

## Competency Assessment Through Student Portfolios

By Genice Dooly and Colleen Schmidt

Are students competent upon graduation? As educators, we must evaluate students to determine if successful learning and comprehension have occurred. One method to assess student learning is the use of portfolios.

The purpose of the portfolio is to provide evidence of growth and competence within a discipline. Portfolios exhibit a progression of student learning from the beginning of the educational program to the end, including self-evaluation and documentation of academic and professional achievements. In the case of the dental hygiene program, this culmination of activities not only addresses specific program competencies but also the University’s general educational competencies. At the end of the two-year program, UA Fort Smith dental hygiene students submit a professional portfolio for evaluation as part of the program’s Practice Management course.

The dental hygiene portfolio includes an introduction specifying the purpose of a portfolio, its contents, the student’s résumé, specific sections for each program competency, and a conclusion. As an introduction to each competency section, the student defines the program competency, includes a minimum of two examples of evidence that demonstrate competence, and specifies when these activities occurred within the curriculum. The competency section ends with the students’ assessments of their strengths and weaknesses on the projects chosen for inclusion, what they

### Contents

Competency Assessment Through Student Portfolios .....	1
Note to Faculty: Membership in General Education Competency Committee .....	2

have learned, and how they plan to incorporate what they have learned into their professional activities. The portfolio concludes with an overall summary, including the students’ reflection of their growth in learning, their knowledge of the profession, and their goals for the future. Competency content includes activities that address both general education and program competencies which are documented from the beginning to the end of the program. Documentation supporting the attainment of program competencies through the portfolio is a capstone measure for faculty to verify that students are competent, ready to enter the workforce, and prepared to serve as productive members of the community.

One of the examples of evidence the dental hygiene students include in their portfolio is documentation of a case study patient. This example of evidence addresses most of the dental hygiene competencies due to the complexity and comprehensiveness of the assignment. The case study includes assessing patients, planning treatments, designing study models, analyzing nutrition, developing a research paper, and presenting the information to faculty and students. The case study assignment also addresses the general education competencies of

computer literacy, communication skills, and analytical skills. In addition, appropriate decision making and evaluation skills are illustrated by the student and assessed by faculty.

Each competency section ends with a self-assessment by the student. The student is required to address the strengths and weaknesses of their performance on the examples of evidence for each competency, what they have learned from these experiences, and how they will apply what they have learned to their future experiences. The dental hygiene portfolios conclude with an overall summary section in which the student reflects upon their growth in learning, their knowledge of the profession, and their plans to maintain competency in the future. The portfolio represents achievement from the initiation level to the attainment of goals and competency.

The University of Arkansas – Fort Smith Dental Hygiene Program addresses graduate competencies throughout the curriculum. Program competencies include, but are not limited to: providing care for the child, adolescent, adult, geriatric and medically compromised patient; providing care for all types of periodontally involved patients; interpersonal and communication skills; assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of all dental patients; and assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of community dental health education programs. The dental hygiene program has defined ten program competencies graduates must meet prior to graduation. Intertwined with the hygiene competencies are the University's general education competencies.

How do we assess attainment of student learning and competence? Testing is an obvious answer, but how can we assess learning from beginning to end? Student portfolios are an excellent tool for faculty and for students. Faculty members use the portfolios for reflection upon their courses, curriculum, and programs. Students likewise gain valuable information from the portfolios, but they also gain a genuine sense of their accomplishments. Students should have a sense of satisfaction upon reflection of their educational programs, reflecting upon where they began, their successes, their hardships, their achievements, and how

### Note to Faculty

#### **Which General Education Competency Committee Are You On?**

Every member of the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith faculty is assigned to serve on one of the General Education Competency Committees. Please take a moment to find out which committee you will be serving on during the 2005-06 academic year. The committee list is available on the Student Learning Web site, <http://www.uafortsmith.edu/Learning/Index>. Click on "Members."

their education will prepare them to be successful, productive citizens in the community.



*Student Learning Matters* is published by the Student Learning Committee of the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith.