Incorporating Faith, Spirituality, and Religion into College Counseling and Student Affairs Graduate Programs

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Several associations have provided standards and competencies in the area of faith, religion, and spirituality. This article reviews three of those sets of standards and competencies.

As the recognition of faith, spirituality, and religion in student development is considered, it is important to look at training in the graduate programs for college counselor and student affairs professionals. While various associations and organizations have explored this field, this article will focus on three organizations and the guidance they offer for educators who are challenged to expand in this arena.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) have all incorporated faith, spirituality, and religion into the standards and competencies that they advocate for individuals working as educators in the counseling and student affairs fields. Nevertheless, the counselor education and student affairs graduate preparation programs are still challenged to transfer these competencies effectively so that new professionals feel well or even adequately prepared.

Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, and Belaire (2002) found after studying 94 CACREP accredited programs that 70% of the respondents stated their programs addressed spirituality and religion. Furthermore, "half of the respondents viewed themselves as prepared or very prepared to infuse the competencies into their teaching and supervision" (p.28). However, a majority of the individuals who responded did not think of their colleagues as prepared to address these issues.

If we need to put more focus on the issues of faith, religion, and spirituality into our programs we also need to be sure that those of us who are educators in the fields of college counseling and student affairs are competent to be the trainers. Just as we want our graduates to be prepared, so too we need to evaluate our level of preparation. As Parks (2000) states, "Professors have been vulnerable to functioning as less-than-whole persons. The vocation of higher education has been impoverished, and young adults searching for a fitting orientation to ultimate reality – a faith to live by – have been abandoned by faculty and others in the academy who are distinctively positioned to serve the formation of a critical and worthwhile faith" (p. 161-162).

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While it is important for educators to have a strong self-awareness in this area, their ability to provide the needed foundation does not have to be correlated with their own religion, faith, or spiritual foundation. An "authentic respect for others, their relationship abilities and their technical competence, not their personal religiousness or nonreligiousness, constitute the fundamental base for sensitive and effective counseling" (Kelly, 1995, p. 43). We can evaluate our knowledge base and technical competence by reviewing several of the CAS standards, the ASERVIC Spirituality competencies, and the some of the CACREP standards.

Professional Standards and Competencies

In the CAS masters-level graduate program for student affairs professional standards (2002), faith, spirituality, and religion are incorporated in the following areas:

- In part 5b. "There must be extensive examination of theoretical perspectives that describe students' growth in the areas of intellectual, moral, ego, psychosocial, career, and spiritual development; racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, and sexual identity; the intersection of multiple identities; and learning styles throughout the late adolescent and adult lifespan ." (CAS, p. 12)
- In part 5.3a "student development theory, including. . . spiritual development (CAS, p. 15).
- In part 6: Equity and Access "Institutional personnel policies must not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, color, veteran status, religion..." (CAS, p. 16).
- Institutions that incorporate the CAS standards are encouraged to "stress differential strengths and applications of student development theories relative to student age, gender, ethnicity, race, culture, sexual identity, disability, spirituality, national origin, socioeconomic status, and resident/commuter status" (CAS, p. 12). Furthermore, ". . . the curriculum component should include opportunities for the study of student affairs programs and services including . . . religious programs... (CAS, p.13).

In addition to the standards set forth by CAS we are also guided by a set of spiritual competencies that have been developed by ASERVIC. In 1995 the Summit on Spirituality, sponsored by ASERVIC, addressed two important areas: "defining or describing spirituality and exploring key counselor competencies regarding spirituality" (Miller, 1999, p. 499) From this summit emerged the following list of competencies which all counselors should hold. Faculty in our preparation programs should possess these competencies, and graduate students should develop the ability to do the following:

- Explain the relationship between religion and spirituality, including both the similarities and differences.

- Describe the religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices in a cultural context.
- Engage in self-exploration of one's own religious and/or spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity, understanding and acceptance of one's belief system.
- Describe one's religious and/or spiritual belief system. Explain various models of religious and/or spiritual development across the lifespan.
- Demonstrate sensitivity and acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions in the client's communication.
- Identify the limits of one's understanding of a client's religious and/or spiritual expression and if appropriate, demonstrate appropriate referral skills and be able to generate a list of possible referral sources.
- Assess the relevance of the religious and/or spiritual domains in the client's therapeutic issues.
- Be both sensitive to and receptive of the religious and/or spiritual themes in the counseling process as they fit the client's expressed preferences.
- Use a client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the client's therapeutic goals as they fit the client's expressed preferences. (ASERVIC, 1996)

The ASERVIC Summit on Spirituality also supported the inclusion of religious and spiritual issues in the CACREP standards (Miller, 1999). CACREP has included recognition of spiritual and religious issues in the standards. Programs in both College Counseling and Student Affairs are expected to meet these standards.

Social and Cultural Diversity – studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural and diverse society related to such factors as culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical characteristics, education, family values, religious and spiritual values, socioeconomic status and unique characteristics of individuals, couples, families, ethnic group, and communities including all of the following:

a. multicultural and pluralistic trends, including characteristics and concerns between and within diverse groups nationally and internationally;
b. attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities;
c. individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with diverse populations and ethnic groups;
d. counselors' role in social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, and cultural self-awareness, the nature of biases, prejudices, processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination, and other culturally supported behaviors that are detrimental to the growth of the human spirit, mind or body;
e. theories of multicultural counseling, theories of identity development, and multicultural competencies; and
f. ethical and legal considerations. (CACREP, 2001, p. 61)

Also, within the foundations of college counseling and student affairs "the role of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage, nationality, socioeconomic status, family structure, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual beliefs, occupation, and physical and mental status, and equity issues . . ." should be addressed (CACREP, 2001, pp. 80 , 95).

Implications for Training

The CAS standards, the ASERVIC-sponsored competencies, and the CACREP standards all incorporated faith, spirituality, and religion. The challenge to utilize these competencies and standards as guideposts is important. In areas that many educators may need to develop, the challenge can be addressed through a variety of resources, including continuing education workshops, classes, books, and articles (such as those contained in this special issue).

For educators in college counseling and student affairs preparation programs, faith, spirituality, and religion can be incorporated into the curriculum in many ways. These are some example.

a. When looking at the history of college counseling and student affairs the instructor can discuss the history of campus ministries on campuses and the central role many denominations have played in establishing institutions of higher education.

b. When discussing issues, problems, and trends in student development in higher education the instructor can include the role that religion may play in each of the issues.

c. For classes discussing research and program evaluation, instruments could be considered that assess religion, spirituality, and/or faith.

d. When addressing the characteristics of college students, the instructor can include the role of religion as one of the characteristics that may be present.

e. When discussing the impact of different kinds of college environments, instructors can include a discussion of the impact of an environment that cancels classes for one religious holiday and not for another.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples that may help to illustrate opportunities that are already present to incorporate religion, spirituality, and faith into the curriculum and into the training for new professionals in our field. We have standards and competencies we can utilize from our professional associations that challenge us to address this area. As Love (2001) states, "Incorporating faith and spiritual development into courses on student development is an additional means of legitimizing this work; it better prepares student affairs professionals to recognize

elements of spiritual development in the experiences of their students" (p.15). We have opportunities on almost a daily basis to meet this challenge. Illustrating throughout our educational programs how faith, religion, and spirituality are key components to working with the whole student can be a benchmark for all educators.

"At its best, higher education is distinctive in its capacity to serve as a mentoring environment in the formation of critical adult faith. . . . Thus every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith" (Parks, 2000, p. 159). The combined articles in this journal can provide some of the support that educators in our field need to help graduate students learn more about their own unique faith, spiritual, and religious journeys and develop competencies that will strengthen their later work with other students.

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