

Specialized  
Practice  
Curricular Guide  
for **Military  
and Veteran  
Social Work**



Council on Social Work Education  
*Alexandria, Virginia*

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# Preface

## **COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION**

In 2008, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) adopted a competency-based education framework for its educational policy and accreditation standards. Competency-based education is an outcome-oriented approach to curriculum design. The goal of the outcome approach is to ensure that students can demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice. In the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), competence consists of nine interrelated competencies and component behaviors that include multiple dimensions: knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes.

Competency-based education rests on a shared view of the nature of competence in professional practice. Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to practice in a culturally responsive, purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being. The EPAS recognizes a holistic view of competence: that the demonstration of competence is informed by multiple dimensions of competence, including the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment regarding unique practice situations. Overall professional competence is multidimensional and composed of interrelated competencies. An individual social worker's competence is developmental and dynamic, changing over time in relation to continuous learning (CSWE, 2022, p. 7).

Using a curriculum design that begins with the outcomes, expressed as the expected competencies, social work program developers produce the substantive

content, pedagogical approaches, and educational activities that provide learning opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies (CSWE, 2022, p. 7).

## **SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES**

The 2022 EPAS stipulates nine competencies that prepare students for social work practice. These competencies apply to both generalist and specialized practice. The nine social work competencies are listed in the 2022 EPAS on pages 8–13. Each of the nine social work competencies is followed by a paragraph describing the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that make up the competency at the generalist level of practice, followed by a set of bulleted behaviors that integrate these components. These behaviors represent observable components of the competencies, and the descriptions that precede them represent the underlying content and processes that inform the behaviors.

## **SPECIALIZED PRACTICE**

Specialized practice builds on generalist practice, as described in Educational Policy (EP) 3.0 of the 2022 EPAS, by extending and enhancing the generalist social work competencies for practice with a specific population, problem area, method of intervention, perspective, or approach to practice.

The master's programs in social work prepare students for specialized practice. Programs identify the specialized knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes, and behaviors that extend and enhance the nine social work competencies and prepare students for practice in the area of specialization and to demonstrate an ability to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate across client populations, problem areas, and methods of intervention (CSWE, 2022, p. 18).

In each area of specialized practice defined by a program, the program extends and enhances the nine social work competencies that are demonstrated in observable behaviors indicative of competence in specialized areas of professional practice. Specialized practitioners synthesize and use the knowledge and skills necessary for interprofessional collaborations based on scientific inquiry and best practices, consistent with social work values (CSWE, 2022, p. 18).

Specialized practitioners advocate with and on behalf of clients and constituencies in their area of specialized practice. Specialized practitioners synthesize

and use a broad range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills based on scientific inquiry and best practices and consistent with social work values. Specialized practitioners engage in and conduct research to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR THE GUIDE**

CSWE, in partnership with its Commission on Educational Policy (COEP), created a framework for the development of curricular guides for areas of specialized practice. The task force followed the guidelines for creating social work competencies and curricular resources for military and veteran social workers that reflect accreditation standards for master's programs in the 2022 EPAS, including:

- 1) Identification of an area of specialized practice for a specific population, problem area, method of intervention, perspective, or approach to practice in social work (EP M3.2).
- 2) Identification of the specialized knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes, and behaviors that extend and enhance the nine social work competencies and prepare students for practice in the area of specialization identified (EP M3.2 and Accreditation Standard [AS] M3.2.1).
- 3) Discussion of how the area of specialized practice builds on generalist practice as described in EP 3.0 (AS M3.2.2).
- 4) Suggested curriculum content and resources (e.g., readings, multimedia and online resources, modules, assignments, experiential exercises, class and field activities) for each of the nine social work competencies and any additional competencies identified.
- 5) Identification of the competency dimensions (knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes) associated with the course content for each competency.

The curriculum content and resources identified in this guide are not required by accreditation standards and are meant to serve as an optional guide to programs on how to conceptualize military social work practice with the nine social work competencies identified in the 2022 EPAS.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDE

Congruent with the 2022 EPAS and framework developed by CSWE, specialized practice in military and veteran social work builds on generalist practice but augments and extends social work knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate within this area of specialized practice. Accordingly, for each of the competencies identified in this guide, there is a paragraph description of the dimensions—knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes—that make up the competency and prepare students for military and veteran social work practice. This is followed by a set of behaviors to be attained by social work students entering practice to work with and on behalf of military personnel, veterans, and their constituencies.

This curricular guide also includes a new competency that is not part of the nine CSWE competencies—Competency 10: Prevention. The chairs of this guide consider prevention an essential competency in the practice of social work, especially military social work.

Readings, in-class exercises, field activities, media, and assignments are identified for each of the competencies, along with whether they address knowledge, values, skills, or cognitive and affective processes. Descriptions of shorter selected assignments and in-class exercises follow each competency; longer activities or additional details are included in the appendixes.

## REFERENCE

Council on Social Work Education. (2022). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/bb5d8afe-7680-42dc-a332-a6e6103f4998/2022-EPAS.pdf>



# Competency 1

## Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

### **SPECIALIZED PRACTICE COMPETENCY DESCRIPTION**

Military and veteran social workers represent the profession, its mission, and its core values. They understand that conflict may be inevitable when they uphold the values, principles, and mission of social work, which promotes the advancement of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and the reduction of oppression and discrimination. Military and veteran social workers demonstrate a professional demeanor that reflects competency, maintains professional boundaries, and displays an awareness of and respect for military and veteran culture. Military and veteran social workers embody the values of social work and those of the military, which call for one to uphold selfless service, duty, loyalty, courage, honor, and integrity. Furthermore, a military social worker must demonstrate a respect for and understanding of the “warrior ethos” associated with military service and the impact that mission readiness has on the military healthcare system.

Military social workers understand the nuances of military culture, such as deployment cycles, global military mission changes, personal accountability, differences associated with occupational specialties, officer and enlisted categories, rank structures, the impact on gender, and family dynamics; the differences among service components; and the barriers to seeking help that this culture may present to service members and their families. Military social workers understand that diagnoses and treatment decisions can have a significant impact on the career and family stability of service members and a long-term impact on service-connected disability ratings, which affect financial and healthcare benefits that veterans receive after their active-duty military career concludes. They are aware of potential ethical conflicts that can arise with requirements to communicate sensitive clinical information to

unit leadership. Military social workers recognize the proliferation of technology in healthcare and day-to-day interaction. They understand the importance of the ethical use of technology in the delivery of care and service aligned with best practices of social work standards. These standards ensure that military social workers are appropriately considering issues such as maintaining professional boundaries, confidentiality, informed consent, cultural relevance, and protecting privacy when using technology to serve the needs of military and veteran beneficiaries.

## **COMPETENCY BEHAVIORS**

### **Military and Veteran Social Workers:**

- Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision making, relevant research, and additional codes of conduct as appropriate to the military context.
- Appropriately use supervision and consultation to guide professional and ethical judgment and behavior, and to navigate complex situations in social work practice with military and veteran populations.
- Maintain professional standards for privacy and confidentiality while serving as command consultants responsible for supporting unit readiness.
- Advocate for changes to a system that perpetuates stereotypes of those who have served in the military that stigmatize help-seeking behavior.
- Adhere to social work ethical standards for appropriately using technology when consulting, counseling, supervising, and communicating within the military and veteran communities and with military and veteran beneficiaries.
- Engage in appropriate self-care, to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma.

## CURRICULAR RESOURCES MAPPED TO COMPETENCY DIMENSIONS

### Readings

Resource	Competency Dimension
Atuel, H. R., & Castro, C. A. (2018). Military cultural competence. <i>Clinical Social Work Journal</i> , 46, 74–82. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-018-0651-z">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-018-0651-z</a>	Knowledge Values
Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2018). Being intentional about self-care for social workers [Editorial]. <i>Social Work</i> , 63, 5–6. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx058">https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx058</a>	Knowledge Values
Brand, M. W., & Weiss, E. L. (2015). Social workers in combat: Application of advanced practice competencies in military social work and implications for social work education. <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> , 51(1), 153–168. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.979094">https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.979094</a>	Knowledge Values
Cohen, E. A. (2023). An introduction to military culture. In C. Warner and C. Castro (Eds.), <i>Veteran and military mental health: A clinical manual</i> (pp. 19–28). Springer. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18009-5">https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18009-5</a>	Knowledge Values
Daley, J. G. (2013). Ethical decision making in military social work. In A. Rubin, E. L. Weiss, & J. E. Coll (Eds.), <i>Handbook of military social work</i> (pp. 51–66). Wiley.	Knowledge Values Skills
Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.) National Center for Ethics in Health Care. <a href="https://www.ethics.va.gov/">https://www.ethics.va.gov/</a>	Knowledge Values Skills
Foley, P. S., Albright, D. L., & Fletcher, K. L. (2016). Navigating the minefield: A model for integrating religion and spirituality in social work practice with service members and veterans. <i>Social Work &amp; Christianity</i> , 43(3), 73–96.	Knowledge Values
Johnson, W. B. (2018). Ethical considerations for working with military service personnel. In M. M. Leach & E. R. Welfel (Eds.), <i>The Cambridge handbook of applied psychological ethics</i> (pp. 3–19). Cambridge University Press. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417287.002">https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417287.002</a>	Knowledge Values

(continued)

*Readings (continued)*

Resource	Competency Dimension
Johnson, W. B., & Johnson, S. J. (2017). Unavoidable and mandated multiple relationships in military settings. In O. Zur (Ed.), <i>Multiple relationships in psychotherapy and counseling: Unavoidable, mandatory, and common relations between therapists and clients</i> (pp. 49–60). Routledge.	Knowledge Values
Johnson, W. B., Johnson, M., & Landsinger, K. L. (2018). Trauma-informed supervision in deployed military settings. <i>The Clinical Supervisor, 37</i> (1), 102–121. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/07325223.2017.1413472">https://doi.org/10.1080/07325223.2017.1413472</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
Kem, J. D. (2006). The use of the “ethical triangle” in military ethical decision making. <i>Public Administration and Management, 11</i> (1), 22–43.	Knowledge Values
Kok, B. C., Herrell, R. K., Grossman, S. H., West, J. C., & Wilk, J. E. (2016). Prevalence of professional burnout among military mental health service providers. <i>Psychiatric Services, 67</i> (1), 137–140. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400430">https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400430</a>	Knowledge Values
Lusk, M., Terrazas, S., & Salcido, R. (2017). Critical cultural competence in social work supervision. <i>Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership, &amp; Governance, 41</i> (5), 464–476. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2017.1313801">https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2017.1313801</a>	Knowledge Values
McCaughey, M., Hacker Hughes, J., & Liebling-Kalifani, H. (2008). Ethical considerations for military clinical psychologists: A review of selected literature. <i>Military Psychology, 20</i> , 7–20. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600701753128">https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600701753128</a>	Knowledge Values
Mo, K. Y., & Chan, O. (2023). Supervisory relationship in cyber supervision: Implications for social work supervision. <i>International Social Work, 66</i> (1), 65–79. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872821991887">https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872821991887</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
National Association of Social Work Boards, Council on Social Work Education, & Clinical Social Work Association. (2017). <i>Standards for technology in social work practice</i> . <a href="https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/Standards-for-Technology-in-Social-Work-Practice">https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/Standards-for-Technology-in-Social-Work-Practice</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes

*(continued)*

**Readings** (continued)

Resource	Competency Dimension
National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2021). <i>Code of ethics</i> . <a href="http://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English">www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2012). <i>NASW standards for social work practice with service members, veterans, &amp; their families</i> . <a href="https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fg817fDop0%3D&amp;portalid=0">https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fg817fDop0%3D&amp;portalid=0</a>	Knowledge Values Skills
Newcomb, M. (2022). Supportive social work supervision as an act of care: A conceptual model. <i>The British Journal of Social Work</i> , 52(2), 1070–1088. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab074">https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab074</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW). (2024, March). <i>Ethical decision-making in social work practice</i> . <a href="https://nlcsw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ethical-decision-making-in-social-work-practice.pdf">https://nlcsw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ethical-decision-making-in-social-work-practice.pdf</a>	Knowledge Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
Olson, M. D. (2018). Exploring military social work from a social justice perspective. <i>International Social Work</i> , 67(1), 119–129. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815606792">https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815606792</a>	Knowledge Values
Pehrson, K. L. (2002). Boundary issues in clinical practice as reported by Army social workers. <i>Military Medicine</i> , 167(1), 14–22.	Knowledge Values
Reamer, F. G. (2019). Essential ethics knowledge in social work. In S. M. Marson & R. E. McKinney (Eds.), <i>The Routledge handbook of social work ethics and values</i> (pp. 313–322). Routledge.	Knowledge Values

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**Readings** (continued)

Resource	Competency Dimension
Reger, M. A., Etherage, J. R., Reger, G. M., & Gahm, G. A. (2008). Civilian psychologists in an Army culture: The ethical challenge of cultural competence. <i>Military Psychology, 20</i> , 21-35.	Knowledge Values
Rishel, C. W., & Hartnett, H. P. (2015). Preparing MSW students to provide mental and behavioral health services to military personnel, veterans, and their families in rural settings. <i>Journal of Social Work Education, 51</i> , S26-S43. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1001278">https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1001278</a>	Knowledge Values
Savitsky, L., Illingworth, M., & DuLaney, M. (2009). Civilian social work: Serving military and veteran populations. <i>Social Work, 54</i> , 327-339. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/54.4.327">https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/54.4.327</a>	Knowledge Values
Scheyett, A. (2021). The responsibility of self-care in social work [Editorial]. <i>Social Work, 66</i> (4), 281-283. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swab041">https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swab041</a>	Knowledge Values Cognitive and Affective Processes
Scott, D. L., Whitworth, J. D., & Herzog, J. R. (2017). Working with military personnel. <i>Social work with military populations</i> (pp. 1-18). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.	Knowledge
Simmons, C. A., & Rycraft, J. R. (2010). Ethical challenges of military social workers serving in a combat zone. <i>Social Work, 55</i> (1), 9-18. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/55.1.9">https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/55.1.9</a>	Knowledge Values
Wooten, N. R. (2015). Military social work: Opportunities and challenges for social work education. <i>Journal of Social Work Education, 51</i> (Suppl. 1), S6-S25. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1001274">https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1001274</a>	Knowledge Values

**Media**

Resource	Competency Dimension
America's Navy. (2010). <i>Navy clinical social worker—LT Bryan Pyle</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZBQHEr3YOY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZBQHEr3YOY</a>	Knowledge Values Skills
Frank Greenagel II. (2015). <i>Frank speaks about being an Army social worker</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMqtALguqC0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMqtALguqC0</a>	Knowledge

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**Media** (continued)

Resource	Competency Dimension
International Society for Military Ethics. (n.d.). <i>Welcome to the archive site for the International Society for Military Ethics</i> . <a href="http://isme.tamu.edu/">http://isme.tamu.edu/</a> Provides links to core values for the Air Force, Army, and Navy, and a long list of case studies that pose ethical questions students can discuss as if they were military service members.	Knowledge Values Cognitive and Affective Processes
U.S. Air Force Recruiting. (2015). <i>U.S. Air Force: Capt Zarah Davis, social worker</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOjZ1gkW7Uk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOjZ1gkW7Uk</a>	Knowledge Values
USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families (USCCIR). (2023). <i>USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans &amp; Military Families (CIR)</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY8ZmibMJ8s&amp;list=PL2BE9D43730529711">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY8ZmibMJ8s&amp;list=PL2BE9D43730529711</a>	Knowledge Values

**In-Class Exercises**

Resource	Competency Dimension
<b>Code of Ethics Case Study</b> Prosek, E. A., & Holm, J. M. (2014). Counselors and the military: When protocol and ethics conflict. <i>The Professional Counselor Digest</i> , 4(2), 93-102. <a href="http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org/counselors-and-the-military-when-protocol-and-ethics-conflict/">http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org/counselors-and-the-military-when-protocol-and-ethics-conflict/</a> Although this article is geared toward counselors, there are some salient points that could be adapted to the NASW Code of Ethics. It includes a case study and two ethical-decision-making models.	Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes
<b>Military Culture Modules</b> Center for Deployment Psychology. (n.d.). <i>Military culture: Core competencies for healthcare professionals</i> . Uniformed Services University. <a href="http://deploymentpsych.org/military-culture-course-modules">http://deploymentpsych.org/military-culture-course-modules</a> Four modules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-assessment and introduction to military ethos</li> <li>• Military organization and roles</li> <li>• Stressors and resources</li> <li>• Treatment, resources, and tools</li> </ul> Register for a VHA Train Account ( <a href="https://www.train.org/vha/welcome">https://www.train.org/vha/welcome</a> ), complete one of the modules in class, and share learnings with the group. Each module takes approximately 2 hours.	Values Skills Cognitive and Affective Processes

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