AHEAD Professional Competencies

Introduction
The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) published the original professional standards document, and this is the second version. In 2020, AHEAD convened a group to complete a Delphi Study. The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) presents revised Professional competencies, formerly referred to as Standards, to its membership and the profession at large. The current version reflects the maturation of the postsecondary disability resources profession.

Professional competencies are intended to guide the formulation of a vision for disability resources practices. The competencies are intended to reflect the breadth of skills and knowledge required of professionals practicing in the accessibility and disability resources space in higher education. The primary intent of the competencies is to promote effective and efficient facilitation of disability access to disabled individuals in higher education. The overall intent is to promote authentic access, inclusion, and equity.

The Competency Framework
- **Competency** refers to the skills, knowledge, and Traits professionals must possess
- **Key Attributes** are attainable outcomes professionals should meet to demonstrate overall achievement of a competency

The Connection to Program Standards
- Correlations between the Competencies and the 2021 AHEAD Program Standards are provided.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Disability is a crucial aspect of diversity. Accessibility through good and inclusive design enables disabled individuals to participate. Disability-related accommodations provide equity for equal opportunity. Disability resources professionals serve as subject-matter experts on their campuses concerning disability access and accommodations., which advances the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Competency #1: Maintain current critical knowledge and practice to facilitate disability access in higher education

Key Attributes of Competency #1

1.1. Understand the process for determining reasonable accommodations for qualified students and employees and the development of processes to implement individualized accommodations

1.2. Actualize the process of determining reasonable and appropriate accommodations and/or relevant campus resources based on interpreting a variety of sources of information, including personal narrative, documentation, professional judgment, and other relevant sources

1.3 Facilitate individuals’ understanding of disability identity, including interpretation of documentation and its relation to reasonable and appropriate accommodation

1.4. Articulate disability resource practice and apply knowledge of Section 504, ADA, ADA Amendments, FERPA, Title IX, and FHA

1.5. Maintain relevant professional organization affiliations and engage in ongoing professional development

1.6. Engage with institutional and broader higher ed committees and colleagues to remain current on campus trends and culture

1.7. Maintain general knowledge of K-12 disability access practices to aid student transitions to higher education

1.8. Develop working knowledge of, and competency with, available assistive technology, adaptive equipment, and general digital accessibility (WCAG 2.1)

1.9. Stay apprised of best practice and available technology in relation to implementing testing accommodations in centralized and decentralized testing models

1.10. Maintain knowledge of relevant case law and unique factors related to professional programs including the health sciences and apply best practices in experiential learning setting such as clinicals and internships

Connection to Program Standards: Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 4.2, 4.2.3, 4.3, 5.2

Competency #2: Possess a philosophical approach to education rooted in an in-depth understanding of multicultural awareness and the embodiment of DEI focused leadership

Key Attributes of Competency #2
2.1. Develop a reflective practice centered on enhancing self-understand and awareness in the context of dynamic educational environments representing individuals with unique lived experiences
2.2. Engage in educational endeavors that enhance understanding of the evolutionary formation of identity intersectionality, and justice and equity within the context of higher education
2.3. Promote initiatives that eliminate bias, address the necessity to remove systemic barriers
2.4. Consistently and intentionally amplify the lived experiences and honor identities of Disabled persons

**Connection to Program Standards:** Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

**Competency #3:** Apply appropriate student and adult development theories/practices to engage with and support students in developing appropriate and effective self-advocacy skills.

**Key Attributes of Competency #3**
3.1. Utilize knowledge of student and adult development theories and apply them in the work with disabled students
3.2. Develop an understanding of the intricacies associated with implementing a compliance-founded resource that provides student-focused support through a Social Justice framework which incorporates features of civil rights and compliance
3.3. Empower disabled students to exercise their rights and uphold their responsibilities through the development of transparent policies, processes, and procedures
3.4. Empower students and employees to be good advocates for access and inclusion as well as assist to develop their disability identity
3.5. Actively engage with students to seek feedback and ensure access to campus-wide activities, services, and programs
3.6. Establish rapport with each student to learn about and incorporate their lived experiences and promote disability as diversity
3.7. Knowing appropriate referral processes to connect students to campus and community and resources (e.g., counseling center, learning enhancement, vocational rehabilitation, social service agencies, etc.) - Reframe as “Knowing” (and look to see if this is in other locations)

**Connection to Program Standards:** Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

3.1, 3.2
Competency #4: Understand personal capacity to manage work responsibility and advocate for personal and professional needs

Key Attributes of Competency #4
4.1. Demonstrate understanding of working within scope of role
4.2. Develop a personal understanding and definition of appropriate commitment to work/life balance
4.3. Promote a practice that represents appropriate self-care tenants

Connection to Program Standards: Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

Competency #5: Demonstrates effective analytic and organizational skills

Key Attributes of Competency #5
5.1 Analyze relevant federal and/or state legislation/regulation and organizational structure/culture to develop and implement relevant policies and procedures
5.2. Gather and analyze data to effectively perform ongoing assessment of campus accessibility
5.3. Gather data relevant to the operation of the disability unit to effectively support ongoing assessment according to AHEAD and/or other relevant program standards

Connection to Program Standards: Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards
   1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2

Competency #6: Possess leadership skills necessary to promote educational and professional growth of DS staff members and/or institutional colleagues

Key Attributes of Competency #6
6.1. Understand varying perspectives of leadership approaches and create a personal philosophy of leadership that can be effectively applied to all aspects of work (e.g., supervision, building collaborative partnerships, creating departmental/institutional change, etc.)
6.2. Incorporate strengths-based approaches to influencing those with whom we work closest, empowering our colleagues and/or staff members to recognize, hone, and build upon personal talents
6.3. Capitalize on personal strengths and areas of growth as leaders when working with our teams and others in order to build an effective office and institutional culture
**Connection to Program Standards**: Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

1.1, 1.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2

**Competency #7**: Possess interpersonal skills that encourage strong collaborative partnerships with campus stakeholders to create and sustain a positive disability culture

**Key Attributes of Competency #7**

1. Actively model, through concrete actions and behaviors, the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity to foster an environment of disability allyship among students, staff and faculty.
2. Develop an understanding of the political structure and ideology of your institution in order to develop and promote a culture of disability allyship.
3. Contribute to the development of communication channels between institutional units.
4. Maintain an effective working relationship with campus legal counsel.
5. Work interactively within and across offices and divisions to carry out the mission, vision, and goals of the office and institution.
6. Form in-depth partnerships with other campus operations that work with disabled students regarding accessibility considerations.
7. Maintain formal and informal connections with relevant and applicable state, provincial, or community resources.

**Connection to Program Standards**: Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.3 (2.3.2), 3.1 (3.1.4, 3.1.8), 3.3. (3.3.2)

**Competency #8**: Possess necessary skills and aptitude to develop educational materials and trainings for the campus community

**Key Attributes of Competency #8**

1. Knowledge of accessible course design and faculty curriculum development.
2. Utilize necessary resources to develop training materials, whether individually or within the institution and access to training to use said resources.
3. Able to effectively develop and present information in multiple formats, such as presentations, documents, website pages, etc.
4. Participate in departmental and institutional policies/procedures development as it pertains to ADA related grievances, documenting intake interviews/interactive processes for providing accommodations, and intersections between Disability Services and partner offices (e.g., Title IX, Facilities, Housing, etc.).
**Connection to Program Standards:** Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

1.1, 2.1, 4.3

**Competency #9:** Understand the importance of continuous engagement in learning opportunities that enhance current knowledge and practical implications of disability services within higher education and applicable fields.

**Key Attributes of Competency #9**
Utilize available professional development opportunities through national, regional, and local agencies

9.1. Conceptualize meaning of continuous updates pertaining to relevant case law and guidance, adaptive technologies available for disabled students, and philosophical approaches to creating accessible educational environments

9.2. Actualize knowledge/understanding to create campus-based programs for students, faculty, and staff that promote in-depth awareness of disability theory and practice

9.3. Contribute to the professional organization through the sharing of innovative thoughts and practices

9.4. Effectively leverage relationships with disability professionals across the nation to promote and procure holistic perspectives and approaches to disability services

9.5. Engage in mentorship opportunities (both as mentor and mentee) with colleagues across the nation to promote a spirit of continuous learning, personal/professional support, and community building

**Connection to Program Standards:** Correlations between key attributes of the competencies and performance indicators of the new AHEAD Program Standards

2.1 (2.1.6, 2.1.7), 2.3, 5.1 (5.1.3), 5.2