Social Work Students’ Understanding of Professionalism
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The Research Questions
• How do BSW students rank the importance of professionalism in social work?
• How do BSW students self-assess their own level of professionalism?

The Definition: Actualized by Six Professional Behaviors
Initiation of Communication: Demonstrates initiative, reliability, dependability
Respect and Collegiality: Demonstrates respect and collaboration in relationships and interactions; awareness and non-judgmental responses to diversity and diverse opinions
Self-Awareness: Demonstrates ability to assess impact of verbal and non-verbal communications and modify as appropriate
Professional Engagement: Demonstrates appropriate participation, attendance, punctuality, attentiveness, use of technology, side conversations
Professional Humility: Views self as learner, responsive to feedback, demonstrates evidence of motivation to improve oneself
Compliance with Professional Requirements: Adheres to NASW Code of Ethics, agency and field policies, University and program policies

The Results
N=31 junior BSW students
• Narrative comments and scores from pre-tests and post-tests indicate students did not have a common understanding of professionalism.
• Students changed their level of importance ratings and self-assessment ratings after participating in the professionalism workshop and at the six-month reassessment, suggesting a change in their understanding of the six professional behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Behavior</th>
<th>Pre Test</th>
<th>Post Test</th>
<th>6 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.81</td>
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<td>Self-Awareness</td>
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<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<td>Engagement</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.06</td>
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<td>Humility</td>
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<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Impact
Narrative comments on self-ratings reveal personal awareness:
• Need to initiate conversations and participate more
• Get easily distracted in class
• Need to limit side conversations
• Overly sensitive to feedback
• Need to learn policies
Focus groups held in spring revealed mixed impressions:
• Having a rubric helps bring awareness to professional behaviors
• Having a rubric doesn’t impact classroom behaviors
• Feedback from professors is more important than self-assessment
• Is there a problem with students being unprofessionalism in field?
• Professional behaviors don’t translate to service projects, agency staff set the expectations

The Discussion
Implications:
• Raising the topic and definitions is positive
• Students possess some self-awareness
• Continual education is needed

Limitations:
• Measuring understanding
• Isolating independent variables
• Developmental growth/Maturation

Applications:
• Continue to offer a Professionalism workshop for new students
• Offer to Human Service Agencies as part of employment orientation

Future Research:
• MSW students
• Other Professions-Education, Nursing, etc.
• Practicing Social Workers
• Focus on communication (in self-ratings)

Special thanks to the WTFS Program, leaders, and group members; the UWGB Provost office; research assistant Barb Dvoracek; and my Social Work colleagues for their steady inspiration and support.