

MEETING THE HOLISTIC NEEDS OF STUDENTS: A PROPOSAL FOR SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS COMPETENCIES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

*Authors discuss the importance of school counselors addressing spiritual and religious issues in ethically meeting the developmental and cultural needs of K-12 students. Domains of spiritual and religious competence for professional counselors, published by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009), are examined in relation to their relevance for professional school counselors. The authors introduce expert-reviewed *Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors* to supplement the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) *School Counselor Competencies* (ASCA, 2012). Implications for practice are presented along with strategies for integrating the competencies into a comprehensive school counseling program.*

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution calls for what some consider to be the separation of church and state, a separation that has had a profound impact on the practice of school counseling (Lambie, Davis, & Miller, 2008; Sink, 2004; Smith-Augustine, 2011; Wolf, 2004). School counselors, like many educational stakeholders, have historically conceptualized spirituality and religion as constructs akin to church, often viewing the topics as “taboo” in the school setting (Curry, 2010; Goodell & Robinson, 2008; Lambie et al., 2008; Schellenberg, 2012; Smith-Augustine, 2011). In 2004, a special edition of *Professional School Counseling* (PSC) was dedicated to encouraging what was decidedly a significant “delayed dialogue about this topic” (Sink & Richmond, 2004, p. 291). That issue of PSC is a milestone special edition that opened the door for school counselors to begin discussing and identifying approaches to address religious and spiritually laden student issues in order to promote holistic student development.

The American Counseling Association (ACA) published a special issue of the *Counseling and Values* journal in 2011, exemplifying the mounting research and literature on the impor-

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tance of attending to the spiritual and religious needs of students. ACA's special issue references the spiritual dimension as a "fifth force" in promoting mental health, well-being, change, healing, personal and social growth, and student resilience while also reducing student at-risk behaviors (Briggs, Akos, Czyszczon, & Eldridge, 2011; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Yeh, Borrero, & Shea, 2011).

Still, school counselors who desire to attend to the spiritual and religious aspects of student development appear to be experiencing uneasiness with the topic, expressing uncertainty regarding how to address issues with spiritual or religious undertones in an ethically and culturally sensitive manner. This uneasiness and uncertainty have resulted in a reluctance to address the topic or an avoidance of the topic altogether (Curry, 2010; Dobmeier, 2011; Schellenberg, 2012; Smith-Augustine, 2011). In such cases, some might argue that school counselors are only accommodating the views of those students with no spiritual/religious beliefs (i.e., atheism) or those who neither believe nor disbelieve (i.e., agnosticism) in a diverse climate where school counselors are to respect, accommodate, and competently work within the belief systems of all students. This argument is supported by the lack of specific spiritual and religious competencies within the current professional model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012) and ethical codes (ASCA, 2010). Furthermore, ASCA Position Statements (ASCA, 2012) neglect spiritual and religious topics, offering practitioners no guidance regarding how to appropriately meet the spiritual and religious needs of students (Sink & Devlin, 2011; Smith-Augustine, 2011). Thus, the purpose of this article is to propose Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors as a supplement to the ASCA School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, 2012) to help guide practitioners in being culturally responsive to the unique spiritual/religious identities and development of students.

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Prior to further discussion, it is important to define and establish similarities and differences between the two constructs of religion and spirituality. In this article, spirituality is defined using a combination of several authors' definitions. *Spirituality* is conceptualized as a broad yet core developmental dimension of human life that focuses on an individual's essence of being in relation to nature and the universe and one's personal search for meaning that may include belief in a higher power, principles of hope, meaning in life, honesty, integrity, respect, and compassion (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009; Davis, Lambie, & Ieva, 2011; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004; MacDonald, 2004; Sink & Richmond, 2004). Like spirituality, *religion* may also be linked to one's personal search for meaning, which could include a belief in a higher power, principles of hope, meaning in life, honesty, integrity, respect, and

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compassion; however, religion observes a more ritualistic practice that involves specific beliefs and worship by groups of individuals generally in an established dwelling (MacDonald, 2004; Morrison, Clutter, Pritchett, & Demmitt, 2009; Richards, Bartz, & O'Grady, 2009). In literature where authors discuss the appropriateness or inappropriateness of addressing the spiritual/religious beliefs of students in the school setting, some view religion as separate from spirituality (Dobmeier, 2011), while others view religion as one face of spirituality (MacDonald, 2004). For the purposes of this article, both views will be accommodated

while acknowledging that there are distinct differences.

Spirituality/Religion and Counseling

Spirituality and religion are key socializing forces that have been identified as critical developmental and cultural agents that create unique personal meaning to life and craft a family system of accepted morals and values from which holistic development occurs and a unique worldview emerges (Allen & Coy, 2004; Benson, 2004; CACREP, 2009; Curry, 2010; Davis et al., 2011; Dobmeier, 2011; Goodell & Robinson, 2008; Sink, 2004). This worldview influences one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that interact with life experiences, resulting in a continuous reshaping process of the family system, personal identity, and worldview (Davis et al., 2011; MacDonald, 2004; Smith-Augustine, 2011). Passalacqua and Cervantes (2008) also point out the importance of spirituality and religion in relation to gender and gender socialization, emphasizing the need to understand the intersection of gender, culture, and spiritual/religious orientations as

germane to the counseling process. Considering the developmentally and culturally laden nature of spirituality/religion and the potential magnitude of their impact on virtually all aspects of an individual's life, both are viewed as natural areas for exploration in ethically sound and culturally sensitive counselor preparation and counseling practices (CACREP, 2009; Dobmeier, 2011; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004; Rayburn, 2004; Schellenberg, 2012; Sink, 2004; Sink & Devlin, 2011).

Section II, G.2.e. of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) Standards addresses the importance

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of teaching counseling students about their role as it relates to developing a cultural self-awareness and knowledge that allows for the promotion of client “wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body” (CACREP, 2009, p. 91). The ACA Code of Ethics (2005) outlines the importance of spirituality/religion in understanding the differing cognitions, feelings, and behaviors of diverse cultures that play a critical role within the counseling relationship and processes; a belief further supported by the results of a recent national survey of ACA members (Young, Wiggins-Frame, & Cashwell, 2007).

School counselors, too, recognize the importance of spirituality/religion related to their preparation and practice. For example, a recent study involving school counselors and school counseling interns revealed that 80% of participants desired to improve their competence level for counseling students with spiritual/religious issues (Smith-Augustine, 2011). Thus, a closer examination of the relationship between spirituality/religion and school counseling is warranted.

Spirituality/Religion and School Counseling

The school-age years are particularly salient developmental periods that include a multitude of diverse, culturally specific issues often grounded in spiritual/religious worldviews (Bloch, 2004; Dobmeier, 2011; Fowler, 1981; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004; Sink & Richmond, 2004). For example, school counselors frequently work with students who are questioning their identity, challenging authority, searching for meaning in life, experiencing grief and loss, and/or dealing with crisis situations. Issues such as these are generally infested with spiritual/religious undertones.

If a school counselor is unable or unwilling to address spiritual or religious issues, he or she may miss important core aspects of presenting problems, doing a disservice to students and potentially engaging in unethical practices (Goodell & Robinson, 2008; Lambie et al., 2008; MacDonald, 2004; Passalacqua & Cervantes, 2008; Souza, 2002). Instead, recognizing spirituality/religion as a powerful tool for enhancing mental health, promoting positive psychological characteristics and hopefulness, and building resilience in culturally diverse, school-age populations, school counselors are encouraged to tap into this resource as a strength-based approach and developmental asset (Curry, 2010; Dobmeier, 2011; Goodell & Robinson, 2008; Sink 2004; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Smith-Augustine, 2011).

Consider a student who is of Indian culture, in which religion is often so deeply ingrained into personal and social aspects of living that understanding or working effectively and ethically with the student apart from his or her religious beliefs and unique worldview is nearly impossible (Benson, 2004; Schellenberg, 2012). Literature suggests that a school counselor would not be in line with the goals, competencies, and/or ethical standards set forth by the ACA, ASCA, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), or the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) if the school counselor neglects to address the spiritual/religious concerns of students (Lambie et al., 2008; Smith-Augustine, 2011). Therefore, school counselors should be prepared to attend to the developmental and multicultural needs of students in a holistic manner that includes spiritual/religious

dimensions as a natural aspect of human development that is connected to students' family systems and worldviews, permeating the school counselor-student relationship and school counseling processes (Davis et al., 2011; Lambie et al., 2008; Sink & Richmond, 2004; Smith-Augustine, 2011; Souza, 2002).

Researchers recommend that school counselors begin preparation by: (a) anticipating the need to address students' spiritual/religious beliefs; (b) valuing student diversity; (c) developing self-awareness related to their own spiritual/religious beliefs and experiences; and (d) developing an awareness of the spiritual/religious patterns of the communities, families, and students they will serve (Davis et al., 2011; Sink & Devlin, 2011). Furthermore, Cook and Houser (2009) highlight the importance of understanding not only Western views of ethical/moral behavior and values, but also Eastern views as well. In doing so, school counselors seek to avoid ethnocentric assumptions when considering that which may constitute “good” values and that which is viewed as moral, ethical, and virtuous when meeting the spiritual/religious needs of culturally diverse student bodies.

DOMAINS OF SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS COMPETENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

Encouraging exploration and growth with regard to the spiritual/religious beliefs and values of individuals, ASERVIC created the Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009). This document includes 14 competencies divided into six domains: Culture and Worldview, Counselor Self-Awareness, Human

and Spiritual Development, Communication, Assessment, and Diagnosis and Treatment. Although these ACA-endorsed competencies address spiritual and religious concerns for professional counselors in general practice settings, they do not fully encompass the experience of professional school counselors working with issues related to spiritual/religious beliefs and values of students.

School counselors need to be prepared to address spiritual and religious issues in school settings when appropriate and necessary (Davis et al., 2011; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Smith-Augustine, 2011). For example, due to the age of students, school counselors often work with students' families. However, the ASERVIC competencies do not address working with a client's family on issues related to spirituality/religion or how to counsel children and adolescents who present with issues that are directly (or indirectly) related to this critical cultural and developmental area. Making referrals to a spiritual leader is another topic that looks quite different in a general professional counseling setting versus a school counseling setting. A further concern is that the largest domain of the ASERVIC spiritual and religious competencies is Diagnosis and Treatment. Although diagnosis holds a central focus in general professional counseling settings where managed care is often involved, formal diagnosis and long-term treatment is generally outside of the scope of school counseling practices.

The ASERVIC competencies (2009) are beneficial in providing a solid foundation for general practitioner guidelines. The school counseling profession, too, might benefit from such competencies. However, pre-service and practicing school counselors may not have the necessary knowledge and resources to develop their own spiritual/religious competencies (Davis et al., 2011). The authors suggest that spiritual and religious competencies specific to the practice of school counseling may aid in meeting the holistic needs of students.

Domains of Spiritual/Religious Competence for School Counselors

Spiritual and religious competencies for school counselors do not exist in any formal document in spite of the fact that the CACREP Standards

Counselor Self-Awareness, Human and Spiritual Development, and Assessment domains of the Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009). The final competency domain

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(2009) and the ASCA Ethical Standards (2010) both identify spirituality/religion as a developmental and cultural aspect of students' lives that needs to be competently addressed. The most recent version of the ASCA School Counselor Competencies included in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) refers school counselors to the professional ethical codes, but does not include competencies related to spirituality/religion or even mention these constructs in the document. Couple this with the absence of an ASCA position statement regarding the school counselor's role in addressing spiritual/religious aspects of student development, and school counselors will likely continue to be unsure as to whether or not the topic should remain taboo.

In light of the ethical call to meet students where they are in relation to their spiritual/religious development and to attend to this culturally sensitive aspect of living, the authors encourage meeting the topic head-on. The Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors included in this article are proposed to offer guidelines for school counselor education and practice and continued professional discussion.

The Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors include 20 competencies within five domains and are grounded in school counseling research, literature, professional standards, and ethical codes. The first four competency domains are adapted from the Culture and Worldview,

aligns with the Delivery component of the ASCA National Model (2012), as school counselors spend a significant amount of time addressing this component by providing a variety of direct and indirect student services compared to responsibilities related to the other three components (i.e., Foundation, Management, and Accountability).

Competency Development and Expert Review

Initially developed by the authors, the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors were reviewed by a culturally diverse, expert panel of practicing school counselors and counselor educators to establish validity (Dimitrov, 2012). Practitioner experts were licensed school counselors with a minimum of 3 years experience as a practicing school counselor. Counselor educator experts held doctoral degrees in counselor education and demonstrated an expertise in school counseling and/or spirituality as evidenced by courses taught and related scholarly publications and presentations. A total of eight reviewers participated on the expert panel, which consisted of four practicing school counselors and four counselor educators, representing both male ($n = 3$) and female ($n = 5$) gender perspectives as well as multiple ethnicities. Two of the experts—one practitioner and one counselor educator—currently work in faith-based settings and the remaining six experts are employed in public settings. The authors identified

and recruited the experts by e-mail to review the proposed competencies and provide feedback with regard to: (a) ambiguous terminology, (b) existence of cultural stereotypes or biases, (c) appropriateness of items, (d) missing or redundant information, (e) grammatical or punctuation errors, and (f) overall presentation (e.g., Did the proposed items provide clear, concise, useful competencies for school counselors?).

The authors individually reviewed comments and critiques provided by the expert panel and then collaborated to arrive at a consensus regarding how to appropriately revise the competencies to reflect expert reviewer

THE SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS COMPETENCIES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS ARE PROPOSED TO OFFER GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND PRACTICE AND CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION.

feedback. A majority of the experts commented on the need for increased attention in the area of spirituality in school counseling and, overall, reviewers gave significant support and approval for the initial draft of the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors. One expert captured this sentiment by stating, “It is my considered opinion that [this] list of competencies is quite comprehensive, practical, and appropriate.” Revisions based on expert panel feedback included: adjusting terminology to remain consistent, clarifying ambiguous terms (e.g., stakeholders), rewording redundancies, adding legal considerations (i.e., including language about varying laws, policies, and district approval for referral resources), reorganizing item order in the “Indirect Student Services” subsection to follow a linear/logical progression, and other general word-smithing changes. The final draft of the expert-reviewed competencies is proposed here.

Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors

I. SPIRITUALITY/RELIGION AND WORLDVIEW

- A. Professional school counselors possess a general understanding of the similarities and differences between spirituality, religion, atheism, and agnosticism, as well as how each construct may or may not be viewed by various stakeholders within a school system.
- B. Professional school counselors understand that spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism, and characteristics and experiences

related to diverse belief systems impact students’ personal, social, academic, and career development, as well as individual worldview and behavior.

- C. Professional school counselors have a basic knowledge of established spiritual/religious denominations around the world and view student belief systems as developmental and cultural dimensions of students’ lives.

II. SCHOOL COUNSELOR SELF-AWARENESS

- A. Professional school counselors identify and explore their own spiritual/religious belief system and are aware of personal biases.
- B. Professional school counselors recognize how their own belief system and potential biases may impact the counselor-student relationship and counseling process as well as how they might intersect with the local laws and district policies that govern the parameters of school counselors.

III. SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

- A. Professional school counselors view spirituality/religion as a natural dimension of human development that has potential to affect students of all ages and cultural backgrounds.
- B. Professional school counselors possess a basic knowledge about models of spiritual and religious/faith development.
- C. Professional school counselors are knowledgeable about common belief system issues that arise in school-age populations at specific developmental levels across various cultures.

IV. ASSESSMENT

- A. Professional school counselors are sensitive to spiritual/religious biases that may exist in formal and informal student assessment instruments or practices.
- B. Professional school counselors consider students’ spiritual/religious beliefs and values during formal and informal student assessments.

V. DELIVERY OF STUDENT SERVICES

- A. Direct Student Services
 1. *School Counseling Core Curriculum*
 - a. Professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program that attends to the holistic needs of students by including practices that facilitate involvement of the diverse belief systems of the students.
 - b. Professional school counselors integrate spirituality/religion into classroom instruction and group activities in a manner that is sensitive to the prevailing community values yet open to all students’ belief systems.
 - c. Professional school counselors allow opportunities for sharing of all spiritual/religious beliefs and values

(e.g., spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism) during classroom instruction and group activities.

2. Individual Student Planning

- a. Professional school counselors understand how spiritual/religious beliefs and values impact student goals and decision making, with regard to education and training as well as post-secondary career choices, and work within that belief system when advising and conducting student assessments.
- b. Professional school counselors encourage exploration of spiritual/religious beliefs and values which impact goal setting, education, and post-secondary planning, and aid students in planning activities that align with their belief system.

3. Responsive Services

- a. Professional school counselors implement responsive services and activities reflective of the understanding that spirituality/religion may be a powerful resource for building resilience and improving mental health and overall well-being in students.
- b. Professional school counselors provide individual counseling and crisis response services that allow students an avenue for expression of values and belief systems as well as opportunities to explore issues related to values and belief systems.

B. Indirect Student Services

1. Collaboration

- a. Professional school counselors serve on committees and collaborate with stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school/district personnel, commu-

nity groups and religious leaders) to cultivate safe and welcoming school climates for diverse spiritual and religious belief systems as well as conduct parent workshops on topics that teach the developmental and cultural aspects of spirituality/religion in an impartial manner.

2. Consultation

- a. Professional school counselors consult with stakeholders to solicit information, resources, and services that meet students' spiritual/religious development needs.

3. Referrals

- a. Professional school counselors provide students and parents with resources that are approved by the school district and accommodate diverse belief systems (e.g., spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism) when referrals are warranted.

Utilizing the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors also may be useful for school counselors working with other school professionals. School counselors collaborating with other educational stakeholders can look to the competencies as a road map for promoting a welcoming school climate that is open to varying spiritual and religious traditions while also being respectful to those students who hold no spiritual/religious beliefs (Lonborg & Bowen, 2004; Ribak-Rosenthal & Russell, 1994; Richmond, 2004). These competencies provide guidelines from which to build a solid foundation for school counseling programs, activities, and practices that, by law, do not violate the sanctity of the separation of church and state. For example, there is no law that prevents school counselors from counseling students who initiate spiritual/religious discussions or prevents such discussion when it is relevant to student concerns and approached from a developmental and diverse perspective respectful of students'

THESE COMPETENCIES WERE REVIEWED BY A CULTURALLY DIVERSE EXPERT PANEL OF PRACTICING SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND COUNSELOR EDUCATORS TO ESTABLISH VALIDITY

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

The Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors may prove to be beneficial for counselor educators who are tasked with implementing innovative methods for teaching counselors-in-training how to address spiritual/religious concerns in counseling practices (Briggs & Rayle, 2005). Furthermore, these competencies provide counselor educators with a knowledge and skill set that specifically relates to ethical practices, human development, and multicultural competence (Lonborg & Bowen, 2004).

worldviews (Richards et al., 2009; Sink, 2010; Smith-Augustine, 2011).

Although school counselors are understandably wary about addressing spiritual/religious concerns of students, it may be helpful to point out that it was not the intent of the First Amendment to dogmatically make our schools spirituality/religion-free communities (Education Week, 2004; Sink, 2004; Sink & Devlin, 2011). Instead, as *counselors* in the educational setting, school counselors can meet the complexities of addressing students' spiritual/religious issues through school counseling practices and programming that present activities related to spirituality/religion as educational and for "explorational" purposes that are

not intended to impose any spiritual or religious values on *any* student, family, group, or anyone else.

Delivery of the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors

The delivery component of the ASCA National Model accounts for 80% of the school counselor's use of time (ASCA, 2012). For this reason, the authors suggest approaches and techniques for practical application in the delivery of direct and indirect student services for Domain V of the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors.

School Counseling Core Curriculum

- Make use of spiritual/religious documents, symbols, and books, such as the Bible, Star of David, Crescent Moon, Buddha, Cross, Rosary, Koran, Prayer Beads, Torah, and the Book of Mormon during classroom instruction to teach civic values, virtues, and moral conduct related to a variety of spiritual/religious beliefs around the world (Wolf, 2004).
- Discuss spiritual/religious beliefs and associated holidays during school counseling core curriculum delivery by having students share spiritual/religious beliefs from their cultural context, approaching the topic as educational versus devotional (Haynes & Thomas, 2002; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Wolf, 2004; Yeh et al., 2011). Facilitate the discussion with questions such as: What is a holiday? What holidays do you and your family recognize and how? Are these holidays based on particular religious or spiritual orientations?
- Use school counseling core curriculum in classrooms to teach leadership styles and effective, respectful communication and behavior that supports a united appreciation for spiritual/religious differences and combats school violence (Goodell & Robinson, 2008).
- Implement school-wide programs that promote positive peer interactions and interconnectedness, an appreciation of differences, and a climate of caring where the peaceful resolve of problems is encouraged,

facilitates the discussion to illustrate how this warm gesture of greeting in the western world was viewed as intrusive by the Indonesian people; many of whom practice the Muslim faith, highly valuing female purity and modesty, and thereby viewing the handshake with the first lady as highly inappropriate.

- Hang a poster in the school counseling office with a multitude of spiritual and religious systems represented, including atheism and agnosticism, to illustrate the importance many individuals and groups throughout the world assign to spirituality/religion and to promote cross-cultural understanding while exposing (not imposing) specific spiritual/religious practices (Haynes & Thomas, 2002).
- Conduct classroom guidance lessons that explore and promote an appreciation of cultural differences. For example, discuss similarities and differences in appearance, dress, greetings, eating habits, foods, communication, languages, cultural norms/values, time consciousness, and customs; views of children, parents, and the elderly; and spiritual/religious development and practices (Haynes & Thomas, 2002).

A MAJORITY OF THE EXPERTS COMMENTED ON THE NEED FOR INCREASED ATTENTION IN THE AREA OF SPIRITUALITY IN SCHOOL COUNSELING.

- Explore with students ways in which they can meet goals and reach personal potential by developing values, virtues, and moral conduct, understanding that these characteristics are “socially and culturally mediated” (Haste & Abrahams, 2008, p. 379).
- Include spiritual and religious careers as options during career exploration curriculum delivery (Haynes & Thomas, 2002; Yeh et al., 2011). For example, when planning career day, school counselors may wish to invite community leaders from a variety of spiritual/religious orientations to enhance awareness (but not necessarily acceptance) of any one particular religious practice, such as through peer mediation, conflict resolution, peer transition, new student orientation, and tutoring (Briggs et al., 2011; Goodell & Robinson, 2008; Smith-Augustine, 2011).
- Engage students in developmentally appropriate discussions about current news and world reports related to behaviors and beliefs that are driven by diverse spiritual and religious beliefs (Hoefflinger, 2012). Such a topic could be the international incident that received widespread media attention when First Lady Michelle Obama put her hand out to shake the hand of a conservative Indonesian government official. The school counselor

Individual Student Planning

- Encourage student volunteer work at food banks, homeless shelters, and community service agencies (including spiritual/religious organizations) in academic and career plans to promote the development of empathy, inner strength, and a civic identity (Goodell & Robinson, 2008).
- When helping students construct academic and career plans within the context of their spiritual and religious beliefs, the following questions may be helpful for student reflection (Anderson, Peila-Shuster, & Aragon, 2012; Arthur & Collins, 2011): Do you view a career as a means of making money to survive, or as a measure of achievement? How do you include your family when making career decisions?

What motivates you toward a specific career? How might your gender be influencing your academic and career plans? What do you consider to be important work habits?

Responsive Services

- Spend time getting to know your students and establishing a caring, trusting, and accepting climate. Employ an open invitation for students to discuss their personal and familial culture and spiritual/religious beliefs in order to understand the role these constructs play in their lives (Richards et al., 2009).
- Make use of bibliotherapy and/or poems to illustrate and nurture exemplary moral behavior, positive socialization, and developmental assets, strengthening character values in the cultural context of student's worldviews (Briggs et al., 2011; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Yeh et al., 2011). Ask students what the text means to them in relation to their personal/cultural values.
- Serve as a leader and mentor in the psycho-spiritual development of students, nurturing positive attributes (e.g., hope, optimism, perseverance, courage, truthfulness, humility) that are adaptive, build resilience, and relate to success (Goodell & Robinson, 2008).
- Have students begin assessing their spirituality and religious beliefs as a critical aspect of a comprehensive personal assessment (Richards et al., 2009). Questions may include: How do you take care of yourself? How do you cope during difficult times? What (or who) helps you to make meaning out of life experiences and gives you a sense of purpose? What are your most important relationships? Do you discuss important decisions with your family? Do you discuss your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and/or other personal issues with family or others outside of your family?
- Have students engage in role plays that are rich in opportunities to develop empathy, demonstrate respect for others' beliefs and values,

THESE COMPETENCIES PROVIDE GUIDELINES FROM WHICH TO BUILD A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, AND PRACTICES THAT, BY LAW, DO NOT VIOLATE THE SANCTITY OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.

and work through issues laden with spiritual/religious themes such as sexuality, pregnancy, violence, grief and loss, suicidal ideation, self mutilation, homicide, divorce, crisis, career selection, and natural disasters (Richards et al., 2009).

- Explore case studies to encourage reflection and reasoning and to highlight ways in which the case might be resolved using culturally sensitive, moral decision making and positive social interactions (Yeh et al., 2011). For example, the school counselor can pose the moral dilemma: How might you view a brother who steals food from another to save his starving sister? School counselors can also open discussions about the cultural differences in ethical systems.
- Engage the family system in the counseling process when appropriate (Davis et al., 2011).

Referrals

- Develop a list of school district-approved community resources for students/parents for career (e.g., employment, interest inventory websites) and academic support (e.g., tutoring, test preparation), as well as intervention for mental health issues (e.g., suicidal ideation, eating disorders). Include common spiritual/religious institutions that represent the target community (Davis et al., 2011; Yeh et al., 2011).

Collaboration and Consultation

- Collaborate with teachers to conduct school-wide character education activities and recognitions (Goodell & Robinson, 2008), including morning announcements

that emphasize a monthly virtue (e.g., perseverance, courage, truthfulness, kindness, patience, hope, humility).

- Partner with teachers to sponsor student-led spiritual/religious clubs or attend student-sponsored events before/after school (e.g., the annual "See You at the Pole" meeting and other prayer or meditation-focused events) to model the importance of spiritual/religious values and beliefs in schools and communities (Haynes & Thomas, 2002).
- Conduct parent workshops on parenting styles and share objective information and research that speaks to the introduction of values and beliefs in relation to early child development and well-being (Sink & Devlin, 2011) as well as student achievement.
- Conduct parent/teacher workshops on how peer and school environments impact student spiritual/religious development. Present research linking heightened school violence to deficiencies in spiritual/religious belief systems among students in order to demonstrate the need for creating a nonviolent, respectful school climate which ultimately promotes academic achievement and student success (Allen & Coy, 2004; Rayburn, 2004).
- Partner with parents, teachers, and community members to raise awareness about school violence and coordinate anti-bullying activities that are both preventative and responsive to holistic youth development to promote peaceable schools with caring climates (Yeh et al., 2011).
- Consult with teachers and administrators in developing school mottos

HAVE STUDENTS BEGIN ASSESSING THEIR SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS A CRITICAL ASPECT OF A COMPREHENSIVE PERSONAL ASSESSMENT.

revolving around fair and equal treatment of all people and appreciation of differences.

- Work with parents and community agencies to coordinate an annual, outdoor around-the-world day at which all countries are represented, highlighting customs that include cuisine, clothing, spiritual and religious beliefs, rituals, and more.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following questions could be considered for future research to promote the application of the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors and encourage continued dialogue that cultivates an open exploration of this important topic in school counseling: (1) How competent are school counselors in addressing students' spiritual/religious concerns? (2) What training do school counselors receive in preparation for addressing the spiritual/religious concerns of students and is the training comprehensive and sufficient? (3) What types of interventions do school counselors implement to address students' spiritual/religious identity and development? (4) How can the Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors proposed in this article be improved upon and/or further validated? (5) Do school counselors find the competencies presented in this article to be useful in working with students who present with issues related to spirituality/religion? Future research might include the development of an instrument for measuring school counselor perceptions of self-efficacy regarding the proposed Spiritual and Religious Competencies for School Counselors. Creation of a student assessment to collect data on common spiritual and

religious issues that K-12 students experience would also be beneficial in designing training curricula for school counselors to focus on these topics.

CONCLUSION

Student spirituality is identified as an important, naturally occurring, developmental and cultural agent that is critical to consider for ethical school counseling practice. This article suggests strategies and approaches for ethically, politically, and legally attending to the culturally-specific spiritual/religious identities and development of students so that school counselors may be equipped to serve today's youth in a more effective and holistic manner. ■

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