
Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

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What injustice
are you most
passionate about
fighting against in
your career?

Outline

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What is Competency 3?

Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights. Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected.

Key Knowledge

Social workers:

- apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels.
- engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.
- facilitate team and coalition-building and other collaborative strategies for promoting system change designed to reduce social and economic inequities.

Values



- **Dignity and Worth of the Person**
 - Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients' socially responsible self-determination

- **Social Justice**
 - Social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice.

Related Skills

- Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.
- Assess and respond to the political, resource, and technology environments that effectively shape policy practice to advocate for social and economic justice.
- Engaged in practices that advance social and economic justice issues by joining advocacy groups and writing letters to our representatives

Other Related Skills

Social work skills include soft skills, such as:

- Active Listening
- Critical Thinking
- Information Gathering
- Organization
- Time Management
- Boundary Setting
- Empathy
- Communication
- Persuasion
- Cooperation
- Advocacy



Application

Coursework & Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Analyze your beliefs, your worldview, and if they align with the Social work core values● Play devil's advocate● Research policy, statistics, on scope of study
Internship Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Examine your beliefs & habits● Understand that every person deserves freedom, safety, privacy, healthcare, and education; (3.2 Social Work Core Competencies Berkeley Social Welfare, n.d.)● Educate yourself about injustice within the demographic you serve● Educate yourself on policy regarding the demographic you serve● Try to learn from your clients; be empathetic and compassionate● Be knowledgeable about theories on human strategies to help eradicate oppressive barriers (3.2 Social Work Core Competencies Berkeley Social Welfare, n.d.)

Application

Other:

- Educate yourself about all social and economic injustice
- Understand how injustice is on system levels (micro, macro, mezzo)
- Discover local organizations
- Take positive action in your community through volunteering and giving of your resources
- Support minority owned businesses

Personal Experiences



Agency: Abraham House

Alternative To Incarceration

Demographic Served:

ATI serves former inmates adult men ages 18 and up from diverse populations with various ethnic backgrounds, including Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Albanian, and other ethnic groups.



Identify and celebrate the ways you have gained knowledge, values, and skills relevant this competency

Knowledge: I learned that the **root** reasons **of** any **oppression**, regardless of economic class, are political, economic, cultural, and worldview structures that reinforce societal conditions. Clients with a past of incarceration struggle to reintegrate into society. The issue I encountered was that, while the **microsystem** assists with the client's requirements, not all **society is forgiving**. The **macrosystem** create policies and legislation for change but on the other hand the society still use their mistakes against them which can cause this particular population as well as others to stay **unliberated**.

Value: To **value every life** and to behave in a **trustworthy** manner to **empower** participants to empower themselves to live a **quality life**.

Skills: Engaging, assess, Active listening, observing verbal and non-verbal messages, **person-in-environment approach**.

Specific relevant practice activities, papers, assignments, readings, and internship accomplishments:

The curriculum content area for completing this competency is content knowledge from the **Social Welfare Policy and Services** and **Foundation of Social Justice: Diversity Power Oppression**. The classes helped me understand that there are some policies that are meant to help clients but can hinder clients from achieving the goal set for them. One example is that the Department of Welfare Services has policies limiting how much money a family can earn to receive benefits. If a client is a penny over the required income level is disqualified from obtaining services. In class, the assignment was to **find out the names of each member official in my district at the local, state, and federal levels**. Then I was to select someone to **write a letter addressing a chosen issue**. This part of the assignment could be anyone, so I decided on **Henry Garrido, Executive Director, District Council 37**.

Another assignment was the **policy analysis brief** "Should the government guarantee housing for homeless people?" why or not? This **paper advocated for people experiencing homelessness with research stats, causes, effects, etc.** Social Work Policy and Services class taught me that words alone do not change situations, but changing policies do, and we have to participate in the fight to change policies for human rights. **Program Evaluation Plan on Effectiveness of The Alternative to Incarceration Program Success**

How you've grown professionally regarding this competency:

- Working with the former inmate community has given me a **different perspective on engaging**. I now look at the **person-in-environment PIE** to understand the story behind their experiences.
- My **responsibility** is to help navigate clients' dilemmas or situations while giving clients a safe space to work through their issues and **to advocate for change in systems** that are not working.
- To **treat all people** with **dignity and respect** no matter their ethnicity, gender, sex orientation, or mental status because people could be one trauma away from having mental issue or one accident or mistake or false accusation away of being incarceration

What has been helpful (and what has not) in terms of the program's attempts to promote competency.

- My internship instrumental in helped me comprehend, communicate, and effectively interact with people from different cultures. It allows me to compare various cultures to my own bias and it help me to understand the differences in the person-in-environment and how it dramatically affects who we are and how we behave.

Not Helpful

- Most of our participants had a comorbid substance use with a medical issue and although participants are sent to rehab they enter back into the program with the same substance use problem.

Lillian Gomez: Internship Experiences

Agency:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● RestoreNYC - 2021 to 2022● Child Center of New York - 2022 to 2023
Demographic Served:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● RestoreNYC: Women (ages 18+) who are survivors of human trafficking● CCNY: Hispanic mothers, children, and families



Gained knowledge, values, & skills

Knowledge: Although, I am hispanic, I have never experienced many of the challenges that my clients go through (immigration trauma, and language barriers, just to name a few). Since being at CCNY, I have educated myself on how my community is affected by systemic barriers. Many of my clients face severe mental and physical challenges due to policies and practices that have been established here in the United States.

Values: The social work values that that I have used in regards to this competency are cultural competence, and seeing & acknowledging the dignity and worth of a person.

In general some values that are relevant to this competency are: compassion, security, autonomy, power, respect, and service.

Skills: The skills that I have implemented and are relevant to this competency are: empathy, understanding, critical thinking skills, active listening,

Practices such as activities, papers, assignments, readings, & internship accomplishments

First Year: During my generalist year, I worked with survivors of human trafficking; many of these women were brought here from different countries, and/or have come from impoverished communities. During my time at Restore, I attended several coalition meetings, panels, and conferences. I also educated, and wrote a research report to my supervisor on laws, and policies that have been implemented in the state of New York that affect the demographic that I worked with. Further, I researched sex worker laws and educated myself on the topic of decriminalization vs legalization of sex work.

I also took a policy course and in that class we were to research policy on a certain issue in which I chose immigration policy. I was to write a proposal and send it to my local representative and advocate for a marginalized people groups.

In that class, I also debated both side to universal healthcare in the United States. For this presentation, I had to education myself on how healthcare works, how one can obtain it, and who is benefiting from it. I also used critical thinking skills on how we could potential offer universal healthcare to Americans.

Why Decriminalize Sex Work Instead of Legalize?

Decriminalization

Eliminates all laws and prohibits the state and law enforcement officials from intervening in any sex work related activities or transactions

De-prioritizes arrest and reduces interactions between police and sex workers

Retroactively seals criminal record and provides a pathway for sex workers who want to transition into other employment

Provides allocated resources for people who have historically and currently are being criminalized for sex work

Legalization

Regulation of sex work with laws regarding where, when, and how sex work could take place

Requires sex workers to keep up with registration fees, costs, and licenses, which is difficult for people with little money and resources

Provides a pathway for law enforcement interaction and regulation of where, when, and how (criminalization is not removed)

Provides allocated resources to law enforcement to regulate consensual, private behavior

Practice activities, papers, assignments, readings, & internship accomplishments

Second Year: This year I have been focusing on the hispanic population. I have specifically worked with individuals who are affected by child abuse, trauma and neglect within the population. During my internship this year, I have been looking into how systemic barriers such as lack of employment opportunities, lack of education and housing have a correlation to mental health issues and how they can cause child abuse, neglect and trauma.

Further, my internship has provided me with several trainings and resources to learn more. Some trainings I have been in cover topics such as:

- Child welfare laws
- How to psycho-educate parents affected by systemic barriers
- How to work with victims of immigration trauma
- How to work with individuals in the foster care system

Growing professionally

- I have examined and challenged (and will continue to do so) my beliefs so that I can better assist my clients
- I have educated myself more on social justice issues on micro, macro, and mezzo levels
- I have discovered and volunteered at local organization and know that one of the best things I can do is give of my time
- My empathy and understanding has increases especially to those who have completely different worldviews and experiences from me

Helpful vs. Not Helpful

What has been helpful?

- The social justice course; which helps us learn more about injustice and prompts us to think more about our worldviews and beliefs

What could be improved?

- I am fully aware that Alliance university has a racial reconciliation office. I think it would be awesome to see the Social work department partner more with them.
- Having the Social work department partner more with organization run by minorities or focused on minorities (in NYC) and having them come in to educate us

Michaela Gulachek

Agency:

iMind Behavioral Health LLC

Demographic Served:

Servicing the individuals of Prince George's County Maryland, the 6th most diverse county in the state. Any individual any age that is experiencing a mental health or substance use crises. PG county is a very wealthy county yet severely underfunded county for social services.



iMIND
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Michaela Gulachek

- **Identify and celebrate the ways you have gained knowledge, values, and skills relevant this competency**

I had a limited knowledge of substance abuse and what it really did to not only the individual but the community. Through my agency and school I have learned the skills on how to advocate on a macro level to funders and stakeholders the value of harm reduction and treatment for my clients and the community that I serve to be provided the opportunity for rehabilitation and have the population i serve treated with dignity and respect.

- **Specific relevant practice activities, papers, assignments, readings, and internship accomplishments**

At the agency I work at I have had the opportunity to write the report to the funders and stakeholders to advocate for more funding and more services that have helped facilitate team and coalition-building and other collaborative strategies for promoting system change designed to reduce social and economic inequities.

Michaela Gulachek

- **How you've grown professionally regarding this competency**

I have always been passionate about advancing human rights and being very dedicated to justice. I went to my first protest when I was 16, I have spoken at events, etc. The social work program has given me the skills to take my passion and make it professional. Such as my social work in policy class that taught me how to write to my legislators and formulate policy briefs, or my research class that taught me the importance of collecting data and how to present the needs to the stakeholders to really help the community.

- **What has been helpful (and what has not) in terms of the program's attempts to promote competency.**

I honestly believe that the social work department here at Alliance has promoted this competency in a very positive way. Through my various classes, every one of my professors have stressed the importance of this competency and how to live it out as an individual and professional.

Jennifer Matelski

Field Placement

Agency:	Family Centers
Demographic Served:	children, adults and families in Fairfield County, CT and the greater area through some virtual options



Family Centers: The Den for Grieving Kids



- The Den For Grieving Kids provides a safe, caring place for children, teens and families to explore their feelings about the loss of a parent, sibling or other family member and begin the journey toward healing. Children and their families participate in groups led by professionals and trained volunteer facilitators.



Identify and celebrate the ways you have gained knowledge, values, and skills relevant this competency

Knowledge: I have gained knowledge of the lack of financial resources available to many within Fairfield County, CT. I have also learned that programs like The Den are not widely available to grieving individuals across the country, especially for young adults. We have one of the first and only young adult bereavement groups in the United States.

Values: Since our group consists of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, I have learned first hand the importance of cultural humility. I come from a place of learning when working with others from different cultural or social backgrounds than my own.

Skills:

- Advocating for participants and helping to connect them with additional resources (at no cost or on a sliding scale based on income)
- Empathy, Validation, Active Listening

Specific relevant practice activities, papers, assignments, readings, and internship accomplishments

- **Annual Report**

- As a facilitator, I was asked to be interviewed and featured in the Family Centers Annual Report.
- This helps the agency show donors and the community the positive impact that the programs are making. The funds raised through this report help provide no cost services to those in Fairfield County, CT.

- **The Den for Grieving Kids Facilitator Trainings**

- The Den provides mandatory trainings for group facilitators. The on-boarding training provides a large array of materials including videos, role plays, and readings. Some of this material cover cultural awareness and humility when working with diverse population within a group setting.
- The Den also provides annual trainings for existing facilitators so that they continue to learn and develop their facilitation skills.

How you've grown professionally regarding this competency?

- I have broadened my knowledge of underserved populations from working directly individuals who, without the Family Centers, would lack the financial resources often necessary to obtain grief support and treatment.
- Through this internship opportunity, I have recognized my passion for helping others through their grief journey and to manage symptoms of their grief. I have gained an awareness of the lack of grief support in all communities, **but especially in communities with limited resources**.
- Throughout my career, **I will prioritize making space for those in underserved communities**. Grief support and mental health services need to be provided to all individuals, regardless of ability to pay.

What has been helpful (and what has not) in terms of the program's attempts to promote competency?

What has been helpful:

- The Den for Grieving Kids has aimed to reach out to all those grieving in Fairfield County and surrounding areas including Westchester County. The Den has a group specifically for Spanish speakers which is facilitated by trained Spanish speaking facilitators. These facilitators are also closely tied to the Hispanic community in Fairfield County which allows them to connect with participants from this community.

What needs improvement:

- Outside of the Spanish speaking group, all other facilitators happen to be caucasian. I think the Den should work to **train facilitators from other ethnicities and cultural background to better reflect the participants in our groups.**

Why is it important in practice?

- Social work's heart is all about helping those who are underserved. When we put in the effort as clinicians to help advance injustice, this helps promote fairness, and equality in society.
- Advocating for justice can affect our lives positively though:
 - Creating better educational opportunities
 - Better access to healthcare
 - Reduce poverty
 - Freedom from injustice and stereotypes
 - Promote unity and peace
 - Improve the overall quality of life

- When we advocate for justice in a general sense this could positively impact our clients to having access to higher quality care to obtain wellness and health.

(Hamilton, 2021)

Questions?



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