

# **The AHEAD Professional Competencies: Supporting Excellence in Disability Resource Practice**

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# Meet the Presenters



# **History of Competencies and Process for Revision**

Discussing How We Arrived At This Moment In Disability Resource  
Practice

# Standards and How They Became Competencies

- Changes in the DS field from 2000-2022
- Need to update what is expected of DS Professionals with the advent of technology and assistive technology
- Growing need on campuses to have expanded established knowledge, skill, and experience thresholds off of which to base recruitment and training

# Revising and Updating the Competencies

- Aspirational revised competencies were developed based on the advancement of DRO
- Involved multiple steps with many different stakeholders, including the AHEAD community, to come to consensus on the structure and content of the competency model

# Why A Competency Model?

- Guide the formulation of a vision for disability resources practices
- Reflect the breadth of skills and knowledge required of professionals
- Promote effective and efficient facilitation of disability access
- Promote authentic access, inclusion, and equity

# How AHEAD Structures the Competency Model

- **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
- Correlations between the Competencies and the 2021 AHEAD Program Standards are provided.
- Each competency is reflective of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion considerations, including context in which progress in the competencies is made and access to resources for progressing in competencies

# The Nine Competencies

- **Competency 1:** Maintain current critical knowledge and practice to facilitate disability access in higher education
- **Competency 2:** Possess a philosophical approach to education rooted in an in depth understanding of multicultural awareness and the embodiment of DEI focused leadership
- **Competency 3:** Apply appropriate student and adult development theories/practices to engage with and support students in developing appropriate and effective self-advocacy skills

# The Nine Competencies (cont.)

- **Competency 4:** Understand personal capacity to manage work responsibility and advocate for personal and professional needs
- **Competency 5:** Demonstrate effective analytic and organization skills
- **Competency 6:** Possess leadership skills necessary to promote educational and professional growth of DS staff members and/or institutional colleagues

# The Nine Competencies (cont.)

- **Competency 7:** Possess interpersonal skills that encourage strong collaborative partnerships with campus stakeholders to create and sustain a possibility disability culture
- **Competency 8:** Possess necessary skills and aptitude to develop educational materials and training for the campus community
- **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

# **Breaking Down the Competencies**

Discussing Themes and Relevance of the Competencies to  
Disability Resources Practice

# Theme One: Understanding the Foundations of Disability Resources

- **Key Points**

- The Interactive Process
- Working Knowledge of Relevant Laws and Regulations
- Utilizing Student Development Theory and Educational Research on College Student Success

- **Important Takeaway:**

- To be successful in Disability Resources Practice, professionals must have strong knowledge around the concepts that have been enshrined in our work through case law, federal and state regulations, and collective acceptance of best practice

- **Pertinent Competencies: 1, 3, 8**

# Theme Two: Understanding Institutional Dynamics

- **Key Points**

- Strong Understanding of Institutional Structure and Characteristics
- Building Relationships within the Institution

- **Important Takeaways:**

- Disability Resource Practice looks very different depending on the institution at which one works, the unique student, faculty, and staff populations that exist at that institution, the established culture(s) of the institution, and the ways in which practice integrates into the institution's mission and vision.
- Our work also does not exist in a silo and often we need the support of well-trained and willing campus partners to find success in our decisions translating into meaningful outcomes of access for disabled students

- **Pertinent Competencies: 3, 5, 6, 7, 8**

# Theme Three: Engaging in Learning Opportunities and Professional Development

- **Key Points**

- Identifying and Making Space for Continued Learning
- Engaging in Learning Opportunities Earnestly and with Purpose
- Conceptualizing How Learning Translates into Practice
- Connecting Beyond One's Institution to the Field

- **Important Takeaways:**

- As evidenced by the past decade or two in Disability Resources Practice, we are never finished learning about best practice. Disability Resources Professionals are always subject to exposure to new knowledge, skillsets, and paradigms about practice.
- These learning opportunities don't always occur organically and may require staying connected to other professionals in the field or intentionally creating environments in which professional development and learning can be practiced free of consequences

- **Pertinent Competencies: 2, 8, 9**

# Theme Four: Prioritizing Principles of Equity, Inclusion, and Disability Justice

- **Key Points**

- Importance of Individual Work
- Actively Seek Out Opportunities to Promote These Principles

- **Important Takeaways:**

- We know, as evidenced by the lived experiences of the students we work with, that disability is not a monolith.
- Ignoring the impacts of race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, and other identities and lived experiences on how individuals may experience their disability is critical to shape our practice to be more responsive and individualized
- Disability Resource Professionals must not only talk the talk but also walk the walk of equity, inclusion, and disability justice in their practice

- **Pertinent Competencies: 1, 2, 3**

# Theme Five: Cultivating a Sense of Self in a DRP's Practice

- **Key Points**

- Prioritizing and Making Space for Joy and Self-Care
- Establishing a Professional Philosophy and Identity

- **Important Takeaways:**

- Disability Resources Practice is a helping profession and one that many individuals can experience burnout in
- Disability Resources Professionals who are grounded in their own purpose for engaging in this work can more successfully navigate the complexities of secondary trauma, depersonalization, and prioritizing others needs over their own
- Disability Resources Professionals should engage in self-restorative practices as well to find balance and better work-life integration

- **Pertinent Competencies:** 2, 4, 6, 9

# **Integrating the Competencies Into Our Work**

Discussing Individual, Departmental, And Field-Specific  
Implications of the Competencies on Disability Resources Practice

# Practical Applications of Competencies

- Each of the competencies are applicable to Disability Resource Professionals, regardless of the type of institution they work at or how long they have been practicing
- The competencies can often be the foundation of identifying the knowledge, skillsets and experience that define a professional's strengths, and those professional experiences or moments of learning that the professional needs to engage in

# Practical Applications of Competencies (cont.)

- The competencies should be at least part of the foundation of a professional development plan for any Disability Resource Professional
- The competencies are not linearly completed nor are they are a “finish line.” Progress in meeting individual professional goals should be measured by the competencies and calculate institutional context and the direction of the field into that measurement of progress.

# Important Companion Resources

- Intentionally, the authors of the new competencies connected each one to the AHEAD Program Standards to emphasize that individual professional growth and DROs meeting basic expectations of the field are important to each other
- As emphasized in the model, staying connected to the field (through AHEAD, listservs, and community boards) and developing strong collegial and mentor/mentee relationships is critical to progress in knowledge, skills, and experience

# Creating a Competency & Professional Goal Plan

- Successful use of the competencies in professional practices requires intentional individual reflection and work with a supervisor or colleague to assess progress
- Creating a competency plan that iterates from professional goals (or vice versa) can be a way to intentionally structure this work
  - Sample competency plan worksheet available in webinar materials

## Staff Competency/Goal Plan

[Employee Information](#)

Employee Name:  Click or tap here to enter text.      Employee ID:  Click or tap here to enter text.

Job Title:  Click or tap here to enter text.

Reviewing Supervisor:  Click or tap here to enter text.      Goal Period:  Choose an item.

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### How to Complete the Competency Plan

An important step in your career is the development of a plan of action that will measure your growth based on standards adopted by the field, often labeled as competencies. These competencies are often determined to be essential for professionals within a certain field of study or practice and can also include technical standards established by a reputable professional association. The questions below will help you identify what competencies you would like to build your professional goals off of for this particular review year, articulate the objectives you hope to accomplish in working toward those goals, and define how you will demonstrate progress in accomplishing your selected goals.

To assist you in establishing your competency plan for the year, you may desire to consult some of the following resources:

1. [AHEAD Professional Competencies](#): These 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.
2. [ACPA/NASPA Competencies](#): This set of Professional Competency Areas is intended to define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals working in the U.S., regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field. All student affairs professionals should be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the basic list of outcomes under each competency area regardless of how they entered the profession. [An accompanying rubric](#) can be used to identify whether outcomes using these competencies have been met.
3. [National Court Reporters Association Guidelines for Professional Practice](#): For captioners and communication access professionals, the NCRA has established these guidelines to support continued development and practice in the field. The Guidelines for Professional Practice are goals that every member of NCRA should strive to attain and maintain. Members are urged to comply with the guidelines and must adhere to local, state, and federal rules and statutes.

A Department of Student Affairs

# Group Dialogue Sessions

- For teams with multiple staff members or cross-collaborative offices willing to engage in this work
- Group's goal is to **choose one of the nine competencies** and **discuss the following questions:**
  - What are some examples of how this competency is exhibited in our work?
  - What are some ways for us to work toward meeting this competency?
  - Knowledge, skillset, and experience are ever evolving; how do we collectively advance as an office or as a group of professionals?
- Insights are shared back with the team doing this activity
- Helpful for collective learning and team building around shared professional values and goals

# Competency Activity

# Instructions for Activity

- Attendees should **choose one of the nine competencies** and **reflect on the prompts on the following page**
- We will return after 10 minutes of self-reflection to share their insights and to discuss the impact of intentional reflection on the competencies

# Self-Reflection Prompts

- What are some examples of how you have engaged in work that meets some of the outcomes described in the competency?
- What are some of your own professional areas of growth that align with your chosen competency?
- If you have significant experience in Disability Resources Practice, how has your professional practice changed over time through the lens of your chosen competency?
- If you are a new or new-ish Disability Resources Professional, where is a comfortable and reasonable starting place for your own professional journey progressing in your chosen competency?
- As a supervisor or colleague, how can you support others who are progressing in your chosen competency?

# Questions & Comments