

Spiritual and Religious Competencies: A National Survey of CACREP- Accredited Programs

*J. Scott Young, Craig Cashwell, Marsha Wiggins-Frame, and
Christine Belaire*

In this study of 94 Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited counselor education programs, 69% of respondents reported their programs addressed spiritual and religious issues; however, only 46% of CACREP liaisons perceived themselves as *prepared* or *very prepared* to integrate material related to spirituality and religion in counseling into their teaching and supervision activities. In addition, only 28% of respondents viewed their colleagues as similarly capable of addressing these issues as a component of counselor preparation. The authors discuss implications for training and practice.

The vast majority of individuals in the United States have reported that they are spiritual or religious (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Although the terms *religion* and *spirituality* are related, for the purpose of this article, Kelly's (1995) definitions are used. According to Kelly (1995), spirituality refers to "a personal affirmation of a transcendent connectedness to the universe" and religion is the "creedal, institutional, and ritual expression of spirituality that is associated with world religions and denominations" (p. 4). According to a 1991 Gallup poll, 94% of adult Americans believe in God or a universal spirit. In addition, 68% of adult Americans are members of a church, synagogue, or place of worship, and 58% of the same population rate religion as being very important in their lives (Gallup, 1993).

Despite these statistics, many counselors do not address religious or spiritual issues in their work with clients (Kelly, 1995). Some believe they are unequipped to deal with clients' spiritual or religious beliefs and practices because they have not received training in this area (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobson, 1987; Genia, 1994; Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Others are skeptical about religion and spirituality because of the conflict between the scientific, objective perspective of psychology and the transcendent, subjective aspects of religion and spirituality (Lovinger, 1984; Pattison, 1978; Prest & Keller, 1993; Rayburn, 1985; Wallwork & Wallwork, 1990). Still others believe that religion and spirituality are best discussed only within an ecclesiastical setting (Thayne, 1997). Counselors' personal experiences with religion

J. Scott Young and Christine Belaire, Counselor Education and Educational Psychology, Mississippi State University; Craig Cashwell, Department of Counseling, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Marsha Wiggins-Frame, Counseling Psychology and Counselor Education, University of Colorado at Denver. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to J. Scott Young, 508F Allen Hall, PO Box 9727, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762 (e-mail: jsyoung@colled.msstate.edu).

or spirituality and their assumptions about it also affect the way they work with clients' religious or spiritual concerns (Frame, 1996; Grimm, 1994; Stander, Piercy, MacKinnon, & Helmeke, 1994).

Recently, however, more attention has been given to religion and spirituality in the therapeutic area. Examples of this increased interest are the inclusion of religion as an element of human diversity in the American Counseling Association's (ACA, 1995) code of ethics and that of the American Psychological Association (1992); the inclusion of spiritual problems as a V-code in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994); and, most recently, a number of important publications dedicated to religion and psychotherapy (Hall & Hall, 1997). In addition, "religious and spiritual values" are used in the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP, 2001, p. 61) standards in the common core area of Social and Cultural Foundations. Thus, there is a growing awareness in the mental health field that religion and spirituality are one aspect of clients' culture (Pate & Bondi, 1992) that should be considered in the counseling process.

Spirituality and Religion in Training

Despite the increased openness to addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling, these topics seem to receive modest to mixed treatment in counselor training (Kelly, 1994). In his study, Kelly (1994) found that of 341 accredited and nonaccredited counselor education programs, only 25% reported that religion and spirituality were included as a course component. In Pate and High's (1995) study of CACREP-accredited counselor training programs, 60% of the respondents reported attention given to clients' religious belief and practices in the Social and Cultural Foundations core area. In a study of 48 programs accredited only by CACREP (as opposed to programs with multiple accreditations), Kelly (1997) found that slightly more than half reported that spirituality and religion were included in some aspect of their training programs. However, to date, no research has addressed counselor educators' ability to train students to address spirituality issues.

The Summit on Spirituality

In response to a desire among some counselor educators to infuse spirituality into counselor education, leaders of the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling invited 15 individuals who had published books or articles on spirituality and counseling to a 2-day meeting in Belmont, North Carolina, in October of 1995. This meeting was the first Summit on Spirituality (Miller, 1999). An outcome of this meeting and four subsequent sessions held at ACA national conferences and Association for Counselor Education and Supervision conferences was a description of spirituality and the development of a series of competencies. These competencies address four knowledge domains: (a) general knowledge of spiri-

tual phenomena, (b) awareness of one's own spiritual perspective, (c) understanding of clients' spiritual perspective, and (d) spiritually related interventions and strategies (see Appendix). In addition, participants in the Summit on Spirituality supported efforts to include training on spiritual and religious issues in the CACREP standards and to survey ACA members to determine their needs and concerns (Miller, 1999).

Young, Frame, and Cashwell (1998) surveyed a random sample of 600 ACA members regarding the perceived importance of the competencies for addressing spiritual issues and how capable they believed themselves to be in each of the skill and knowledge areas. Results provided empirical support for the importance of the competencies. An overall mean rating of the importance of the concepts for effective clinical practice was a 4.14 on a 5-point scale. Respondents, however, reported a need for specific training in spiritually oriented techniques, interventions, and research in order to be able to address spiritual and religious issues in counseling (Young et al., 1998). Thus, it seemed that there was interest among counselors in addressing religion and spirituality in their work, but there was evidence that the number of counselor educators who possessed the expertise to provide such training was limited.

This research sought to determine if counselor educators in accredited programs perceive themselves and their colleagues as capable of integrating the competencies related to spirituality and religion into their teaching and supervision activities. The purpose of the present study was to extend the Young et al. (1998) study with counselor educators in CACREP-accredited programs. Although previous researchers (Kelly, 1994, 1997; Pate & High, 1995) have surveyed counselor education programs regarding the inclusion of spiritual and religious issues in counseling, none have used the competencies established at the Summit on Spirituality as a template for the research. Three research questions were addressed. The first research question asked, "How important are each of the competencies for effectively preparing counselors-in-training?" The second question asked, "How well prepared are you to infuse the competencies into your teaching and supervision?" Finally, a third question asked, "How well prepared do you think your current programs' faculty are to infuse the competencies into your curriculum?"

Method

Population and Sample

At the time of data collection (October, 1999), there were 136 counselor education programs accredited by CACREP. The study population consisted of the CACREP liaison listed on CACREP's online directory of accredited programs for all 136 programs. The CACREP liaisons at each program were selected as survey recipients. Because of their role in the self-study and accreditation process, these individuals are familiar with program curriculum content at their institution. Of the 136 survey packets mailed, 94 recipients returned the questionnaire for a 69% return rate. The final sample consisted of indi-

viduals representing institutions offering master's, educational specialist, and doctoral degrees in all program areas accredited by CACREP. Respondents were predominately from public institutions ($n = 70$; 75%). The majority of respondents reported that the institution where they worked did not offer a specific course addressing spiritual and religion issues in counseling ($n = 73$; 78%). However, the majority of participants reported that instruction regarding how to work with issues related to spirituality and religious in counseling was provided at some place in the curriculum ($n = 66$; 70%).

Survey Instrument

The authors constructed a five-part questionnaire using the Summit on Spirituality's list of competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling (see Appendix). In the first portion of the questionnaire, respondents provided information about the counseling program(s) at their university or college (e.g., public/private, degrees available, program areas accredited, and course work that addresses spirituality and religion).

In the second portion, respondents indicated their perceptions of the importance of each of the general competencies for the effective preparation of counselors-in-training by rating each competency on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). Also in this section, respondents rated their own preparation for infusing the competencies into their teaching and supervision and how prepared they believed their current program faculty to be in infusing the competencies into the program curriculum. Participants rated the items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very unprepared*) to 5 (*very prepared*). Finally, using similar Likert-type scales in the third, fourth, and fifth sections of the questionnaire, respondents rated their views of the counselor-based competencies, client-based competencies, and interventions and techniques competencies. The internal consistency for the survey instrument was examined by calculating coefficient alphas. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was .96. Furthermore, reliability coefficients for the four subscales were generally high at .88 for the set of General Competencies, .87 for the Counselor-Based Competencies, .89 for the Client-Based Competencies, and .94 for the Interventions and Techniques Competencies.

Procedure

From the CACREP Internet homepage (<http://www.cacrep.org>), we obtained addresses for the CACREP liaisons. Each of the 136 CACREP liaisons received a cover letter requesting his or her voluntary participation, a copy of the survey questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope. The cover letter included instructions requesting recipients to complete and return the questionnaire within approximately 1 month, at which time the persons who had not responded were sent a follow-up letter and copy of the questionnaire. A

first-round return of 63 (46%) was generated. A complete follow-up mailing to nonrespondents in early November 1999 resulted in 31 additional questionnaires returned, yielding a final response of 94 participants (69%).

Results

To address the first research question regarding the importance of each competency for effectively preparing counselors-in-training, we calculated descriptive statistics (see Table 1). The overall mean importance rating for all competencies was 3.83 (out of 5), which suggests moderately strong agreement among respondents that the competencies are important aspects of the professional preparation of counselors. Only 1 item ("Assist counselors in training in conceptualizing themselves from two different models of spiritual development across the life span") received a mean rating below the midpoint of the 5-point Likert scale, whereas 10 of the 26 items received ratings over 4.0.

In addressing the second research question, Table 2 provides a summary of respondents' ratings of how prepared they believed themselves to be to address the competencies in their teaching and supervision of counselors-in-training. An overall mean rating of 3.3 suggests that, in general, respondents perceive themselves as moderately prepared to infuse the competencies into their teaching and supervision responsibilities. Respondents viewing themselves as very unprepared listed what they needed (additional training, curricular guidelines, or "other") to be adequately prepared to include the competencies in their training and supervision. Eighty-five percent of very unprepared respondents indicated they needed additional training to meet the competencies. Seventy-nine percent of very unprepared respondents indicated the need for curriculum guidelines to meet the competencies. Finally, 27% checked "other" and listed concerns such as additional funding and greater flexibility within the curriculum as needed to address the competencies effectively.

The third research question asked CACREP liaisons to rate the preparedness of other faculty members in their program to adequately address the spirituality competencies as part of the curriculum (see Table 2). The overall mean rating of 2.93 suggests that respondents viewed their colleagues as being less prepared than they themselves were for this task.

Finally, an analysis was conducted to determine if differences existed between respondents whose programs are housed in a public versus a private institution, the rationale being that programs housed in private institutions might have a greater religious focus. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted that revealed no significant differences in ratings of the competencies for these two groups, $F(3, 79) = 1.137, p > .05$.

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study suggest that faculty members who are CACREP liaisons in accredited counselor education programs are in moderately strong

TABLE 1

Importance of Spirituality Competencies

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Competencies		
A general understanding of how issues of spirituality are relevant to the counseling profession.	4.05	0.95
Explain how spirituality is understood from a variety of perspectives that represent the diversity of clients with whom counselors work.	4.12	0.90
Describe the possible relationship among various points of view of spirituality such as psychospiritual, religious, spiritual, transpersonal, including their similarities and differences.	3.36	1.08
Describe the basic beliefs of various spiritual systems including world religions, the spirituality of indigenous people, agnosticism, and atheism.	3.24	1.14
Explain at least two models of human spiritual development across the life span.	3.34	1.13
Describe theory, research, and clinical evidence that indicate the relationships between spirituality and mental health.	3.87	1.06
Operate from a solid ethical base when combining spiritual issues with counseling methods.	4.46	0.93
Counselor-Based Competencies		
An understanding of and ability to explain how the counselor's own spiritual perspective is important to the counseling process.	4.10	0.91
Assist counselors-in-training in identifying key events in their lives that have contributed to the development of their spiritual perspective and explain the contribution of these events.	3.49	1.04
Identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and values that form the counselor's spiritual perspective and how these may support or hinder respect for and valuing of different spiritual perspectives.	3.98	0.98
Assist counselors-in-training in conceptualizing themselves from two different models of spiritual development across the life span.	2.92	1.17
Engage counselors-in-training in an ongoing process of challenging their attitudes and beliefs that hinder respect for valuing of different spiritual perspectives.	4.07	1.01
Assist counselors-in-training in conceptualizing themselves in terms of research, theory, and clinical evidence that indicate the relationship between spirituality and mental health.	3.60	1.10
Client-Based Competencies		
Provide an understanding of how the client's spiritual perspective is important to the counseling process.	4.13	0.82
Counselors-in-training can demonstrate openness to, empathy with, and acceptance of a variety of spiritual perspectives.	4.46	0.78
Describe the importance of a client's spiritual perspective to the counselor's understanding of the client as a whole.	4.21	0.80
Work to acquire the knowledge needed to better understand a client's spiritual perspective by requesting information from the client and/or outside resources.	3.82	1.01
Identify when one's understanding and/or acceptance of a client's spiritual perspective is insufficient to adequately serve the client.	4.10	1.10
Interventions and Techniques Competencies		
Understand how spiritually related intervention strategies and techniques are important to the counseling process.	3.61	1.02

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Importance of Spirituality Competencies

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Interventions and Techniques Competencies (continued)</i>		
Understand how to assess the relevance of the spiritual domain in a client's therapeutic issues.	3.89	1.10
Use spiritual terms and concepts that are meaningful to a client.	3.78	1.20
Use a client's expressed spiritual perspective in the pursuit of the client's counseling goals.	3.88	1.13
When relevant to the client's goals and stated preferences, apply spiritual development theory to facilitate the client's understanding of his or her present stage/status of life-span spiritual development.	3.59	1.11
Demonstrate techniques for the remediation of problems while facilitating the psychological integration of spirituality.	3.55	1.15
Consult with professionals in the areas of spirituality—including those whom clients consider a spiritual authority, when such a consultation would enhance the service to the client or when one has reached one's limits of acceptance and competence.	3.84	1.12
When one has reached the limits of one's acceptance and competence, seek further education and training or make appropriate referrals.	4.24	0.92

agreement that spiritual and religious issues are an important training issue for the effective preparation of counselors-in-training. On average, respondents rated the importance of the proposed competencies at 3.83 on a 5-point scale. Furthermore, the results of this study were consistent with the findings of Young et al. (1998), in which ACA members who rated the importance of the same competencies to effective counseling practice reported an average rating of 4.14 on a 5-point scale.

In recent years, researchers have found that about half of accredited counseling programs reported including spiritual and religious issues as part of training (Kelly, 1997; Pate & High, 1995), which makes the results of this study interesting for several reasons. First, this study provides empirical support for the inclusion of spiritual and religious knowledge competencies in counselors' training because respondents tended to show moderately strong agreement that the competencies under investigation are important for effective preparation of counselors-in-training. Second, however, just under half of the respondents (46%) viewed themselves as prepared or very prepared to infuse the competencies into their teaching and supervision of counselors, which raises questions regarding the likelihood that counselors-in-training will receive curricular experiences around these spiritual and religious issues. Third, respondents who considered themselves unprepared to address the competencies indicated a clear need for both additional training and for curricular guidelines to provide direction for the infusion of this material.

Although it is important to be cautious when interpreting this finding, it is noteworthy that respondents tended to view themselves as more prepared than other members of their program faculty to train counselors to

TABLE 2

Respondents Rating of Self and Program Faculty Preparation to Address Competencies

Item	<i>n</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Competencies				
How well prepared are you to infuse the general competencies into your teaching and supervision?			3.17	1.13
Additional training needed	17	18.1		
Curriculum guidelines needed	25	26.6		
Other needs	4	4.3		
How well prepared do you think your current program faculty is to infuse the general competencies into your curriculum?			2.86	1.06
Counselor-Based Competencies				
How well prepared are you to infuse the counselor's perspective competencies into your teaching and supervision?			3.32	1.19
Additional training needed	16	17.0		
Curriculum guidelines needed	22	23.4		
Other needs	3	3.2		
How well prepared is your current program faculty to infuse the counselor's perspective competencies into your curriculum?			2.96	1.08
Client-Based Competencies				
How well prepared are you to infuse the client's perspective competencies into your teaching and supervision?			3.49	1.12
Additional training needed	12	12.8		
Curriculum guidelines needed	19	20.2		
Other needs	2	2.1		
How well prepared is your current program faculty to infuse the client's perspective competencies into your curriculum?			3.08	1.01
Interventions and Techniques Competencies				
How well prepared are you to infuse the interventions and techniques competencies into your teaching and supervision?			3.29	1.14
Additional training needed	13	13.8		
Curriculum guidelines needed	22	23.4		
Other needs	4	4.3		
How well prepared is your current program faculty to infuse the interventions and techniques competencies into your curriculum?			2.82	1.03

address issues related to client spirituality and religion. Respondents' average ratings of their colleague's preparation to address the competencies were 2.93 on a 5-point scale, as opposed to 3.3 for themselves. This finding might suggest that although respondents consider their colleagues as more than minimally capable of training counselors to address these competencies, general program faculty are less prepared than respondents.

To accurately interpret the findings of this study, there are several limitations that bear consideration. It is not possible to know from this research what levels of preparation respondents actually possess for addressing the competencies. According to the current results and those of previous researchers, it is unlikely that most counselor educators in the field today had graduate program training in spirituality and religion in counseling. Therefore, the accuracy of respondents' rating of their preparation is unknown. In addition, the current data were collected only from CACREP liaisons familiar with the general content of the curriculum in their program. It is unlikely that these individuals would have a detailed knowledge of all aspects of teaching and supervision in their program. Therefore, results reflect the views of the individuals who completed the questionnaires and not the entire faculty in a particular program. In fact, in some instances, it seemed that individuals other than the CACREP liaison returned the questionnaire, presumably because they were considered more knowledgeable about the area of spirituality and religion than the individual who first received the questionnaire. Finally, it is not known how respondents and nonrespondents differed.

Given the descriptive nature of the current study, future research should examine specific course content (i.e., texts, syllabi, examinations) to understand in greater detail what is actually taught related to spiritual and religious issues in counseling. Although only 22% of respondents indicated that their program had a specific course dealing with spirituality, 69% reported that their program addressed these issues within the curriculum. This is an increase in the number of programs that report addressing spirituality and religion compared with previous research (i.e., Kelly, 1997; Pate & High, 1995). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how spirituality and religion are addressed in these programs. Therefore, obtaining information directly from a variety of program faculty and students would yield firsthand information regarding what counselors-in-training are learning about the competencies under investigation. This type of research would also serve to address another issue raised by the current study, that is, the need for curricular guidelines to assist counselor educators in training students to work effectively with spiritual and religious issues in counseling. Nearly 80% of very unprepared respondents indicated that curriculum guidelines were needed to assist them in addressing issues of spirituality and religion in counseling. Furthermore, 85% of unprepared respondents indicated the need for additional training around these issues. Therefore, keeping in mind that respondents perceived their colleagues as less prepared than themselves, it is possible that the need for curriculum guidelines and training may be even greater than revealed by these results.

The interest of many counselors in spirituality and religion as clinically relevant issues has been well established (Faiver, Ingersoll, O'Brien, & McNally, 2001; Kelly, 1995; Young et al., 1998); however, the comfort and ability of the majority of counselor educators to address these issues seem uncertain. Therefore, there is a need for greater investigation into exactly

what training programs are doing to address these issues. It is likely that content analysis of training programs would reveal greater details regarding what is taught within CACREP-accredited programs. Furthermore, such analysis may assist educators, who are expected to train counselors to meet the spirituality and religion competencies, by providing the groundwork for developing specific training and educational guidelines for preparing counselors to address spiritual and religious issues.

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Appendix

Counselor Competencies: Spirituality in Counseling

1. Believing that a general understanding of spiritual phenomena is important to the counseling process, the counselor can
 - A. Explain how the varieties of spiritual phenomena are understood from the perspective of diversity.
 - B. Discuss possible relationships, including similarities and differences, among various views of spirituality: psychospiritual, religious, spiritual, and transpersonal.
 - C. Describe basic beliefs of various spiritual systems, including the major world religions, indigenous people's spirituality, agnosticism, and atheism.
 - D. Explain at least two models of human spiritual development across the life span.
 - E. Describe research, theory, and clinical evidence that indicate the relationships between spiritual phenomena, on the one hand, and mental health, on the other.
 - F. Explain how the potential power of combining spiritual issues with counseling methods compels the counselor to operate from a solid ethical base.
2. Believing that awareness of one's own spiritual perspective is important to the counseling process, the counselor can
 - A. Describe one's own spiritual perspective.
 - B. Identify key events in one's life that contributed to the development of one's own spiritual perspective and explain how those events contributed.
 - C. Identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and values from one's own spiritual perspective that may support or hinder respect for and valuing of different spiritual perspectives.
 - D. Actively engage in an ongoing process of challenging one's own attitudes and beliefs that hinder respect for and valuing of different spiritual perspectives.

- E. Conceptualize oneself from two different models of human spiritual development across the life span.
 - F. Conceptualize oneself in terms of research, theory, and clinical evidence that indicate relationships between spiritual phenomena and mental health.
3. Believing that an understanding of the client's spiritual perspective is important to the counseling process, the counselor can
 - A. Demonstrate openness to, empathy with, and acceptance of a variety of spiritual phenomena.
 - B. Describe the role of the client's spiritual perspective in an understanding of the client as a whole.
 - C. Acquire knowledge needed to better understand a client's spiritual perspective by requesting information from the client and/or from outside resources.
 - D. Identify when one's understanding and/or acceptance of the client's spiritual perspective is insufficient to adequately serve the client.
 4. Believing that spiritually related intervention strategies and techniques are important to the counseling process, the counselor can
 - A. Assess the relevance of the spiritual domain in a client's therapeutic issues.
 - B. Use spiritual terms and concepts that are meaningful to the client.
 - C. Use the client's spiritual perspective in the pursuit of his or her counseling goals as befits their expressed preferences.
 - D. When relevant to the client's counseling goals and expressed preferences
 - (1) Apply spiritual developmental theory to facilitate client understanding of their present stage/status of life span spiritual development.
 - (2) Share research, theory, and clinical evidence with the client to facilitate their understanding of the relationship between spiritual phenomena and their mental health.
 - E. Demonstrate competent use of techniques for remediation of problems with, facilitation of, enhancement of, and psychological integration of spiritual phenomena.
 - F. Consult with professionals in the area of spirituality, including professionals the client considers to hold spiritual authority, when such consultation would enhance service to the client.
 - G. Having identified limits to one's acceptance or competence, seek consultation, seek further education or training, and/or demonstrate appropriate referral skills.

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