



OSCE Adapted for Social Work: Fact Sheet

- **Objective:** Skills directly observed by a rater who does not have a relationship with the student
- **Structured:** A set scenario and format
- **Clinical:** Assesses practice skill
- **Exam:** Performance is evaluated on a set scale resulting in an assessment of student competence.

An OSCE Consists of:

- an interview of specific duration (in this case 15minutes) conducted by a student with a standardized client directly assessed by an assessor using a rating scale
- standardized clients are actors trained to enact a particular scenario in the role of a client, consistently each time
- students conducting one or more interviews, moving through a series of scenarios (also called stations) representing areas of practice
- scenarios where the student is observed and his/her performance is rated on a scale designed as a checklist of behaviors or a series of more general or global practice processes.

Current status and research support in health professions

Originated in medicine (Harden & Gleeson, 1979) to:

- assess knowledge, clinical skills, and how knowledge is *used in practice*
- provide a standardized, fair, and equitable method of assessment in contrast to the variability of client, problem, and preceptor/assessor in the clinical setting
- provide a reliable and valid assessment approach.

Extensive research literature on OSCE method over the past three decades finds (Hodges, 2006):

- acceptable validity and reliability, is accepted by students and faculty members
- used frequently for episodic performance-based assessment in undergraduate medical education, specialty areas, and in licensing examinations in some countries, including Canada.

Adapted for Social Work

Why needed in social work

Challenges to reliable and valid evaluation of student learning due to:

- intensity of student-field instructor relationship (Bogo et al., 2007)
- variability in agency context, complexity of client situations, nature of field instruction
- variability of practice data used to arrive at evaluation with heavy reliance on verbal or written self-report of practice rather than direct observation or use of video records (Maidment, 2000)
- tendency for grade inflation in field evaluations (Regehr, Bogo et al, 2007; Sowbel, 2011)
- responsibility of the educational program to directly assess students' practice competence rather than such assessments only taking place in field settings.

The nature of competence

Holistic competence consists of two inter-related components: 1) performance of complex behaviors based on an integration of knowledge, values, and skills; and 2) critical thinking, decision-making and judgment, and self-awareness underpinning practice (Bogo & Regehr, et al., 2006; Cheetham & Chivers, 2005). Therefore an examination is needed which assesses these two components.

Empirical support for OSCE in social work

Although systematic study of the use of client simulations is limited (Logie et al., in press) recently there is growing interest in testing the use of OSCE in social work (Bogo et al., 2011; Lu et al., 2011; Rawlings, 2008). SSHRC funded research conducted at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work tested a 5-scenario OSCE adapted for social work including a performance rating scale, a reflective dialogue, and a reflection rating scale. Testing with social work students, recent graduates, and experienced practitioners demonstrated high internal consistency for the scales, moderate reliability across the five stations, and construct validity (Bogo et al., 2011).

The first Canadian study of OSCE in social work was conducted at FIFSW and demonstrated that it is a reliable and valid assessment method with high student acceptance.

Components of the OSCE

1. The conduct of the first 15 minutes of a usual client-social worker interview to assess students'

2. performance of practice behavior: all students conduct such an interview at the completion of the Lab course at the end of the first semester, Year 1 of the Masters Program

- Students are expected to demonstrate behaviors associated with competence in:
- developing a collaborative relationship
- conducting an eco-systemic assessment
- setting the stage for collaborative goal setting
- demonstrating cultural competence

Raters use a performance rating scale to rate students' behaviors on a 5 point scale with descriptors for each level.

3. Written responses to structured questions to stimulate reflection and assess students' integration of key social work concepts.

Reflection consists of responses to a structured set of questions to elicit students' impressions and critical thinking about their own performance and to assess the way in which students:

- conceptualize practice, i.e., use knowledge and critical thinking to understand the practice situation, how/why to intervene, and integrate concepts related to diversity
- use self in an intentional manner including self-awareness and self-regulation
- assess their performance in the interview with implications for their future learning as a professional.

Raters use a reflective dialogue rating scale to rate students' reflections along a 5 point scale with descriptors for each level.

OSCE adapted for the Lab course

This process provides a standardized method to evaluate student learning, using standardized patients/clients, a standardized format for reflection, and two ratings scales.

1. All first year students are enrolled in Social Work Practice Laboratory. The course is given a Credit/No Credit grade based on students' demonstration of competence in a number of evaluation activities, one of which is an interview role play with a fellow student followed by a written reflective analysis at mid-term. The final assignment is a one-station 15 minute interview with a standardized client rated by an instructor in the Lab course other than students' instructor.
2. Following the interview each student receives immediate feedback from the trained actor/clients.

3. Students also receive brief feedback from the rater.
4. Each student then spends 20 minutes in the computer lab and completes a written reflection guided by a structured set of questions. The reflection is evaluated by the rater who observed the interview using the standardized reflection rating scale.
5. Performance and reflection ratings of each student on the OSCE is forwarded to the student's course instructor who incorporates this information in written feedback to the student as part of the overall evaluation in the course.

Use of OSCE for the Year 1 Field Practicum (subsequent to Lab course)

As the foundation preparatory practice courses, the Elements of Social Work Practice and the companion course the Social Work Practice Laboratory aim to provide students with content essential for professional practice. The Lab is a prerequisite for entry into the practicum. It is essential that as students transition into their field experience they have the opportunity to build on and integrate the learning that occurred in the Lab.

Following completion of the Lab all students will receive a summary written evaluation from their course instructor. This will include feedback from the OSCE, as well as general feedback about their progress in the Lab. Strengths and areas to develop will be identified. Students are required to bring this evaluation to their practicum instructor. This requirement is outlined in the course syllabus and in the practicum manual. The instructor will then assist the student to develop a learning contract based on the identified learning needs.

References

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