

# 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 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.

## 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 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 Methodology

In September, at the start of their Social Work Program, students completed a pre-test in which they ranked the importance of, and provided a self-assessment for, the six professional behaviors. After participating in a workshop that discussed the professional behaviors in detail, students completed a post-test. After six months in the Program, students provided an additional self-assessment using a similar rubric.

Level of Importance for Social Work 1=Low Level 2=Moderate Level 3=High Level 4=Very High Level	Communication	Pre Test	3.74
		Post Test	3.94
Respect	Pre Test	3.92	
	Post Test	4.00	
Self-Awareness	Pre Test	3.71	
	Post Test	3.93	
Engagement	Pre Test	3.71	
	Post Test	3.97	
Humility	Pre Test	3.63	
	Post Test	3.97	
Compliance	Pre Test	3.84	
	Post Test	3.93	
Self-Rating 1=Unacceptable 2=Needs Improvement 3=Acceptable 4=Outstanding	Communication	Pre Test	2.92
		Post Test	3.26
		6 Months	3.19 ↓
	Respect	Pre Test	3.42
		Post Test	3.45
		6 Months	3.81
	Self-Awareness	Pre Test	2.97
		Post Test	3.06
		6 Months	3.44
	Engagement	Pre Test	3.03
		Post Test	3.22
		6 Months	3.31
Humility	Pre Test	3.06	
	Post Test	3.26	
	6 Months	3.56	
Compliance	Pre Test	2.74	
	Post Test	2.97	
	6 Months	3.52	

## 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)

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