

Competency 10: Qualitative Assessment of the Spiritual Domain

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Abstract

Integrating spirituality in counseling, when appropriate, can be an effective strategy for facilitating insight, hope, and change (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Furthermore, client involvement in spiritual and/or religious practices has repeatedly been found to be positively related to health and inversely related to physical and mental disorders (Gallup, 2007; Young, Wiggins-Frame, & Cashwell, 2007). However, despite counselors understanding *why* integrating spirituality into counseling is important, many are unsure of *how* to do so (Hagedorn & Gutierrez, 2009). In an effort to bridge the gap between theoretical models of spirituality and counseling practice, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) developed *Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling* (2009). The purpose of this teaching module is to focus specifically on one of these competencies, *Assessment*, which states, “*During the intake and assessment processes, the professional counselor strives to understand a client’s spiritual and/or religious perspective by gathering information from the client and/or other sources*”.

This module, meant to be taught across more than one class meeting, will introduce students to informal (qualitative) spiritual and/or religious assessment strategies. An introduction to informal assessment, which includes reasons why assessment is often neglected and what the counselor and client gain by assessing spiritual and/or religious beliefs, is reviewed. Specific attention is given to intake, observation, and direct interviews. A review of questions which can be incorporated into a general intake interview is presented and common observations, including behaviors and word choice as indicators of the client’s spiritual worldview, are addressed. In addition to intake and observation, an explanation of how direct interviews can incorporate spiritual themes is also provided. An overview of informal assessment strategies such as

spiritual narratives, sentence stems, genograms, spiritual autobiographies, and spiritual timelines are included. The module ends with three experiential exercises.

This module is in direct alignment with three Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) core content areas: Assessment (CACREP Standard G.7.), Helping Relationships (CACREP Standard G.5.), and Social and Cultural Diversity (CACREP Standard G.2.). Designed specifically for use in appraisal and assessment core courses in CACREP accredited programs, this module can also be used in courses related to helping relationships (e.g., counseling skills, human growth and development, practicum/internship, and/or) and multicultural counseling. In addition to learning specific assessment strategies, student will also learn to establish a more positive working alliance with clients through investigation of the spiritual domain. This increased therapeutic alliance will foster the helping relationship, enhance interviewing skills, and assist in the development of appropriate counseling interventions (CACREP Standard G.5.b; G.5.c; G.5.d). In terms of social and cultural diversity, students will better appreciate the spiritual and/or religious domain of clients, thus increasing their ability to fully understand others as psychospiritual beings (CACREP Standard G.2.b; G.2.e). At the end of this module, students will be able to:

1. describe several informal spiritual and/or religious assessment strategies and discuss why counselors choose different strategies (CACREP Standard G.7.b);
2. demonstrate how informal spiritual assessment strategies can be incorporated into the intake process, behavioral observations, and direct/indirect interview techniques (CACREP Standard G.7.b);

3. demonstrate how informal spiritual assessment strategies can be used to increase counselor as well as client self-awareness (CACREP Standard G.7.b; G.2.b; G.2.e; G.2.f); and
4. recognize an increased the level of interpersonal knowledge and skill when addressing issues of spirituality and religion (CACREP Standard G.2.b; G.2.e; G.2.f)

The information provided in this module allows students the freedom to choose from a myriad of techniques for the purposes of: assessing spirituality, promoting counselor/client insight and awareness, setting goals, fostering spiritual growth, and evaluating progress. This module is not intended to be an exhaustive review of informal assessment strategies or of any one assessment or tool. Rather, it is hoped that students will obtain a general understanding of informal spiritual assessment strategies. Students who wish to further explore the assessments and practices reviewed in this module should do so in an effort to gain a greater level of proficiency and understanding of options for exploring the spiritual domain.

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