

# ADOLESCENT SBIRT

Screening, Brief Intervention & Referral to Treatment

## EDUCATIONAL EXEMPLAR

## Adolescent SBIRT Simulation Brings a Real-World Learning Experience to a Rural Historically Black College and University Undergraduate Social Work Program during COVID-19

### Background

Tuskegee University (TU) is a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) co-founded by Lewis Adams and Booker T. Washington on July 4, 1881 in Tuskegee, AL (rural area). The College of Arts and Sciences Department of Social Work (SOWK) is an undergraduate Bachelor of Science Social Work (BSW) program erected in 1971 and accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1973. Dr. Jones is the current department head

of social work and assistant professor responsible for program direction, faculty supervision, teaching and research, and has been an adolescent SBIRT champion for the department. The adolescent SBIRT curriculum was implemented in the spring 2020 semester among undergraduate students (social work, health sciences, occupational therapy, nursing, psychology and sociology), faculty, practitioners, preceptors and health care providers. Of the 38 individuals that received the curriculum, the majority were African American

SCHOOL



TUSKEGEE  
UNIVERSITY

AUTHOR

Dr. April Jones  
LMSW

**“This experience was a lot different than what I expected. It was way more in-depth and extensive.**

**...I liked how detailed the simulation was [and] accessible even after you finished.”**

**- Social Work Minor/Health Science Major**

women. Most social work minors were from the health sciences, occupational therapy, or nursing programs with a few from psychology and sociology. TU SOWK majors and minors consist of military reserve officer training corpscadets as well.

## Opportunity

Adolescent SBIRT aligns well with TU SOWK department's mission and values and fits seamlessly within the department's child welfare related program. The Kognito *SBI with Adolescents* online simulation is an added



value to courses related to substance use, health care, and field education. The simulation brings theory into practice allowing students to test their knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes of the social work competencies through role play with virtual adolescents. Additionally it provides educators an opportunity to evaluate how well the teaching content has been introduced, reinforced, or mastered. It also provides students with real-world experiences highlighting the importance of SBIRT from both a social worker and nursing prospective creating inter-disciplinary course dialogue and learning.

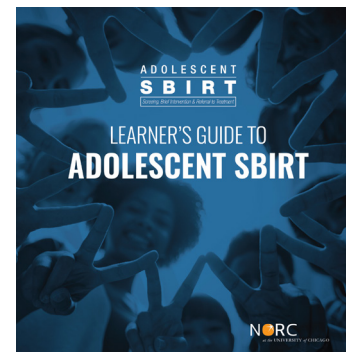
The importance of training community professionals and field instructors in adolescent SBIRT ensures they are abreast of current practice modalities, such as motivational interviewing, and receiving professional development at a low cost. Rural agencies often lack funding for such professional development opportunities, so it is important to provide cost effective opportunities such as *SBI with Adolescents* simulation to enhance rural professionals' practice and field instruction with students.

Implementing the adolescent SBIRT curriculum has had a holistic impact among both students and professionals by filling a much needed gap. Specifically, students need real-world practice prior to field placement to build their confidence working one-on-one with clients, and practitioners need cost-effective, quality and innovative professional development in Alabama's rural areas. In a digital society, students and practitioners need to be prepared for 21st century practice modalities, such as telehealth. The *SBI with Adolescents* simulation provides a safe environment where students and practitioners can practice without concerns for liability and are provided immediate feedback on how to redirect errors when delivering a brief intervention with clients.

## Methods

TU SOWK department utilized various components of the

adolescent SBIRT curriculum including the *Learner's Guide to Adolescent SBIRT* and companion slide deck, sample syllabus, on-demand webinars, and the *SBI with Adolescents* simulation.



The course content covered screening, brief interventions utilizing motivational interviewing skills, and referral to treatment, with an assignment related to the virtual simulation. The educational setting for students was in-person up until the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the remote instruction format was used to complete the simulation with introduction to the simulation content through lecture PowerPoint presentations, video demonstration, fliers, and handouts. For practitioners the virtual simulations were introduced via a conference presentation. The estimated hours of instruction for students was three hours and practitioners one hour. Data was collected from post skills assessment conversation embedded in the simulation that assess individuals competency in utilizing SBI using motivational interviewing strategies with adolescents.





## Results

A key achievement of this initiative was that most students scored 80% or better on the skills assessment indicating increased knowledge about motivational interviewing and practice skills. For the students who scored below 80% they learned of their growth areas for practice and understood from the virtual simulation coach why their thought process and choice of responses were not the best option(s).

Feedback received from professionals included a sense of accomplishment in gaining new knowledge about motivational interviewing skills that can be utilized with adolescents. Additionally practitioners that received the training were excited to learn about the availability of an affordable training curriculum that can be used for professional development.

What is most rewarding is that students and professionals are acquiring new knowledge and practicing their motivational interviewing skills through a cost effective program. This was most evident in students written reflective assignments. Collectively students enjoyed the simulations, specifically being able to practice motivational interviewing skills in a virtual environment gave them the opportunity to see what it was like working with clients without the fear of making a mistake. The virtual coach made the students feel comfortable throughout the session; and, when debriefing in

**“I learned how to use change talk with a client... I learned a lot about adolescents and the way they cope with substance abuse issues... I learned about the different types of reflections, [and] I learned that insightful affirmations could help establish rapport.”**

**- Junior Intern,  
Social Work BSW Major**

class the expression of joy on the students faces only reinforced that they enjoyed engaging with the technology and found the assignment beneficial. This was an invaluable collaboration that has brought innovation in teaching that normally could not have been done due to limited funding.

## Discussion

The findings from this initiative fit within the broader social work or inter-professional curriculum requirements (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2015) through the integration of theoretical concepts to practice. There is a need for more competency-based education beyond use of service-learning and internships that directly address the curriculum content with an interactive practice scenario. The *SBI with Adolescents* simulation fills this gap by providing

a real-life experience with virtual humans with real-time professional feedback.

Some of the barriers to implementation included IRB approval and COVID-19 delays. After processing the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic students were able to better relate to clients experiences and the potential for increased use of substances during social distancing. This created enthusiasm for adolescent SBIRT and motivated students to complete the virtual simulation. This in turn created a need to train faculty expeditiously during COVID-19 on the dissemination of information about the simulation as well as how to facilitate the uptake of the simulation.

It was not expected that the students would buy-in to the adolescent SBIRT curriculum as well as they did due to prior experiences with mixed reality simulations (MRS). MRS is a real-time simulation with a professional actress trained in social sciences. Some students reported that they enjoyed the *SBI with Adolescents* simulation more than MRS and seemed more comfortable with the feedback provided by the virtual coach rather than a client avatar, faculty and peer feedback that happens during or immediately after MRS. Use of the virtual coach minimized students anxiety and pressure to perform. The students found the additional adolescent SBIRT



curriculum resources invaluable and noted they would be keeping them for future practice. Most of all, students reported it was beneficial to their learning to have multiple response options to select from when communicating with the client avatar. This allowed students to apply critical thinking skills in determining the best response option to motivate the client towards change by eliciting change talk. Moreover, seeing the client avatars reaction to specific response options assisted

students in learning interviewing techniques to engage clients through the change process.

Although COVID-19 was unexpected and created challenges for instructors, once faculty and students overcame the initial shock, the adolescent SBIRT curriculum provided a way to engage students in learning with an informative and innovative activity using technology. Students in rural areas did report poor internet connection which made getting through the simulation more

difficult and time consuming than would have been if on campus. Those students received an alternate assignment and were able to listen to other student's discussions of the simulation. This was an unfortunate impact to learning due to COVID-19. Some key factors to increase uptake and sustainability of the adolescent SBIRT training curriculum is funding to continually support higher education at no cost for courses that align with the simulation and to offer curriculums across age groups.

## A few quotes from students' include:

"I can apply this learning to all aspects of my work when working with a client. Understanding the basics will help me grow as a social worker. It is important to know confidentiality, screening, brief intervention example phrases, referral to treatment, summary of content, follow-up, and support. These are the major things I learned while taking my stimulation. I believe practicing this stimulation periodically would really help me know how to work with different groups."

- **Senior BSW major**

"I can apply the learning experience from this simulation assignment to my future experiences with patients once I attain my RN license, upon my graduation."

- **Senior Nursing major**

"This experience was a lot different than what I expected. It was way more in-depth and extensive than I expected. The way the simulation explained why or why not each statement should or should not be used really helped give insight on the type of conversations you want to have with your patients. Also, I liked how detailed the simulation was with every answer and phrase. Similarly, I liked how the simulation made information accessible even after you finished the level the information was available for review."

- **Social Work Minor/Health Science Major**

"I learned how to use change talk with a client. This experience was way different than I expected. I learned a lot about adolescents and the way they cope with substance abuse issues. In this

training, I have learned about the different types of reflections, such as double-sided and amplified. I used reflections to move the conversation forward by suggesting the thoughts or feelings the teen might express next. That was a new technique that I learned through this activity. I learned that insightful affirmations could help establish rapport."

- **Junior Intern, Social Work BSW major**

"As a nursing major, I'm going to encounter a lot of teenagers with substance use so having this knowledge from this training can help me to encourage them more to decide upon what's best for them to recover."

- **Junior Nursing major/social work minor**

## Additional Suggestions for Implementing Adolescent SBIRT into Social Work Education

- Providing a variety of settings in the simulations, specifically settings and attire of a social worker or nursing student as opposed to a school counselor or teacher. This will enhance the overall experience making it more realistic. Allowing for the customization of scenes, characters, and scenarios is one possible solution.
- Aligning course questions from social work content to the training would make it seamless for educators to integrate into their classroom curriculum.
- Randomizing questions would prevent cheating.
- Include a reflection post- simulation that is sent to the professor or downloadable for the student to upload to their learning management system would be a nice addition.
- Granting a certificate of completion or certification in motivational interviewing would be helpful for students.
- Lastly, providing more incentives for using the simulation or increasing the pay to benefit programs scholarship or instruction funds is one way to increase student participation.

### References


- Council on Social Work Education. (2020). *Specialized Practice Curricular Guide for Substance Use Social Work Practice*. Alexandria, VA. Retrieved from [https://cswe.org/Education-Resources/2015-Curricular-Guides/2015-Substance-Use-Guide-Web-Version?\\_zs=6p22j1&\\_zl=bnpv6](https://cswe.org/Education-Resources/2015-Curricular-Guides/2015-Substance-Use-Guide-Web-Version?_zs=6p22j1&_zl=bnpv6)
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Retrieved from <https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS/2015EPASandGlossary.pdf.aspx>
- Council on Social Work Education. (2012). *Curricular Resource on Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment: Mapping CSWE 2015 EPAS to SBIRT*. Alexandria, VA. Retrieved from <https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/SBIRT-Curricular-Resource/SBIRT-Curricular-Resource.pdf>
- Tuskegee University College of Arts and Sciences Department of Social Work.(n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.tuskegee.edu/programs-courses/colleges-schools/cas/social-work>


### Recommended Citation

Jones, A. (2020). *Adolescent SBIRT Simulation Brings a Real-World Learning Experience to a Rural Historically Black College and University Undergraduate Social Work Program during COVID-19*. [Brochure]. Bethesda, MD: NORC at the University of Chicago.



**Dr. April Jones,**  
LMSW  
Chair  
Tuskegee University,  
Department of Social  
Work

 <https://www.tuskegee.edu/news/jones-named-new-social-work-department-head>

 [ajones@tuskegee.edu](mailto:ajones@tuskegee.edu)