

# 101 ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES: M.S.W. HANDBOOK

## 101 Essential Attributes and Abilities

Becoming a competent clinical social worker is a lengthy and complex process requiring the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experience including the development and deployment of a conscious and skillful use-of-self. The professional activities of social work students are guided by the application of professional knowledge that is grounded in relevant biological, psychological, and social knowledge and research. This includes but is not limited to knowledge and skills in relationship-building, data-gathering, assessment, interventions and evaluation of practice.

The skillful use-of-self, the primary instrument of clinical social work, requires a certain set of attributes and abilities that enable students to engage successfully in the full spectrum of the experiences and the requirements of the curriculum. The following standards (distinguished from academic standards such as grades, class attendance, etc.) describe those attributes and abilities necessary for students to have and to demonstrate throughout the entirety of the program study in which they are enrolled at the SCSSW. They are informed by both the mission of the School for Social Work and its anti-racism commitment. Students at the Smith College School for Social Work are expected to have and demonstrate these abilities and attributes at a level appropriate to their year in the program. Attention to these standards are critical to the School's mission to educate effective clinical social workers and will be part of evaluations of students' progress in all arenas of the program, including classroom, internship, and as members of the school community.

Evident in its antiracism commitment is the School's recognition that structural racism and multiple forms of oppression manifest within all organizations and systems. Accordingly, the School also acknowledges that dominant standards of professionalism have been, and can be, used to further marginalize, exclude, and discount the contributions and competence of social workers from marginalized communities. A driving force for diversifying higher education is to decenter dominant narratives and to welcome a multiplicity of voices and knowledges within the profession. The School acknowledges, therefore, that building structures and processes of accountability that will aid the ongoing review and assessment of its practices and policies is also a critical component of the School's mission to educate effective clinical social workers.

In applying the standards outlined below, the School is committed to interrupting the ways that the forces of racism and structural oppression materialize within its own institutional policies and processes. In recognition, moreover, that students are placed in a broad range of field internships, each at a different phase of their anti-oppression work, the School also affirms the need for ongoing work with these partner organizations in support of students as they navigate those systems. In all aspects of its educational programs, the School will strive to attenuate the impact of structural racism and oppression on the learning and progress of all students in general, and students of color and those identifying with other marginalized communities in particular.

## 101.1 Professional and Ethical Commitment

- Demonstrate commitment to the broad scope of values, ethics, goals, and standards of the profession as outlined by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Social Work (NASW), and the principles of the SSW Mission statement and anti-racism commitment.

## 101.2 Diversity & Social Justice

- Demonstrate an appreciation for the value of human diversity in all aspects of their professional interactions
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity a commitment to engage the complexity of inequality and structural oppressions in all aspects of their professional interactions.

## 101.3 Self-Awareness & Self-Management

- Demonstrate the ability to recognize and reflect upon one's own values, attitudes, beliefs, biases, emotions, and past experiences, and be adept at examining and managing how these affect their thinking, behavior, and relationships in all aspects of one's professional interactions.
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to critically examine and modify one's behaviors when they impede or contradict the values, ethics, and standards outlined by the profession and the School.

## 101.4 Empathy

- Demonstrate the capacity to understand the experience and perspectives of other individuals or groups and be able use this empathic connection as a basis for productive professional relationships.

## 101.5 Communication

- Demonstrate the willingness and capacity to communicate effectively and respectfully in all their professional interactions.
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to express one's ideas and feelings clearly.
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to be aware of the possible impact that personal communication on a social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler, etc.) could have in a professional setting.
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to listen respectfully to others. Demonstrate sufficient skills in spoken and written English to successfully engage in all components of the program.

## 101.6 Interpersonal Skills

- Demonstrate the interpersonal skills needed to relate effectively and respectfully in all professional interactions. These include but are not limited to: compassion, altruism, integrity, and respect for and consideration of others.

## 101.7 Organizational Awareness

- Interact respectfully and effectively with people in all capacities and hierarchical ranks within organizations.

## 101.8 Professional Behavior

- Comport oneself within the scope of one's role as a social work student, adhering to the profession's code of ethics and practicing within the scope of their developing competencies.
- Demonstrate the willingness and capacity to critically analyze one's level of competence, making active use of feedback from relevant sources.
- Comport oneself as a professional in all arenas of the program.
- Professional comportment includes but is not limited to: timeliness, responsiveness, punctuality, reliability, and appropriate self-presentation. Be aware of and abide by the ethics, laws and policies of all arenas of the program (e.g., HIPPA, ADA, FERPA, etc.).