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# Religion, spirituality, and school psychology: A national survey of training programs

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Religion, Spirituality, and School Psychology:

A National Survey of Training Programs

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Educational Specialist

Graduate Psychology

August 2011

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my family. Mom and Dad, thank you for supporting my education and teaching me how to be sensitive, accepting, and respectful of other people's religious beliefs and values. Gam, thank you for inspiring me to take after you and become a school psychologist. Matt and Kimmie, thank you for being my sources of strength at JMU and always. I love you all.

## Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Dedication ..... ii

Acknowledgments ..... iii

List of Tables .....vi

Abstract .....vii

I. Introduction .....1

    Statement of Problem

    Religion and Spirituality

    Professional Ethical Guidelines

    Cultural and Religious Competence

    Potential Influence of Religious Diversity for School Professionals

    Religious Diversity

    Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health

    Purpose

II. Method ..... 14

    Sample

    Instrumentation

    Analyses

III. Results..... 16

IV. Discussion..... 20

    Response to Competencies

    Definition of Religious/Spiritual Competence

    Limitations to the Current Study

Future Research	
Recommendations and Resources for Training Programs	
V. Appendix A.....	33
Consent to Participate in Survey	
VI. Appendix B.....	35
Training on Religion and Spirituality Survey	
VII. Appendix C.....	38
<i>Comments Made on Question Five: “If your students have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality please list examples.”</i>	
VIII. Appendix D.....	39
<i>Comments Made on Question Nine: “Please list the courses and indicate if the course is required or optional.”</i>	
IX. Appendix E.....	40
<i>Responses to Questions 11: “How would you define religious/spiritual competence in school psychology practice?”</i>	
X. References.....	43

List of Tables

Table 1: Percentage of Responses to the Statements from Question 10..... 18

Table 2: Percentage of Responses to the Statements from Question Four..... 42

## Abstract

As school psychologists strive to become culturally competent in our growing diverse society, an important piece that seems to be missing from the typically accessed conceptualization of culture is religion and spirituality. The focus of this study was to survey NASP approved training programs to determine how these programs intentionally incorporate knowledge and skills and determine the competence of their graduate students in matters of religion and spirituality. All NASP approved school psychology programs were sent a survey and the program director served as the sole participant. Most programs do not believe that their students have been involved in casework involving religion/spirituality. Further, most programs do not offer a course or embed a course with information regarding religion/spirituality. However, other participants offered great examples of casework and courses that have involved spirituality and religion. More than half of the participants believe their students are competent in concepts of school psychology involving spirituality and religion. Also, many participants offered their definition of religious/spiritual competence in school psychology. Using the definitions offered by the participants, a definition about religious/spiritual competence was synthesized. It is hoped the examples given by the participants for casework and courses, and the definition created from participant responses can be used by training programs to incorporate spiritual and religious information into coursework.



## Statement of Problem

In the recent school psychology movement to provide school-based services within a model of cultural competence, a wealth of knowledge has been accumulated about diverse cultural characteristics and English Language Learners, which has helped to support many children in the schools. School psychology training programs also have incorporated multicultural classes and topics into curricula. However, an important piece that appears to be missing from school psychologists' conceptualization of culture is religion and spirituality. The lack of research, articles, and conference presentations on religion and spirituality within the discipline of school psychology is astounding. The focus of this research is on determining the intentional development of knowledge and skills, and the current competence of graduate students regarding spirituality and religion in school psychology training programs.

## Religion and Spirituality

The current study is designed to help in our understanding of how religious and spiritual themes are incorporated into school psychology training. The working definition of religion used in this study is:

“allegiance to a particular system of faith and worship... characterized by adherence to a set of sacred doctrines or membership in a body of people who share similar beliefs about God, holy observance, and morality” (Davis, Kerr, & Kurpius, p. 358).

Spirituality is defined in this study as “a general sensitivity to moral, ethical, humanitarian, and existential issues without reference to any particular religious doctrine” (Genia, 1994, p. 395). Spirituality is different from religion, because spiritual people may or may not be associated with a religious affiliation, religious doctrine, or any formal theological structure (Genia, 1994 & Davis et al., 2003). It is hard to separate

religious and spiritual information, since spirituality appears to be an umbrella term that religion falls under. Unfortunately, the few psychology articles and competencies associated with the topic only explicitly use the word religion and not spirituality, which is why much of the information to follow is specifically associated with religion.

However, the authors believe there is a need to branch out and include spirituality along with religion in our conceptualization of children and families and, therefore, have included both terms in this study.

#### Professional Ethical Guidelines

The two governing bodies of school psychology, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), list religion as a competency to be considered when conceptualizing multiculturalism. Since 1977, the APA's Ethical Standards of Psychologists has incorporated the importance of client background characteristics, specifically including religion (Genia, 1994). In APA's updated Ethical Standards of Psychologists, religion is listed as a factor in which to be competent for adequate service delivery (American Psychological Association, 2002). NASP's Principles for Professional Ethics lists a few principles and standards related to religion. Principle II.1 Competence, Standard II.1.1 states that "school psychologists recognize the strengths and limitations of their training and experience, engaging only in practices for which they are qualified" (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010, p.6). Principle I.3 Fairness and Justice, states that school psychologists, "use their expertise to cultivate school climates that are safe and welcoming to all persons regardless of actual or perceived characteristics, including... religion" (National

Association of School Psychologists, 2010, p.5). Further, Principle II.1 Competence, Standard II.1.2 states that

“Practitioners are obligated to pursue knowledge and understanding of the diverse cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds of students, families, and other clients. When knowledge and understanding of diversity characteristics are essential to ensure competent assessment, intervention, or consultation, school psychologists have or obtain the training or supervision necessary to provide effective services, or they make appropriate referrals” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010, p. 6).

Finally, Principle I.3 Fairness and Justice, Standard I.3.2 states

“School psychologists pursue awareness and knowledge of how diversity factors may influence child development, behavior, and school learning. In conducting psychological, educational, or behavioral evaluations or in providing interventions, therapy, counseling, or consultation services, the school psychologist takes into account individual characteristics” which includes religion (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010, p.6).

It has been stated that it is a challenge for training programs to interpret the ethical standards and determine how best to incorporate them into their training to meet the needs of their student’s future diverse clients (Genia, 1994). School psychology training programs have an ethical duty to introduce their students to competencies in religious and spiritual domains of client and family functioning since most of the knowledge professionals utilize in practice comes from graduate training. Therefore, it seems reasonable and useful to survey training programs to determine if and how they are integrating education on religion/spirituality into their training programs and how programs define competency in religion and spirituality. The information obtained could be used to create awareness of the importance of the religious and spiritual aspect of multiculturalism, the need to incorporate more coursework (e.g., targeted readings,

professional dialogues, exposure) on religion and spirituality into school psychology curricula, and the need for professional development on religion and spirituality in the future for already practicing professionals.

### Cultural and Religious Competence

Bergin and Jensen (1990) remind therapists “every therapeutic relationship is a cross-cultural experience” (Bergin & Jensen, 1990, p. 3). As school psychologists move to becoming more multi-culturally/cross-culturally competent, it is important to understand precisely what these constructs mean. NASP endorses two definitions of cultural competence. The definition supported in this study is “cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural studies” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989 as cited in National Association of School Psychologists, 2009 p. 1). The second NASP endorsed definition of culture is: a “specific set of social, educational, religious and professional behaviors, practices and values that individuals learn and adhere to while participating in or out of groups they usually interact with” (Diversity Rx, 2003 as cited in National Association of School Psychologists, 2009, p. 1). Since the NASP definition of culture includes religion, cultural competence implies an understanding of religion. In addition, multiculturalism is an understanding of many cultures and their parts, whereas cross-cultural connotes an understanding of one’s culture and how it may affect an interaction with another person’s culture. Miranda (2002) states in *Best Practices in Increasing Cross-Cultural Competence* that important elements of cross-cultural competence include “developing a personal awareness,

developing a knowledge of other cultures, and applying that knowledge,” and “trainers as well as practitioners must not be fearful to address and confront the most difficult and often taboo topics such as race, oppression, and social justice” (Miranda, 2002, p. 356-357). Therefore, according to NASP and Miranda (2002), it appears that understanding religion and spirituality is a significant part of cultural competence.

In Frisby's (2005) chapter he states that for unknown reasons there is a lack of school psychology research related to religion, and its deficiency does not allow us to fully conceptualize multiculturalism. At the time Frisby wrote this 2005 chapter, only two articles (Klingman, 2000; Overstreet & Brown, 1999) were found when he searched for articles related to religion in the five main school psychology journals. Further, Halstead (2005) said in his chapter that no articles were found with religion in the title in any of the major school psychology journals. This is still true in 2010 when a recent search of religion, spirituality and school psychology was completed by the investigators. Exceptions are chapters by Cobb (1997) and Cobb and Staton (2006) and a few chapters in Frisby and Reynold's (2005) textbook. The lack of research published in major journals' articles about religiosity/spirituality should be addressed in order to create awareness for its need.

Even though there is a lack of research, two of the published works address proposed multicultural competencies for religion. First, Gopaul-McNicol's (1997) article describes two competencies specifically addressing religion to be considered when working with culturally diverse families. First is the Cross-Cultural Counseling Competencies that state “school psychologists need to be aware of the values, customs, behavioral patterns, religious/indigenous beliefs and expectancies of families from

divergent cultural/linguistic/ethnic backgrounds.” The second competency is Competence in Empowering Families through Community Bases Organizations, which explains that school psychologists need to be knowledgeable of supportive community organizations like churches or social services and be able to guide families to the appropriate resources for their children (GoPaul-McNicol, 1997, p. 22-23).

Second, Halstead (2005) proposes four steps to follow to become competent in addressing religious subjects. The first step is to be aware of one’s own personal and professional beliefs and values and understand the impact it may have when working with people with differing values and beliefs. The next step is to gather information on religious diversity, specifically about practices and beliefs outside of previous religious knowledge. The third step is to be sensitive and respect other’s religious beliefs. The last step is to respond to difficulties that are impacted or occur because of religious beliefs (Halstead, 2005).

#### Potential Influence of Religious Diversity for School Professionals

To fully conceptualize a child, whether it is in assessment, counseling, consultation, or for other interventions, it is important to acknowledge and understand a child’s religiosity (Cobb & Staton, 2006; Cobb, 1997; Halstead, 2005). Cobb and Staton (2006) list many situations in which school professionals or school psychologists would handle situations regarding religion, such as confronting religiously prejudiced children or other school employees or counseling students who are struggling with their sexual orientation (Cobb & Staton, 2006). Further, depending on the demographics of the religious and spiritual diversity in the school, school psychologists could help set up programs to support the diversity, which underscores the need for training on religion and

spirituality (Cobb & Staton, 2006). Supporting students talking about their religious/spiritual experiences and history is another avenue to help build rapport and help them become more open about critical issues (La Torre, 2002). Further, asking students about their religion and spirituality can be helpful in order for them to know their perspective is understood and that the psychologist is not accepting stereotypes or automatically interpreting their beliefs (Bergin & Jensen, 1990). If a school psychologist does not ask about religious or spiritual beliefs, it may dampen a potential therapeutic alliance if the student does not feel understood or if they believe the school psychologist does not feel their religion/spirituality is important to talk about (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999). Though many children find support and a sense of belonging in having shared religious or spiritual values, it may also cause conflicting feelings. A school psychologist would need to understand a child's beliefs to understand their psychological development or any mental health problems this could be causing and how best to work through the issues (Cobb, 1997).

School psychologists can also use their knowledge of religion and spirituality to create stronger home-school collaboration. If a child with a unique faith moves into a school, the school psychologist could meet with the parents to understand the important aspects and ensure that special needs are accommodated in the schools. The school psychologist can help the parents to feel comfortable and safe in the new system in case they have questions or concerns. Stated previously in the multicultural religious competencies, school psychologists should help parents find resources for their child in the area, such as close religious establishments or other supportive community services (GoPaul-McNicol, 1997). Additionally, if families are aware of religious/spiritual

understanding it can create empathy and a stronger therapeutic alliance (Cobb & Staton, 2006). Some parents do not want their children working with people outside their faith, but if a parent sensed the consideration of their feelings and religious/spiritual beliefs this may lessen resistance (Cobb, 1997).

Though there is separation of church and state, religious aspects can still be found in public schools. For example, most schools still have winter holiday concerts that are more heavily laden with Christmas songs, even if songs from other religions are included. Also, children who are Muslim can be seen taken out of class to do their daily prayers. Additionally, children who are Jehovah's Witness can be seen leaving class during celebrations of other children's birthdays or holidays. Finally, during major Christian holidays, children from all religions can be found making crafts of reindeer or Easter bunnies to take home to their families. Case law has also been made, the most famous being *Wisconsin v. Yoder* 1972, in which the Supreme court ruled that Amish children could finish school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade because their parents were afraid religious teachings would be attenuated by their children continuing to learn about other beliefs.

This is not to say that all religious symbols, songs, or imagery should be taken out of schools; though if school psychologists have been trained on different religions they could help to diffuse distress that may be associated with these situations. For example, school psychologists could help establish a meeting place in the school in which all the Muslim children could feel more comfortable and pray together. Similarly, a school psychologist could help set up a school schedule in which time specific time is allotted for the celebration of birthdays and holidays in order for children who are Jehovah's Witness to spend time together and perhaps feel less singled out.



## Religious Diversity

Diane Eck, a writer on religion in America, has been quoted in many sources as saying that “The United States has become the most religiously diverse nation on earth” (Eck, 2001). Though there has been controversy around this statement, it appears to be true that the diversity of American religions has risen. In 1990, there were 15 religious groups that Americans identified as other than a Christian religious group which rose to 21 religious groups in 2001. Further, the percentage of Americans who identify as one of the 35 Christian religious groups has fallen to 76.5% in 2001 from 86.2% in 1990 (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). It is important to be wary of the accuracy and representation of these statistics, since the United States census has not inquired about religion in over 50 years (Halstead, 2005). If we accept Eck’s statement as true, many new issues arise in schools. Eck gives specific examples such as the dagger Sikh adolescents are required to carry as part of religious initiation, though in most schools it would be considered a weapon. Eck also mentions many religions that have dietary restrictions and wondered if schools will work to accommodate or label food ingredients (Eck, 2001). Beyond religious diversity in schools, children may be religiously diverse; for example this may need to be considered when working with a child if their parents have an inter-faith marriage, if the family changed churches, or if they decide to join a different religious group than their family (Cobb, 1997).

In contrast to the growing diversity of the United States, school psychologists continue to be fairly homogeneous. In a 1999 survey, 94.5% of NASP members reported to be Caucasian (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999). This trend still follows in 2004 when NASP members were surveyed again and 92.55% reported to be Caucasian (Curtis,

Lopez, Batsche, & Smith 2006). Since the diversity of the profession is not comparable to the growing diversity of students in the schools, training to ensure competency in multiculturalism is even more crucial (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999). It has also been stated that mental health professionals have lower numbers than the public average when it comes to religion. However, in a survey of 425 therapists including clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, and marriage and family therapists, 80% identified with a religion while only 41% claim to be regular attendants at church services. This appears to be a higher percentage than previously recorded or assumed by the mental health profession. This study also compared results to the public responses from the Gallup Poll in which 91% of the public identified with a religion and 40% reported they regularly attend services, which is very comparable to the mental health professionals (Bergin & Jensen, 1990). Even though the results are not specific to school psychologists, they may be meaningful, because if a majority of therapists do identify with a religion it could help them to understand and empathize with religious clients.

#### Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health

It is essential to understand religion in children's lives since some studies have shown it to be an important protective factor. Attending religious services and engaging in activities with a religious group has been found to lower depression, reduce thoughts of suicide, anxiety, drug use, and increase pro-school attitudes (Lantieri, 2001; Trusty & Watts, 1999; Davis et al., 2003). Religion can also foster coping skills in students. If a student's religious affiliation involves beliefs such as predetermination of life events beyond their control or in the hands of a powerful God, this could help a child cope more efficiently with negative or stressful life events (Mabe & Josephson, 2004). Additionally,

various religions have beliefs that sickness and suffering are important or necessary and may help students cope with their own or a family member's illness (Barnes, Ploinikoff, Fox, & Pendleton, 2000). Also, in a study of 218 displaced fourth grade children from the Golan Heights in Israel, a significant relationship was found between religiosity and coping (Klingman, 2000). Religion can also be a protective factor for minority cultures. Bankston and Zhou's (1996) study ascertained going to an ethnic church resulted in greater social adjustment and increased achievement in school for adolescent Vietnamese immigrants (Bankston & Zhou, 1996). Further, religion can be a protective factor for families, since religious doctrine can be used to foster moral codes and community service which can help create a close family bond (Frisby, 2005).

Religion and spirituality may also increase positive moral development in children. Many religious beliefs include moral codes, like the Ten Commandments, that teach children ethics to help them make principled choices in the future (Bosacki, 2005). Further, religion and spirituality foster positive values such as forgiveness and service to others that increase children's character. An example of the effect of increased moral development, religion, and spirituality has been found in a systematic review of 40 studies in which it was found to have an inverse relationship with delinquency (Johnson, De Li, Larson, & McCullough, 2000).

On the contrary, religion can manifest negatively in children too. Religions that teach God punishes bad children have been found to foster obedience in children, though it has also been associated with self-blame (Nelsent & Kroliczak, 1984). Further, case studies have investigated mental distortions and scrupulosity, in which it was found that intense religiosity led to anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Greenberg, Witzum,

& Pisante, 1987). Association with a specific religion can also be a risk factor for harassment by peers, especially if a student is part of a religious minority in school. Peer harassment can occur between majority religious groups as well if majority members associate or advocate for religious minority members (Graham & Juvonen, 2001).

Religion was found to be an educational risk factor in a study by Parcel and Geschwender (1995) who examined the disadvantage of verbal abilities of children in the South. The study concluded a fundamentalist maternal family origin is a characteristic associated with lower verbal facilities (Parcel & Geschwender, 1995). It is imperative to understand that negative experiences can come from religion as well as positive experiences and that students may need guidance in working through negative events and feelings (Miller, 1999).

The American Psychological Association has begun to recognize that mental health problems can impair religious and spiritual functioning by adding V62.89 Religious and Spiritual problems to the latest Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*], 2000). Since the *DSM-IV-TR* permits issues related to disorders to be diagnosed, the Religious and Spiritual Problems category covers things such as leaving a religion, leaving a cult, or changing denominations (Lukoff, 2000). Further, clinically significant impairment can occur when psychological impairments impact a person's ability to be religious, including experiencing religious feelings and carrying out religious duties. (Hathaway, 2003). This seems to say that religion or spirituality can be a key part of adaptive functioning. By conceptualizing the religious/spiritual impairment as an outcome instead of the cause of mental health problems is an important movement in the psychological

profession (Hathaway, 2003). A study by Hathaway, Scott, & Garver (2004) surveyed 333 randomly selected members from the APA and though 50% reported asking clients about religiosity or spirituality and 34% reported they had been clinically trained on religion and spirituality, 93.8% reported never using the religious and spiritual problem V code. One explanation could be due to insurance companies not covering payments for this disorder (Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004). This study did not ask the members of APA to specify the age range of their clients; therefore the results may not be applicable to an understanding of the religious and spiritual impairment and children.

The counseling profession is at the forefront of incorporating religion and spirituality into their training and practice and can be used as a positive example. The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) has developed specific religious/spiritual competencies in which counselors should be trained (Association of Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling, 2009). In a study by Kelly (1997) religious and spiritual issues were incorporated into 25% of counselor education programs surveyed (Kelly, 1997). Then, in 2002, a similar study was done that found 69% of counselor education programs incorporate information addressing religion and spirituality (Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, & Belaire, 2002). Further, in a meta-analysis of therapists' use of religion and spirituality in counseling, 64.1% of therapists stated that they use "religious language, metaphors, and concepts in therapy" (Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004 p 74). Therefore, counselors seem to have recognized the relevance of spiritual and religious influences in people's lives and have made progress in incorporating it into their profession.

## Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic and comprehensive survey of school psychology training programs' incorporation of religious and spiritual training into their curriculum, training experiences, and student competencies. This study is loosely based on research by Roger and Connoley (1992) in which they surveyed directors of school psychology training programs on how they incorporate multicultural training into their coursework. The results of this research are intended to be presented at state and/or national school psychology conferences, in order to reach as many current students, trainers, and school psychologists as possible. Training programs may also use the information to further develop training practices that enhance students' understanding of religion and spirituality in children and families.

## Method

### Sample

All 178 directors of National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) approved programs were solicited to participate in the study; the training director from each program served as the sole participant. The email addresses of the directors were acquired by searching respective websites based on the publicly available listing of approved training programs. The web-based *Training on Religion and Spirituality Survey* through Qualtrics and a cover letter was emailed to training directors in September, 2010. Two follow-up reminder emails were sent to all directors who had not responded two weeks after the initial email and again two weeks later.

The primary investigator, Jessica Bass, received training in the use of Qualtrics through James Madison University's Center for Instructional Technology. While data

was kept in the strictest confidence. Responding participant's email addresses were tracked using Qualtrics for follow-up notices, but names and email addresses were not associated with individual survey responses. Qualtrics recorded if a participant had submitted a survey, but the researcher was not able to identify individual responses, therefore maintaining anonymity for the survey. The results of this project were coded in such a way that the respondent's identity was not attached to the final form of this study. Aggregate data is presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data is stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. In the consent form, it stated that if the responders want a copy of the results they can email [bassjm@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:bassjm@dukes.jmu.edu), and at the end of the survey the participants were able to check off a box if they want a copy of the results. Results were emailed to the participants who requested them. Upon completion of the study, data was destroyed.

#### Instrumentation

An 11 question survey, which can be found in Appendix B, was developed for this study by the primary investigator with consultation from faculty and a recognized expert in religious and spiritual competencies in school counseling programs (i.e., Dr. Michele Kielty Briggs). The questions are based loosely off the Rogers & Conoley (1992) survey to directors of school psychology training programs, Halstead's (2005) four proposed steps about cultural competence and religion/spirituality for school psychologists, ASERVIC's (2009) competencies, and a recent survey developed by Dr. Michelle Kielty Briggs. Questions one through three inquire about program demographics, four through nine refer to program diversity, case work, and course work, and 10 and 11 ask about competencies related to religion and spirituality relating to

school psychology. As a note, the format and spacing of the survey were adapted in the Qualtrics version.

Participation in this study posed no more than minimal risk to the survey taker and may even benefit the survey taker by increasing their awareness of religion/spirituality and school psychology.

#### Analyses

The analyses were descriptive statistics and qualitative analyses. The Likert scale questions were analyzed with percentages. The open ended questions, which asked for lists of classes, examples of casework, and a definition of religious competence in school psychology were analyzed qualitatively by forming categories of responses.

#### Results

The participants include 34 of the 178 directors who completed the survey, which is a 19% response rate. Of the programs represented, 47% offer a Master of Arts/Master of science degree, 6% offer a Certificate of Advanced Study/Certificate of Advanced graduate study, 62% offer an Educational Specialist Degree, 3% offer a Doctor of Psychology Degree, and 38% offer a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The accreditation statuses of the represented programs are 32% are American Psychological Association accredited, 97% are National Association of School Psychologists/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education approved, and 74% are accredited by their state. From the programs represented, 88% are public universities, 9% are private universities, and 9% are religiously affiliated.

Questions four through nine of the survey relate to program diversity, case work, and course work. Question four asks the participants to respond to statements about



program diversity and case work influenced by spirituality and/or religion. Of the participants, 53% strongly agree or agree and 41% disagree that there is a great deal of diversity in their training program. All respondents either strongly agree (71%) or agree (29%) that their program has a formally stated focus on promoting cultural competencies. In response to the statement that their program believes spirituality and religion play an important part in understanding children and families, 35% strongly agree/agree, 14% neither agree or disagree, and 24% strongly disagree/disagree. There are 13% of participants who agree/strongly agree and 68% of participants who strongly disagree/disagree that faculty in their training program have expertise in religion or spirituality as related to the practice of school psychology. In response to the statement “Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during practicum,” 15% agree, 29% neither agree nor disagree, and 56% strongly disagree/disagree. In response to the statement “Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during internship,” 18% agree, 41% neither agree nor disagree, 41% strongly disagree/disagree. The full percentage results for question four can be found in Table 2.

Question number five asks, “If your students have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality please list,” and there are 8 responses. After reading through the responses, there appeared to be two distinct themes. These themes were recorded in a table and tallied for response rate. The first theme, which appeared in 37.5% of responses, is that casework is influenced by religion/spirituality when the students have worked with children at religious affiliated schools or when religion/spirituality is accepted at schools. The second theme, which is in 50% of the

responses, is that casework is influenced by religion/spirituality when families have religious/spiritual practices that impacted interventions.

Question six asks, “Do your students take a specific course/courses dealing with religion or spirituality in school psychology?” in which 97% said “No” and 3% said “Yes.” The one respondent who answered, “Yes” did not respond to the seventh question that asked to list the specific course. Question eight asks, “Do your students take a course embedded with information pertaining to religion or spirituality in school psychology?” in which 65% said “No” and 35% said “Yes.” Question nine asked the “Yes” respondents to list the specific courses, and many of the responses included multicultural and diversity classes. All the classes the respondents listed are required to be taken by the program. The full listing of class responses can be found in Appendix E.

Questions 10 and 11 relate to competence in religious/spiritual aspects of the school psychologist profession. The full results of Question 10 can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1  
*Percentage of Responses to the Statements from Question 10.*

	SA	A	NAND	SD	D
1. Students feel comfortable discussing personal beliefs regarding spirituality and religion in my training program	6	38	50	6	0
2. Exploring and understanding spiritual or religious beliefs is an important part of training as a school psychologist in my training program.	6	6	29	44	15
3. Students know where to find answers to questions regarding spirituality and religion in my training program.	3	12	41	35	9
4. Students in my training program can explain the difference between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences.	0	20	53	12	15
5. Students in my training program can describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in a cultural context.	0	50	29	12	6
6. Students in my training program would feel comfortable	12	70	15	3	0

working with clients whose spiritual or religious beliefs are different from their own.

7. Students in my program demonstrate acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions.	6	85	6	0	0
8. Students in my program are sensitive to religious and/or spiritual themes in understanding children and families.	12	56	29	3	0
9. Students in my program can identify limits of his/her understanding of a client's religious or spiritual expression.	9	53	26	9	3
10. Students in my program can demonstrate appropriate referral skills by generating possible referral sources.	18	44	35	3	0
11. Students in my program can assess the relevance of religious and/or spiritual themes in understanding children and families.	0	53	18	26	3
12. Students in my program can utilize the religious and/or spiritual beliefs of children or families in the pursuit of their goals if it is an expressed preference.	3	26	44	15	12

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree NAND= Neither Agree nor Disagree SD= Strongly Disagree D=Disagree

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More than 50% of the respondents positively (strongly agree/agree) to statements five through 11. Statement number two is the only one with more than a 50% negative response (strongly disagree/disagree). Statements number one, three, four, and 12 have ambiguous and mixed results.

Question 11 asked the participants to define religious/spiritual competence in school psychology practice. Many common themes were indicated among the 19 responses. Creating a table with the most used religious/spiritual context words from each response generated the themes and then those words were tallied from each response (Merriam, 2009). A few responses used more than one context word, which is why the total percentages add up to 110%. The percentages and contexts that the participants define religious/spiritual competence as falling under are as follows: 37% cultural differences/diversity, 26% sensitivity, 26% knowledge/understanding, and 21% tolerance and acceptance.

## Discussion

The results from the descriptive statistics show a very good blend of degrees represented; consequently it is believed that the results are not skewed to a particular type of degree program. Since most of the programs represented are NASP and state approved, and many APA approved, the results are thought to be from high quality sources representing the best of school psychology training programs. Also, only three religious affiliated programs are involved in the sample, therefore the results are likely not biased towards schools that could be assumed to promote religious or spiritual competencies.

It is interesting that more than half of the participants strongly agree/agree that the students in their program have a great deal of diversity, because diversity seems to be lacking in school psychologists previously (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999; (Curtis, Lopez, Batsche, & Smith 2006)). Even though specifics about the types of diversity were not asked, these results could show a new trend in the diversity of graduate students in school psychology training program. Due to the recent initiative to promote multicultural competency in school psychology, it is not surprising that all the participants answered strongly agree/agree to promoting cultural competencies. However, it is interesting that with the significant promotion of cultural competencies; only 35% of programs believe that spirituality and religion are important in understanding children and families. There could be many possible reasons for this discrepancy: lack of information about the importance of religion and spirituality in children and families lives or possibly fear of the taboo subject due to separation of church and state. Though, the discrepancy could be due to the fact that the participants state that only 15% of practicum

students and 18% of interns have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality. Even though those percentages appear small, the fact that students are working with cases influenced by religion or spirituality seems to show the importance of students receiving training to be competent in their work.

Although if students are not asking children or families about their religiosity/spirituality, the percentage of actual casework impacted could be higher. Regardless of the percentage, many reasons have already been stated why it is important for school psychologists to understand how religion/spirituality can impact children and families. For instance, schools are religiously diverse, and there are a number of different religious groups and sects of Christianity, which may each impact a child differently (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). Furthermore, even though there is separation of church and state, schools still have winter holiday concerts with religious specific songs. There can be many situations in which students may have struggles dealing with religion and spirituality (e.g. if their sexuality goes against religious beliefs). Further, parental collaboration is important in schools, and families need to feel that they are fully supported and accepted for the collaboration to be successful. Also, openness and acceptance seems to be a basic fundamental necessity for children to establish positive teacher relations. It has also been stated that there are many ways religion/spirituality can be a protective factor or risk factor for children and families. This is important for school psychologists to understand, because they can help to create an open and accepting home/school collaboration. For example, school psychologists can help to generate interventions for students and families that match beliefs. School psychologists can help to educate school personnel if families with new beliefs move into their area. School

psychologists can help create a positive accepting climate in the schools by meeting with parents and families at open houses or before child study meetings to be sensitive too and address any of their concerns. Also, school psychologists can help students and families find resources in that area that are religiously affiliated or that would be sensitive to their beliefs (GoPaul-McNicol, 1997).

It is not surprising that only one program stated that their students take a class about religion and spirituality in school psychology, since there is lack of information on the topic. Also, it would be very tricky for program to offer entire courses on this specific of a topic, given the training models and guidelines for competencies, programs may have trouble justifying entire courses in this area. However, it is interesting that there are three religious universities represented in this study, and possibly only one offers a class on religion, spirituality, and school psychology. It is encouraging that many more programs offer classes embedded with information about religion/spirituality and school psychology. This may mean that students are better trained on dealing with spirituality and religion than research would suggest. However, it is interesting that the percentage of programs that believe spirituality and religion play an important role in understanding children and families is the exact same (35%) that offer a class embedded with information about spirituality/religion, and school psychology.

#### Response to Competencies

The participants were asked to rate statements regarding religious/spiritual competencies that the authors believe are important for a school psychologist to be proficient. Participants strongly agree or agree with over half of the competency statements, specifically with statements five through 11. The statements referred to

acceptance, sensitivity, identifying own limits, making referrals, working with people outside of own beliefs, and understanding religion/spirituality in a cultural context. This seems positive, because it appears that students may be more prepared to deal with religious/spiritual issues than would have been assumed based on the lack of research on religion, spirituality, and school psychology.

There is only one statement in which the majority of programs disagree: “Exploring and understanding spiritual or religious beliefs is an important part of training as a school psychologist in my training program.” This is not surprising, considering most programs do not offer a class in which they could explore or understand religious beliefs, and because almost a quarter of programs do not believe religion/spirituality is important to understanding children and families. A possibility as to why programs may believe it is not important is that typically school psychologists work with children based on within child characteristics (personality, behaviors), whereas religion or spirituality may be seen as outside of the child. Also, programs may not believe it is important due to separation of church and state; religion/spirituality may be seen as separate from school. Further, school psychologists may lack awareness of the importance of spirituality/religion to the work they do.

The one statement that had a majority ambiguous (neither agree nor disagree) response is, “Students in my training program can explain the difference between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences.” This is understandable, because if the topic is not discussed in class, than the program directors would not have any idea about students’ knowledge.

There are three statements in which there is not a clear majority that either agrees or disagrees. The first is, “Students feel comfortable discussing personal beliefs regarding spirituality and religion in my training program.” Though this statement leaned toward the positive, without programs specifically discussing spirituality or religion, it is understandable that there is a great amount of ambiguity. Next, the statement “Students know where to find answers to questions regarding spirituality and religion in my training program,” leaned more towards the negative. This is unfortunate, because much of what training programs strive to do is give resources to their students so that when they have a question they know where to look. If information about spirituality/religion is to be newly incorporated into a program, this seems like a good place to start. The last is the most ambiguous statement. “Students in my program can utilize the religious and/or spiritual beliefs of children or families in the pursuit of their goals if it is an expressed preference.” Again, this is understandable, because if the topic does not come up in class, then the program directors would not know what their students are capable of doing. However, this is also unfortunate and ties back to the last statement, because if a client expresses the preference to use religious/spiritual beliefs in their goals, and the school psychologist does not know how to help them or know where to find information to help them, then the client could miss out on a valuable opportunity.

Overall, the results from the competency statements seem very positive, because even though only one training program surveyed offers a specific course in religion/spirituality and school psychology and only 35% of the participants’ programs offer a course embedded with information about religion/spirituality and school psychology, more than half of the programs believe that their students are competent in



many of the aspects. How is this possible? Could information that the students are learning about another factor of cultural diversity be a generalized model for how to handle spiritual/religious questions? For instance, there are many types of diversity that school psychologists are supposed to be sensitive to and aware of, like race or sexuality, therefore religion/spirituality may be yet another type. This seems likely, because the areas of competency positively agreed with (e.g. acceptance and knowing one's own limits) are best practices of the profession and deal with best practices and ethics for other areas of diversity in school psychology. More research is needed to be sure, however, it is hopeful that school psychologists seem more prepared to tackle spiritual/religious issues than research or training curricula would suggest.

#### Definition of Religious/Spiritual Competence

Even though the NASP and APA ethical guidelines recognize that religion is an important factor to understand when conceptualizing multiculturalism, this seems difficult if one does not comprehend how to be competent in the topic (American Psychological Association, 2002; National Association of School Psychologists, 2010). The definitions offered by the participants about religious/spiritual competence give a good starting place for a working definition, the full list of definitions from respondents can be found in Appendix E. One definition from a participant states,

“Having an awareness of and sensitivity to how religion and spirituality can influence child and family development and how the family interacts with educational institutions, as well as having the requisite skills to enhance the educational experience of children and families for whom religion and spirituality are salient factors.”

This definition is very comprehensive and includes pieces that would seem to be

important for school psychologists addressing spirituality and religion, such as sensitivity, child and family development, and enhancing educational experiences. All three of those pieces are considered best practices for the school psychologist profession in general; however it is pertinent to remember to apply them to matters of spirituality and religion as well. Another participant's definition is simply, "Knowledge, acceptance, and willingness to learn the spiritual and religious aspects of human development and the comprehensive child." The above mentioned definition is very concise, though it also hits significant pieces to consider when attending to spirituality and religion such as knowledge, acceptance, and the comprehensive child. Again these pieces seem to be best practice of school psychology, however there is not any evidence to show that these pieces are being widely taught to include religion or spirituality.

There is a strong amount of agreement between the ideas listed in the definitions, and they have been synthesized by the authors into an adapted definition, "Competence in religion/spirituality can be defined as accepting, understanding, and being sensitive to the values, beliefs, and role religion and spirituality play in cultural diversity, the influence it may have on children's mental health, academics, and behaviors, and the impact it may have on approaches to assessment and intervention for children and families." The main points suggested by the definition are all topics that are discussed often in school psychology when learning how to work with children and families. Many of the concepts mentioned in the author created definition include aspects mentioned in the ASERVIC competencies such as acceptance, sensitivity, and the impact on assessment and intervention. ASERVIC has nine competencies which make it much more comprehensive than a single definition and lists other pieces to consider such as self-

awareness, understanding models of spiritual and religious development, and impacts on making diagnoses (ASERVIC, 2009).

#### Limitations to the Current Study

There are many limitations that may affect these findings. The most obvious limitation is the small sample size, since only 35 out of 178 program directors participated. One possible reason for the small sample size is that directors may have thought that their program does not deal with religion/spirituality at all and that it would not be useful or important to complete the survey. Another possible reason for the small sample size is that the program directors may have felt they were too busy to fill out the survey. Also, the topic of religion/spirituality in school psychology may have been thought of as "taboo". Further, if directors are unaware of the importance religion/spirituality may play in a children or family's lives, they could have thought that this study is irrelevant. One would expect that these results are inflated, because many of the people who participated in the study may have some interest in the topic due to their program beliefs. Whereas, the people who did not participate may not think religion/spirituality in school psychology is important.

Another limitation is that many participants did not answer the open-ended questions. For example, 11 participants responded that practicum students and interns from their program were involved in case work influenced by spirituality/religion and only eight participants provided examples of the cases. One program responded that their students take a specific course dealing with religion and spirituality; however they did not list the specific class. Also, twelve programs stated that their students take classes embedded with religious/spiritual information, and eleven listed examples. Finally, only

nineteen out of thirty-four participants listed their definition for religious/spiritual competency in school psychology. If all the participants had provided qualitative responses, the results could have been much richer, because the open-ended questions provided very useful information for future research and recommendations to programs.

An additional limitation is that program directors were the sole participant, and the survey was designed to look at curricular information and perceived student competencies (Kelly, 1997). Thus, examples of case work did not come from the primary source and could be inaccurate or less than comprehensive. Also, if the students did not tell their professors when religion/spirituality matters arose in casework, then the percentage of students involved in case work could be much higher. It is also possible that the students may not have realized the importance of religion and spirituality in the case themselves. Further, since the professors were using their speculation of what they believe their students would be competent to do regarding spirituality/religion, these numbers could be inflated or deflated. Finally, the program directors may know what most course syllabi contain; however in a larger program they may not. Also, sometimes topics listed on a syllabus are not covered or not covered completely in the class. Without teaching the class, it may be hard for directors to know which classes do or do not cover religious/spiritual information.

#### Future Research

To get a better sample of how spirituality and religion are represented in school psychology training programs, this study should be repeated with a larger more representative sample. To increase the response rate, more background information could be provided to help persuade the programs of the importance of the study. The

professional organization, Trainers of School Psychology (TSP), may help to increase the response rate by presenting information about the study at one of their meetings and soliciting participation. This organization focused on training issues in school psychology could help to create interest in the topic by putting small interest articles in professional newsletters for TSP or NASP. Further, a NASP special interest group might be formed. By connecting with existing interest groups, like in the counseling profession, collaborative efforts could generate new ideas on awareness or cast a wider net of interest.

In the future, another study could be done analyzing syllabi or using the statements from the competency questions to survey actual school psychology students. It would be interesting to see how prepared current graduate students think that they are for dealing with religious/spirituality matters, and what else they would have liked to learn from their training program. It would also be interesting to have focus groups with practicum students and interns to see how religious/spiritual issues have affected their case work.

It also seems that valuable information could be gathered from the practicing school psychologists because they encounter many unique situations everyday. Important information could be obtained from exploring practicing school psychologists' casework involving religion/spirituality, how they handled the case, what information they used from their training, and what they would have liked to learn about religion/spirituality during their training.

Since this study is one of the first in school psychology, interesting information may be obtained by a follow-up study with the participants about how the survey affected

their perception of religion and spirituality in school psychology. For instance, one participant commented in a section of the survey, “We do NOTHING related to religious or spiritual instruction in our program... Your survey, however, has made me consider an area of diversity that we don't discuss, which is interesting since we're a Catholic university!” If other people felt that way after completing the survey, then it may just be a matter of disseminating information to universities and at conferences to get the word out that spirituality and religion are important parts of diversity to consider.

#### Recommendations and Resources for Training Programs

The definition created by the authors can be a good starting place to find topics in which to incorporate information on spirituality and religion into coursework. For example, if a class is discussing different values and beliefs of cultures, it could be a good place to teach that some cultures revolve around religious beliefs, such as Hasidic Jews. In certain some cities, Hasidic Jews have their own communities, where schools and food markets are all based off of their religious beliefs. To understand their culture, one must understand their religion. Or, if an intervention class is discussing how culture may influence intervention, the example could be used that some religions do not believe in using pharmacological intervention and that suggesting a medication intervention could dampen rapport with that family.

The comments made by the participants in response to how students have been involved in case work involving spirituality or religion are valuable and may become future teaching examples. For instance, one of the respondents stated that a student worked with parents who homeschooled their children for religious purposes and did not realize disabilities until they were in upper elementary grades. This could be used as good

teaching example for how religious beliefs could impact access to early intervention services. Another respondent stated that students have worked with children that have come from religious backgrounds in which reading material was restricted. This would be important information that a school psychologist should take into account before recommending any type of bibliotherapy. The full list of participants statements can be found in Appendix C and can be used to create other teaching examples.

Many programs have classes in common based on accreditation standards, and the classes listed by programs that already teach about religion/spirituality in school psychology can be good examples of where to start teaching this information. Many programs listed that their multicultural or diversity classes are embedded with religious/information, though others listed classes such as Crisis Intervention or Legal, Ethical, and Profession Issues. For example, facilitate intergroup dialogue between graduate students about their own religion/spirituality in multicultural class. Additionally, explore religious perceptions of disorders in psychopathology classes. Further, in practicum or internship classes, it would be appropriate to ask students to fully understand the school they are working with in terms of religious diversity. Therefore, there are many possible ways to incorporate religious/spiritual information into classes already offered by the program. The full list of classes from the participants can be found in Appendix D.

Finally, if interested in learning more about how religion and spirituality affect children and families consult Halstead's (2005) chapter in *Multicultural School Psychology*, or Cobb and Staton's (2006) chapter in *Children's Needs III: Development, Prevention, and Intervention*. NASP's *Communiqué* sometimes has articles

about working with various religions, such as the recent article *Considerations for School Psychologists Working With Arab American Children and Families*” by Anisa N. Goforth. Remember, “every therapeutic relationship is a cross-cultural experience” (Bergin & Jensen, 1990, p. 3). It is only when school psychologists have accepted and learned to incorporate religion and spirituality into this cross-cultural relationship, will they fully be able to conceptualize and understand the needs of children and families in our schools.



## Appendix A

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

#### **Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica Bass from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to research the incorporation of religious and/or spiritual awareness into the curriculum School Psychology training programs. As the director, you are the one with the knowledge to help with the research. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of an Educational Specialist thesis.

#### **Research Procedures**

This study consists of an online survey that will be administered to individual participants through Qualtrics. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the inclusion of religion in your university's school psychology curricula. Should you decide to participate in this research you may access the anonymous survey by following the web link located under the "Giving of Consent" section.

#### **Time Required**

Participation in this study will require 15 minutes of your time.

#### **Risks**

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study.

#### **Benefits**

Potential benefits from participation in this study include an awareness of the possibility of including religious/spiritual information into your university's curricula.

#### **Confidentiality**

The results of this research are intended to be presented at state and/or national school psychology conferences. While individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through Qualtrics (a secure online survey), data is kept in the strictest confidence. Responding participant's email addresses will be tracked using Qualtrics for follow-up notices, but names and email addresses are not associated with individual survey responses. The researchers will know if a participant has submitted a survey, but will not be able to identify individual responses, therefore maintaining anonymity for the survey. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. Aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact: Jessica Bass at [bassjm@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:bassjm@dukes.jmu.edu).

Jessica Bass  
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James Madison University  
Telephone: (540) 568-6564  
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### **Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject**

Dr. David Cockley  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
James Madison University  
(540) 568-2834  
[cocklede@jmu.edu](mailto:cocklede@jmu.edu)

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form through email. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age. By clicking on the link below, and completing and submitting this anonymous online survey, I am consenting to participate in this research.

*Insert hyperlink here.*

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Name of Researcher (Printed)

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Date

## Appendix B

## Training on Religion and Spirituality Survey

1. What degrees in the area of school psychology does your university offer? (Please check all that apply.)

MA/MS    CAS/CAGS    EdS    EdD    PsyD    PhD

2. Is your school psychology program: (check all that apply)

APA accredited    NASP/NCATE approved

State accredited    Other

3. Is your university:

Public    Private    Religiously affiliated

4. Please respond to the following statements.

There is a great deal of diversity within the students of my training program (interns included).

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

My program has an intentional formally stated focus on promoting cultural competencies of graduate students.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

My training program believes spirituality and religion play an important part in understanding children and families.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Faculty in my training program have expertise in religion or spirituality as related to the practice of school psychology.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during practicum.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during internship.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

5. If your students have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality please list examples.

6. Do your students take a specific course/courses dealing with religion or spirituality in school psychology?

1. Yes 2. No

7. Please list the courses and indicate if the course is required or optional.

8. Do your students take a course embedded with information pertaining to religion or spirituality in school psychology?

9. Please list the courses and indicate if the course is required or optional.

10. Please respond to the following statements.

Students feel comfortable discussing personal beliefs regarding spirituality and religion in my training program.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Exploring and understanding spiritual or religious beliefs is an important part of training as a school psychologist in my training program.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students know where to find answers to questions regarding spirituality and religion in my training program.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my training program can explain the difference between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my training program can describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in a cultural context.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my training program would feel comfortable working with clients whose spiritual or religious beliefs are different from their own.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program demonstrate acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program are sensitive to religious and/or spiritual themes in understanding children and families.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program can identify limits of his/her understanding of a client's religious or spiritual expression.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program can demonstrate appropriate referral skills by generating possible referral sources.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program can assess the relevance of religious and/or spiritual themes in understanding children and families.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Students in my program can utilize the religious and/or spiritual beliefs of children or families in the pursuit of their goals if it is an expressed preference.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree or Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

11. How would you define religious/spiritual competence in school psychology practice?

## Appendix C

*Comments Made on Question Five: "If your students have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality please list examples."*

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Treatment with children and families in which religiosity and spirituality issues are significant.

Our on campus training clinic receives many referrals from religious-affiliated private/catholic schools. As a result, many of the client (e.g., children, families) have a strong religious orientation which requires our student clinicians to be sensitive to.

Occasionally, students have seen clients for evaluation who are from a strict religious tradition. Reading materials etc. have been restricted.

Occasionally, interns have had to work with families that expressed some interesting beliefs or superstitions that apparently had a religious origin and that had the potential to interfere with interventions or services. The interns were challenged to find ways to frame their interventions and consultations in ways that did not offend or lead the family to refuse treatment or consultation.

It is not clear from your questions exactly what you are asking for with regards to "cases influenced by religion or spirituality."

Parents homeschooling their children for religious reasons and failing to recognize disabilities until their children were in the upper elementary grades.

Supervisors of field work have state their religious beliefs and invited interns to their place of worship and pray before and after meetings. Once out of a building, the prayer is out loud for the intern to hear. Supervisor has religious posters and materials on her office walls. A prayer is said before eligibility meetings in a rural school district.

This year, for the first time, an intern is working PT at a Catholic ES. I hope to continue this practice in the future.

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## Appendix D

*Comments Made on Question Nine: "Please list the courses and indicate if the course is required or optional."*

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Course Title	Required or Optional
SPSY 651 Diversity, Social, and Cultural Issues	Required
Legal, Ethical, Profession Issues	Required
Crisis Intervention	Required
Social and Emotional Development in Childhood and Adolescence	Required
PSYC 7802 Children with Disability and Their Families	Required
Psychology of Multiculturalism	Required
Cultural Competence in Schools	Required
Multicultural Perspectives on Interventions	Required
Diversity	Required
Intro to School Psychology	Required
Multicultural Counseling	Required
Individual Diversity in School Psychology	Required

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## Appendix E

*Responses to Questions 11: "How would you define religious/spiritual competence in school psychology practice?"*

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I think that the only place for teaching our students about religion/spirituality within the context of the practice of school psychology is in helping them understand that there are many views about religion and how various beliefs affect cultures, and how various cultural differences affect children and families in many ways, and how understanding and tolerance are critical to effective work with diverse families.

Knowledge, acceptance, and willingness to learn the spiritual and religious aspects of human development and the comprehensive child.

Sensitivity to religious/spiritual differences; understanding of various religions and/or spiritual perspectives.

Understanding religion and spirituality as one component of cultural difference.

Tolerance for and acceptance of faiths and beliefs of the children and families with whom they work. A willingness to work within the confines of the family's belief system when generating assessment and intervention plans, compromising in such a way that effective best practices can be pursued to the extent possible without offending or creating resistance from the family.

Having an awareness of and sensitivity to how religion and spirituality can influence child and family development and how the family interacts with educational institutions, as well as having the requisite skills to enhance the educational experience of children and families for whom religion and spirituality are salient factors.

Being able to determine if a religious belief system held by the family will impact the approaches to assessment and courses of intervention applied to meet the academic and behavioral needs of the child.

School psychologists must understand how religious beliefs effect client's behavior, sense of self, identity, moral decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Psychologists must be sensitive to client's beliefs and help them clarify those beliefs in relevant situations to assist ethical/moral decision making and taking action consistent with their values and beliefs. School psychologists can assist client's in understanding their beliefs within the larger ecology of religious, spiritual, ontological, and ethical belief systems coexisting within society.



Understanding a student's grounding in spiritual and religious beliefs--including mores, norms, and taboos--as a foundation for that student's behavior, motivation, and aspirations.

Awareness of and sensitivity to religious/spiritual differences of others (students, parents, colleagues); consideration of these differences in practice

The tolerance for all religious viewpoints and practices and advocacy for the safe expression of religious and spiritual beliefs for all children in schools.

Understanding the culture and context of religious/spiritual beliefs and the part they play in a client's life and well being.

Understanding the impact and import of religion/spirituality and being able to work competently with those with varying beliefs.

Only in the context of diversity

Note: We do NOTHING related to religious or spiritual instruction in our program, thus all my answers above are my speculation of what my candidates can do...on their own, as a human being sensitive to differences in people. Your survey, however, has made me consider an area of diversity that we don't discuss, which is interesting since we're a Catholic university! I would define religious/spiritual competence as like any competence in working with family differences...the awareness of differences, the knowledge of what it means, and behaviors to work with the differences.

Only within the context of religious/spirituality as part of diversity and awareness of values and beliefs (cultural or religious) that may impact on symptom reporting and intervention acceptability

Sensitivity and consideration of all persons beliefs and culture.

The ability to understand that there are individual differences in terms of religion/spiritual beliefs; possessing the knowledge to understand how these differences play into the provision of services to children and families in schools; the ability to demonstrate skills with regard to respecting individual differences and allowing this to assist in the provision of services. In addition, such competence is concerned with the knowledge and skills associated with how and when to consult with others to address religious/spiritual beliefs within the context of the provision of school psychology services.

Culturally sensitive to how various religions affect behavior and development, and an appreciation of religious and spiritual beliefs that are different than your own.

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Table 2

*Percentage of Responses to the Statements from Question Four.*

	SA	A	NAND	SD	D
1. There is a great deal of diversity within the students of my training program (interns included).	18	35	6	41	0
2. My program has an intentional formally stated focus on promoting cultural competencies of graduate students.	71	29	0	0	0
3. My training program believes spirituality and religion play an important part in understanding children and families.	9	26	41	18	6
4. Faculty in my training program have expertise in religion or spirituality as related to the practice of school psychology.	9	3	21	41	26
5. Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during practicum.	0	15	29	41	15
6. Graduate students in my program have been involved in case work influenced by religion or spirituality during internship.	0	18	41	23	18

SA= Strongly Agree    A= Agree    NAND= Neither Agree nor Disagree  
SD= Strongly Disagree

## References

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