



**Abstract Title:** HPI core competencies framework for population health educators, leaders, trainees

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## Introduction

Defining competencies within the health professions allows for shared understanding of the fundamental knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for practice (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). Establishing discipline-specific competencies provides reference points for training, academic preparation, and professional development (Battel-Kirk, Barry, Taub, & Lysoby, 2016). Competency-based education can be embedded in various levels of higher education, including degree programs or within research institutions (Berdrow & Evers, 2011).

## Objectives

The purpose of this student-led project was to create a competency framework for interdisciplinary population health research graduate trainees at Dalhousie University's Healthy Populations Institute (HPI). This framework was designed to identify and guide the development of relevant training and learning opportunities for HPI student research scholars.

## Methods

Data collection was conducted in three phases: 1) environmental scan, 2) consultations, and 3) framework development. First, student research scholars conducted an environmental scan to systematically identify existing, relevant competency frameworks. Based on these frameworks, local experiential learning opportunities and resources available to graduate students were mapped. A framework was drafted using this

preliminary data. Second, consultations were held with trainees and experts. In a focus group format, student research scholars were asked to discuss their perceived needs as future population health professionals and suggest how HPI could assist with skill development. The experts' focus group, consisting of HPI associate and senior scholars, discussed how HPI could best support student research scholars, expanded on the draft framework and resources, and offered ideas for incorporating competencies into HPI programs. The third phase integrated feedback from consultations into the draft framework to create the final competency framework.

## Results

The environmental scan produced a draft competency framework of four guiding principles (capacity building, community, cultural competence, and critical reflection) and six common competencies (communication, leadership, knowledge, programming, support and enable change, and research, policy, and practice). Resource mapping of local organizations demonstrated the applicability of competencies and experiential learning opportunities. Consultations with trainees and experts confirmed the validity of principles and competencies identified in the scan while eliciting further resources and suggestions for skill development to enhance HPI student research training.

## Conclusion

Existing competency frameworks are domain-specific and few focused on developing competencies for interdisciplinary population health research graduate students. This project resulted in a unique framework that can guide the development (or evaluation) of available educational resources. This student-led approach for creating a framework can be adapted to other programs and disciplines.

## References

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