barriers that interfere with minority persons' use of services; is knowledgeable about intervention theories and approaches that are culturally sensitive and empowering; understands the dynamics of dialogue and conflict resolution.

Values: demonstrates respect for others' beliefs and values, including religious beliefs, which may affect the social work process; respects the values of client self-determination and client empowerment; recognizes the need to become conversant in the client's language and experience rather than expecting the client to adapt to the social worker's experience.

Skills: able to take the perspective of persons of difference in the helping relationship; able to communicate effectively and with individuals and groups different than him/herself, engages in dialogue to explore differences and commonalities, capably works to explore and, where possible, resolve conflict, expressing respect and understanding for the other person.

Possible Assessment Activities: establishes a professional relationship with persons of difference and critically analyzes his/her ability to be culturally sensitive and understood and accepted by the other person; incorporates feedback/confirmation from the other person.

Student Learning – Advanced Level

Level 4. (develops new competencies) Develops competency in new areas of diversity as required by the needs of the practice situation, and demonstrates its effective application nationally or internationally.

Knowledge: can identify those situations in which new competency is needed; knows how to develop new competency and assess its effectiveness in practice situations; demonstrates the new knowledge that results from developing the new competence.

Values: recognizes the need to continually increase her/his ability to value diversity as new situations arise, realizes that changing economic, political, and social conditions influence and alter the perception and reality of diversity.

Skills: can engage a client system of difference in a social work intervention in a way that is culturally sensitive and builds on the client system's inherent strengths.

Possible Assessment Activities: engages a client system of difference in a social work intervention process and demonstrates effectiveness, including confirmatory feedback from the client system.

Level 5. (personal/professional identity) Develops a positive personal/professional identity based on one's own race, gender, sexual orientation, and other relevant factors.

Knowledge: understands the developmental stages of racial identity and sexual orientation; understands the impact of personal identity on professional identity; is aware of his/her own level of development.

Values: acknowledges how one's own identity influences worldview and behaviors; is committed to his/her own personal and professional growth and development.

Skills: can accurately assess his/her personal/professional identity; uses his/her own personal/professional identity intentionally and appropriately in social work practice situations.

Possible Assessment Activities: student describes accurately his/her stage of identity development, and how it impacts his/her professional identity and capabilities.

Level 6. (self-assessment) Evaluates and analyzes own ability in **Valuing a Diverse World**, identifies areas for further professional growth, and plans for developing the needed competence.

Knowledge: has comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of his/her current competencies and limitations in **Valuing a Diverse World**.

Values: recognizes one's limits in valuing diversity and subscribes by the ethical obligation not to practice in situations beyond one's competence; recognizes the need for continual self-assessment and professional development in the area of diversity.

Skills: is able to assess his/her ability realistically, and seeks periodic confirmation from learning colleagues and supervisors; can articulate one's ability to professional colleagues, clients and prospective employers.

Possible Assessment Activities: makes a realistic assessment of his/her ability to value a diverse world, recognizes areas where new competencies were developed, identifies areas for future growth, develops plan for acquiring the needed competence.