Developing Spiritual Competence:
A Look at a Counseling and Spirituality Course

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The ACA (2014), ASERVIC (2009), and CACREP (2016) standards indicate that counselors must be able to address clients' religious and spiritual needs. Despite this, counseling programs often fail to incorporate religion and spirituality into the curriculum (Adams, Puig, Baggs, & Wolff, 2015). In order to increase student counselors' spiritual competency, a Counseling and Spirituality graduate course was developed at a CACREP-accredited program. Students' spiritual awareness and competence were found to generally increase following the course.

In order to be considered competent, it is necessary that counselors meet the needs of a diverse range of clients (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). This diverse range includes clients who are religious or hold any spiritual belief. Data reveal that 63% of adults in a sample of 35,071 identified as being "absolutely certain," and 20% identify as being "fairly certain" that they believe in God (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014). Following these findings, Saw, Bayne, and Lorelle (2012) and Adams et al. (2015) explain that religious and spiritual beliefs play an important role in clients' lives. Furthermore, it has been said that religion and spirituality are "...among the most important factors which structure human experience, beliefs, values, and behavior, as well as illness patterns" (Lukoff, Turner, & Lu, 1992, p. 56). Self-actualization is an important goal of counseling, and "for some clients, self-actualization involves a religious perspective" (Cashwell et al., 2013, p. 46). In order for counselors to be prepared to handle religion and spirituality within a counseling setting, counselors must receive proper training. As such, the purpose of this pilot study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new course in Counseling and Spirituality for increasing counselor trainees' personal spirituality and spiritual competence.

Defining Spirituality and Religiosity

In training on religion and spirituality, it is important to differentiate between the two terms as well as understand the manners in which they overlap. Richards and Bergin (1997) define religiosity as that which, "...has to do with theistic beliefs, practices, and feelings that are often, but not always, expressed institutionally and denominationally as well as personally..." (p. 13). Spirituality, on the other hand, when defined inclusively, is "the part of one's identity that is concerned with purpose and meaning in life, interdependence with others, inner peace, and transcendence" (Muse-Burke & Sallavanti, in press, p. 4). Religion and spirituality are similar but distinct, and throughout this study, an emphasis is placed on spirituality, as it is inclusive and might encompass people who are religious as well as individuals who identify as spiritual but not religious.

Spiritual Competencies

The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), the ACA Code of Ethics, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) further the idea that religion and spirituality play a role in counseling, as all mention spiritual and religious competence. ASERVIC (2009) initially created a list of 14 competencies that fall under six main topics: Culture and Worldview, Counselor Self-Awareness, Human and Spiritual Development, Communication, Assessment, and Diagnosis and

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Treatment. These spiritual competencies necessitate that counselors are aware of the differences between religion and spirituality, explore their own beliefs, utilize religious or spiritual concepts that are amenable to the client, gain a general understanding of the client's religious or spiritual beliefs during the intake process, and set goals consistent with the client's beliefs (ASERVIC, 2009). The 14 competencies express the knowledge counselors should have about spirituality and religion along with ways in which counselors ought to be prepared to integrate or address religion and spirituality in counseling. For the purpose of this study, and consistent with the spiritual competence literature, spiritual competence is defined as understanding "…the differences between spirituality and religion; the differences between spirituality, religion, and culture; and a counselor's obligation to remain open to spiritual and religious references by the client" (Robertson, 2010, p. 12).

Complementing this portion of the ASERVIC competencies, the 2014 version of the ACA Code of Ethics also addresses spirituality. Specifically, it notes in Section E.8., Multicultural Issues/Diversity in Assessment, that counselors must recognize the effects of religion and spirituality. Required to adhere to this code of ethics, counselors have a duty to their clients to be competent in spiritual and religious matters when completing assessment. Additionally, in their 2016 standards, CACREP (2015) has included spiritual competence as a specific requirement. In Section F.2.g., under Social and Cultural Diversity, the CACREP standards state that "the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients' and counselors' worldviews" must be covered in the curriculum of accredited programs (CACREP, 2015, p. 10). As such, there is a growing expectation that ethical counselors will be competent to work with a variety of clients who identify as spiritual.

Counselor Training in Spirituality and Religiosity

Despite the great number of clients who possess religious and spiritual beliefs (Shaw et al., 2012), and the spiritual competencies of which counselors must be aware, "…legitimate concerns can be raised about the adequacy of spiritual/religious diversity training" (McMinn et al., 2014, p. 51-52). In fact, in many CACREP-accredited counselor education programs, there is not a specific course on religious or spiritual issues, and therefore, the only place in which the information might be learned is through general courses on multiculturalism (Henriksen, Polonyi, Bornsheuer-Boswell, Greger, & Watts, 2015). Unfortunately, the lack of spiritual and religious training might be

attributed to the long-standing, intense separation between the mental health professions and religion (Richards & Bergin, 2000). Some believe that religion and spirituality are not as important to the multicultural training of counselors as other topics, such as ethnicity or gender (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). Also, because many counselor educators were not trained in religious and spiritual issues, graduate programs might be slow to incorporate religion and spirituality into the curriculum, as there might not be faculty who are competent to teach such courses (Hage et al., 2006).

Notwithstanding the lack of training, most counselors believe that they should be trained in religious and spiritual matters. In a study done by Henriksen et al. (2015), of 113 counseling students, only five felt that religious and spiritual beliefs should play no role in the counseling process. Most participants reported that religious and spiritual beliefs should play some role, an important role, or a significant role in counseling (Henriksen et al., 2015). Similarly, in a study conducted by Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, and Belaire (2002), counseling students rated the importance of the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies with moderately strong agreement, suggesting the importance of the competencies in counselor training. Additionally, according to a study conducted by Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell (2007), American Counseling Association members are in strong support of utilizing the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies in counselor training programs.

Addressing spirituality and religion in counselor training programs can take many forms. One important aspect of training counselors on spiritual and religious issues aligns with the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies and maintains that counselors should be trained to recognize their personal beliefs (Shaw et al., 2012). Additionally, Briggs and Rayle (2005) note that it is important for counselors to be taught the difference between religion and spirituality as well as the importance of respecting different religious and spiritual issues. Furthering this idea, Henriksen et al. (2015) developed a data-based model that identifies the important components of meeting students' training needs regarding religion and spirituality. Components that require stronger training include: (a) personal development, (b) self-discovery and clarification, (c) additional education, (d) the role of religion and/or spirituality in the counseling process and ethical counseling practice, and (e) counselor supervision (Henriksen et al., 2015).

One course discussed in the literature focused on expanding awareness of spirituality, increasing awareness of students' own spiritual development, and

increasing confidence in addressing spiritual issues with clients (Curtis & Glass, 2002). This course resulted in a significant increase in students' confidence in their ability to address spiritual issues, a decrease in students' judgmental thoughts, and an increase in beliefs that using spirituality in counseling might be useful to clients (Curtis & Glass, 2002). Notably, after examining 14 different syllabi on introductory courses in spirituality and counseling, Cashwell and Young (2004) found a lack of convergence, which might warrant additional standardization across courses so as to effectively facilitate the development of spiritually competent counselors. Similarly, Shaw et al. (2012) note there are very few articles that provide information on how a spirituality course should be structured for counseling trainees. There is no prescribed framework for a spirituality course within counselor training programs, so this study will help to fill the gap in a lacking area of research.

Hypotheses

Based on this review of literature, the purpose of this pilot study was to examine the effectiveness of a new counseling and spirituality course for counselors-in-training. Specifically, spiritual competence and personal spirituality were assessed for change before and after a six-week, 3-credit graduate course on counseling and spirituality. It was expected that students' personal spirituality (Inclusive Spirituality Index; ISI; Muse-Burke, 2005) and spiritual competence (Spiritual Competency Scale; SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010) would increase following the Counseling and Spirituality course. Further, students' posttest personal spirituality scores (ISI; Muse-Burke, 2005) were expected to exceed the mean score (M = 239.2) of the norming sample (Muse-Burke, 2005). Likewise, students' posttest spiritual competence scores (SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010) were anticipated to surpass the threshold for spiritual competency (score = 105; Robertson, 2010). In addition to examining personal spirituality and spiritual expertise, ratings of the course were reviewed to assess student satisfaction and learning outcomes. It was hypothesized that students' ratings of the completion of course objectives and satisfaction with the course would be greater than the midpoint scores of each measure (i.e., course objectives score > 4.0, satisfaction with course score > 3.0).

Method

Participants

Ten students enrolled in a graduate course entitled Counseling and Spirituality at a small, Catholic, liberal arts university in Pennsylvania participated in the study. The university includes CACREP accredited programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and School Counseling. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university, and participants participated in an informed consent procedure. No compensation was offered to the participants for taking part in this study. Eight of the 10 participants provided demographic information. All eight participants identified as being white. The gender of the participant included seven women and one transwoman. The ages of the eight participants ranged from 22 to 68, with a mean of 33 (SD = 16.41). Of the eight participants, seven identified as graduate students, and one as a school counselor. Six participants were pursuing a degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. The remaining graduate student was pursuing a Master's degree in Psychology. Five participants identified as Catholic, two as Christian, and one as Agnostic/Spiritual. Frequency of religious practice per month ranged from daily to two times per month.

Intervention

The course on counseling and spirituality provided didactic and experiential opportunities related to integrating spirituality and religiosity into counseling. By creating a safe place to discuss religious and spiritual experiences, the course sought to increase students' knowledge of religion and spirituality and awareness of personal religious and spiritual beliefs. The class was designed to teach students about the ethical issues associated with incorporating religion and spirituality into counseling and to help students become knowledgeable of the empirical mental health literature related to spirituality and religion. The course covered a variety of topics related to religion and spirituality, including ethics, theoretical frameworks, qualitative and quantitative assessment, world religions, counselor self-awareness, and group counseling. Students were taught how to incorporate religion and spirituality into counseling sessions through techniques that enhanced gratitude, forgiveness, and mindfulness.

Before each class, students were required to read various articles on religion and spirituality (e.g., ASERVIC, 2009; Briggs & Rayle, 2005; Cashwell et al., 2013). In addition, students completed readings from a book on world religions (Schouler, 2010). During class, the teaching methods included lecture, experiential ice breakers, group discussions, and spiritual practices. The integration of experiential ice breakers and spiritual practices provided students with a unique learning opportunity, as students were able to

participate in meditation, yoga, bible study, and mindfulness during class time.

Students were required to complete three writing assignments. First, they wrote a reflection paper based on their experience creating a spiritual genogram (Frame, 2001). This assignment was developed to help students gain greater self-awareness of their religious and spiritual backgrounds. Students also completed a review of a spiritual book chosen from a list of authors provided by the course instructor (e.g., Pema Chodron, Viktor Frankl, and Caroline Myss). The purpose of this assignment was to teach students analysis skills to incorporate bibliotherapy into counseling. Lastly, students completed a paper on a religious or spiritual practice in which they participated outside of class; students were required to choose a practice with which they had little or no familiarity. The goal of this assignment was to extend students' empirical and experiential knowledge of specific spiritual interventions and help students gain awareness of their personal reactions.

Measures

Spiritual Competency Scale. The Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010), based on the ASERVIC (2009) Spiritual Competencies, was designed to assess the effectiveness of training in spirituality and counseling and provide quantitative data on spiritual competency (Robertson, 2010). The SCS-R-II includes 21-items that are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *High Disagreement*, 6 = *High Agreement*). Items are summed to attain a total score, with no items being reverse-scored. A total score of 105 or higher indicates spiritual competency. Items are written to be harmonious with wording found within the literature on counseling and spirituality, and each can be matched with an ASERVIC competency (Robertson, 2010). The SCS-R-II has an internal consistency of .84 and six factors that account for 61% of the variance in scores (Dailey, Robertson, & Gill, 2015). Reliability of individual factors range from .61 to .85 (Dailey et al., 2015).

Inclusive Spirituality Index. The Inclusive Spirituality Index (ISI; Muse-Burke, 2005) is a measure used to assess the four dimensions of spirituality as defined by Muse-Burke and Sallavanti (in press; i.e., purpose and meaning in life, interdependence with others, inner peace, and transcendence). The ISI utilizes 47 self-report items, 22 of which are reverse scored. Respondents rate their agreement with each of these items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Items are summed for a total score ranging from 47 to 329; higher scores indicate a higher level of spirituality. The ISI displays

high internal consistency, $\alpha = .91$, and high test-retest reliability over a 3 and one half week period, $r = .87$, $p < .0001$ (Muse-Burke, 2005).

Course Objectives Survey. The Course Objectives Survey was designed by the second author to assess the effectiveness of the Counseling and Spirituality course. Students completed the survey at the end of the course, rating the extent to which course objectives were met. Students were asked to reflect on course learning objectives found within the syllabus and rate the degree to which they believe the learning objectives were met using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). Seven items were rated for the course learning objectives; eight items were rated for course activities; and a section was provided in which students might provide written comments. There is no reliability or validity data available for this measure.

University Course Evaluations. The University Course Evaluation is an anonymous survey that students complete electronically for all courses at the university at which the Counseling and Spirituality course was offered. Students rate nine questions concerning course organization and planning, four questions on student/faculty interaction, and six questions about the course experience overall using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = *strongly disagree*, 1 = *strongly agree*). Results are returned to the professor by means of percentages for each item. There is no reliability or validity data available for this measure.

Follow-up Survey. The Follow-up Survey, created by the researchers, consists of five open-ended questions that participants were asked to answer honestly. Questions inquired about what participants learned about themselves, their families, others, being a counselor, and what impressions they gained about religious/spiritual practices.

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire designed by the researchers, which included questions on age, gender, ethnicity, graduate student status, religious orientation, and frequency of religious practice.

Procedure

Data were collected on three separate occasions for this study: (a) the first day of the six-week Counseling and Spirituality summer course, (b) the last day of the course, and (c) two months after the completion of the course. Participants were asked to complete paper copies of the Inclusive Spirituality Index (ISI; Muse-

Burke, 2005) and the Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010), which were distributed and collected at the start of the first and the last day of class. At the conclusion of the course, participants were also asked to fill out paper copies of the Course Objectives Survey and an online version of the University Course Evaluation. Two months after the last day of the course, participants were sent an email to inform them that they would receive follow-up data collection measures in the mail. Participants were mailed the ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005), SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010), the Demographic Questionnaire, and the Follow-up Survey. In addition to these measures, participants were provided with business return envelopes and instructions to mail the completed measures back to the researchers. Surveys were scored after the second author submitted final grades for the course, and students' surveys were coded with names removed. As such, participation in the research and survey scores had no impact on course final grades.

Results

In order to address the hypotheses, mean scores for the Inclusive Spirituality Index (ISI; Muse-Burke, 2005), Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010), Course Objectives Survey, and University Course Evaluations were examined. First, it was hypothesized that the individual spirituality of participants, as measured by the ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005), would increase from pretest to post-test. The results support this hypothesis, with a pretest mean of 254.0 and a post-test mean of 274.5. The increase, however, as examined by a paired samples t-test, was not significant. Similarly, it was hypothesized that participants' spiritual competency, as measured by the SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010), would increase from pretest to post-test. At pretest, participants had a mean score of 107.8, and they finished the post-test with a mean of 112.9. A paired samples t-test was conducted and revealed that the change in scores was not significant.

Also, it was hypothesized that participants' personal spirituality (ISI) would be greater than the norming sample at post-test. The norming score for the ISI is $M = 253.29$ ($SD = 30.99$; Muse-Burke, 2005), which participants exceeded with a mean score of 274.5 ($SD = 25.63$) at post-test. Likewise, it was hypothesized that participants' spiritual competency would be greater than the threshold for spiritual competency (SCS-R-II; Robertson, 2010) at post-test. A score of 105 or higher on the SCS-R-II indicates spiritual competency (Dailey, et al., 2015), and participants received a mean score of 112.9 at post-test, supporting the hypothesis.

Finally, it was expected that participants would rate items on the Course Objectives Survey and the University Course Evaluations higher than the midpoints of 4.0 and 3.0, respectively. On the Course Objectives Survey, an item that concerned developing knowledge about the potential negative effects of religion and spirituality received the lowest rating, with a mean rating of 5.95. The highest ratings were found for meeting the course objective of providing a safe environment to discuss spiritual experiences and for using lecture, discussions, and activities as experiences that contributed to learning. Both items received a mean rating of 6.8. The mean score of all the items was 6.02, which is higher than the midpoint of 4.0. The University Course Evaluation resulted in a mean score of 4.6 for the "Course Organization and Planning" section, a mean score of 4.4 for the "Student/Faculty Interaction" section, and a mean score of 4.7 for the "Overall Evaluation" section. The mean score of all the items was 4.7, which is higher than the midpoint of 3.0. As such, both hypotheses were supported.

Follow-up data was collected two-months after the course concluded, at which time participants' average scores on the ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005) and SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010) were 278.25, and 113.25, respectively. This shows a slight increase from their personal spirituality and spiritual competency scores reported at the end of the semester. As part of the follow-up data, qualitative answers were collected regarding what participants learned about themselves, their families, and others from partaking in the course. Information was also gathered in relation to what participants learned about being a counselor and religious/spiritual practices. One participant noted that, "[t]hough the class concluded months ago, I still reflect daily on what we did throughout the course." In response to a question involving learning about one's family, another participant stated, "[w]e are much more diverse than I thought," and another participant said, "[r]eligion has a lot more to do with the quality of relationships between members than I realized."

On the topic of impressions gained about religious and spiritual practices, one participant expressed that "many [practices] have a lot of the same foundations and share many similarities," while a different participant noted, "I had not been very educated on the variations of religions and/or their beliefs—I have gained respect for others, even those who don't have similar beliefs or have no beliefs…." Another participant concluded that "…spirituality can be felt and understood differently by each person. Some practices are better for some people." Finally, when asked about the clinical implications of the course, participants made comments such as, "[i]t is important to be spiritually educated and without being content with yourself, you can't work on someone else"; "[i]f a

client wants to discuss religion or spirituality I want to be open and willing; now I know how"; "…spirituality is a vital piece to the lives of many & it would be negligent of me to not keep myself educated and competent in this area"; and "recognizing your biases is important, so you do not cause harm to clients."

Discussion

The current pilot study investigated the change in students' spiritual competency and personal spirituality after the completion of a graduate level Counseling and Spirituality course. The study also reviewed course evaluation and participant comments in order to understand the class' utility and impact. It is important to examine the effectiveness of this course, since religion and spirituality classes might become a necessary part of counseling programs in the future in accordance with ASERVIC (2009), ACA (2014), and CACREP (2015) guidelines.

Following the course, it was found that spiritual competency increased, but this increase was not statistically significant. The small sample size in the current pilot study likely accounts for the lack of statistical significance, and a larger sample size might provide the necessary power (Cohen, 1992) to discern a statistically significant change. Notably, the pretest SCS-II-R group score indicates the group had already achieved spiritual competence prior to taking the course. This might be attributed to the fact that students self-selected this class because of interest in the topic. It is possible that counselor trainees who are personally or professionally invested in the topic of spirituality maintain a competence prior to receiving coursework. Future research might examine the effectiveness of a required course in Counseling and Spirituality for students who do not have strong personal or professional interest in the topic.

Despite the lack of significance, an increase in spiritual competency points to the potential value to the course. Cashwell and Young (2004) contend that the best framework for spirituality courses involves addressing spiritual competencies. Additional research indicates that counselors need to be trained in spiritual competency in order to prevent countertransference and deepen rapport with clients (Magaldi-Dopman, Park-Taylor, & Ponterotto, 2011). The current course incorporated the ASERVIC (2009) competencies through teaching definitions, theoretical frameworks, assessments, and techniques related to religion and spirituality. Each lecture topic and experiential exercise was developed to address specific ASERVIC competencies and to provide students with a toolbox of spiritual and religious interventions (Cox, 2013). Moreover, the course focused on the ASERVIC (2009)

competencies related to developing religious and spiritual self-awareness. This took place through icebreakers, group discussions, self-assessment, and course assignments, such as the spiritual genogram and the spiritual practice paper.

The personal spirituality of the participants also increased after the course was completed by nearly one standard deviation. Again, while this change was not statistically significant, it is possible that a larger sample would demonstrate the course increases personal spirituality in a meaningful way (Cohen, 1992). Similar to the SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010), students had higher than average scores, compared to the norming scores, on the ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005) at pretest. Self-selection into the course due to interest in the topic likely explains this outcome. As such, students who are inclined to enroll in an elective course on Counseling and Spirituality are more likely to identify as personally spiritual. Future research might examine reasons for taking an elective course on spirituality and counseling and how this relates to integration of spirituality in counseling.

The increase in personal spirituality from pretest to posttest might be related to the spiritual icebreakers in which students engaged throughout the class. For example, there were several activities related to mindfulness, and previous research indicates that spirituality levels increase with mindfulness meditation training (Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, & Merriam, 2008; Greeson et al., 2011; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). The repeated practice of mindfulness throughout the Counseling and Spirituality course could have positively impacted students' spiritual growth, resulting in higher posttest scores.

While the overall trends demonstrated positive changes in SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010) and ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005) scores, a few participants showed lowered scores from pretest to post-test, which might be the result of several factors. In particular, on the SCS-R-II (Robertson, 2010), three participant's scores dropped from pretest to post-test; the average drop was 7.33 points. With the ISI (Muse-Burke, 2005), two participants' scores decreased from pretest to post-test; the average drop was 11.5 points. The researchers hypothesize that the course resulted in an increase in self-awareness regarding spirituality and spiritual competence, and this self-awareness might have led to a more critical self-evaluation of one's spirituality and spiritual competence. Adams et al. (2015) discussed a heightened awareness that is important to training on spiritual issues. This heightened awareness might have caused students to appraise themselves more critically, resulting in a lowered post-test score. Yet, given the positive, overall trend, it appears unlikely that completion of the course decreased one's spirituality and spiritual competence. Assessment of self-awareness

at pretest might have been useful for determining its impact on these outcomes.

To gain additional insight into the value and utility of the Counseling and Spirituality course, the counselors-in-training were asked to complete the Course Objectives Survey and University Course Evaluation. As hypothesized, students rated all items on both inventories well above the midpoints. This indicates that students believed class learning objectives generally were met, and they generally were satisfied with the course. On the Course Objectives Survey, the item that received the lowest rating involved developing knowledge about the potential negative effects of religion and spirituality. This low rating could be a result of time restraints, which led to less focus being placed on the harmful influences. The course might benefit from including additional class activities and assignments related to this objective. Students designated the highest ratings to items that referenced providing a safe environment to discuss spiritual experiences and using lecture, discussions, and activities as experiences that contributed to learning. In the Counseling and Spirituality course, emphasis was placed on creating a safe space where students could share their thoughts and feelings in order to learn from one another's experiences and insights. The high ratings indicate that students not only felt safe to engage in discussions but also learned from the class conversation. Further, the ratings denote that students gained useful information from the in-class lectures and activities. This provides helpful insight regarding the mode of delivery through which students might best learn about religion and spirituality.

Results from the University Course Evaluation signify that students were satisfied with the class and thought it was a worthwhile learning experience. Students rated each section of the evaluation (i.e., Course Organization and Planning, Student/Faculty Interaction, and Overall Evaluation) as higher than the midpoint. This provides important information about the design of the course, indicating that students generally felt the class was well planned and organized. Consequently, educators might find it useful to implement similar design components in spirituality training for counseling students. It is important to note, however, that participants were not required to take the class but chose to do so, perhaps explaining the clearly positive results. Students who do not value spirituality and religiosity might have divergent reactions if required to complete coursework in this area.

In regard to the Follow-up Survey, participants provided useful responses that counselor educators might wish to consider when deciding whether or not to implement a course on spirituality and counseling. The responses were generally positive and frequently mentioned the ways in which each student learned and grew through the course. Several students commented on how they developed greater self-awareness, stating, "I feel more self-aware," "… I learned more about my own ignorance and prejudices in regards to religion," "I learned my personal relationships are affected by religion," and "…I connected with pieces of myself that I haven't ever explored." These responses correspond with the ASERVIC (2009) competencies related to self-awareness, suggesting the course successfully addressed this material. Answers to the Follow-up Survey also indicate that the course corresponded with the ASERVIC (2009) competencies on culture and worldviews. Students provided various responses demonstrating that they became more knowledgeable about spirituality and religion, such as "I didn't realize how profound an individual's religious or spiritual beliefs and practices, or lack thereof, were on their lives," "[I learned] that many [religions] have a lot of the same foundations and share many similarities," and "I learned that spirituality can be felt and understood differently by each person." Overall, the responses signify that students became more competent, which will enable them to better address the religious and spiritual needs of their clients.

Limitations

The current pilot study contained multiple limitations. As previously mentioned, the small number of participants limits this study, as significant change between pretest and post-test might have been found if there had been sufficient power (Cohen, 1992). An additional limitation is the fact that participants self-selected into the course; students mandated to take a course in counseling and spirituality might result in different outcomes. Also, the small sample lacked diversity, as all the participants were women and one was a transwoman, all identified as being white, and all but one identified as being Christian. Additionally, participant responses might have been affected by the collection of study data by the instructor of the course. It is possible that students were concerned with impression management and might have provided favorable ratings of themselves and the course to please the instructor. That being said, participants were informed that data would not be reviewed or analyzed by the course instructor or primary author until after grades were submitted, so to better ensure students were honest in completing the rating scales.

Conclusion

Based on the participants in this pilot study, it appears that a course in Counseling and Spirituality can improve spiritual competence and personal spirituality.

It is vital that counselor education programs include courses on religion and spirituality or take more time discussing these matters within current courses in order to facilitate the development of competent and ethical counselors (ACA, 2014; ASERVIC, 2009; CACREP, 2015). Counselors must be prepared to work with a diverse range of clients, and given that most individuals in the United States hold some spiritual or religious belief (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014), the chances of a client being spiritual or religious are high. Certain skills and a specialized knowledge base are necessary to effectively address spiritual and religious issues or beliefs in counseling (Robertson, 2010), necessitating training on this significant topic (Hage et al., 2006). Therefore, based on this preliminary research study, counseling training programs are encouraged to consider offering a course specific to counseling and spirituality for students. Moreover, researchers are encouraged to continue to investigate the efficacy of this type of training for increasing counselors' spiritual competence.

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