INCLUSION OF CONTENT ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM: A STUDY OF FACULTY VIEWS

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Recently, there have been calls to re-examine the need for instruction on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum. This study investigated the views of 280 full-time social work educators from 25 schools of social work on including such content in social work programs. Results showed that the majority (82.5%) supported inclusion of a specialized course, primarily as an elective. A positive attitude toward religion and spirituality in social work practice was the most important predictor of support for the inclusion of such content in the curriculum. Findings also revealed concerns about how the topic of religion and spirituality might be handled in practice and in the classroom. Issues related to appropriate course focus and teaching approaches in this content area are presented.

ALTHOUGH THE earliest forms of organized social work were significantly influenced by religious teachings, the profession quickly moved towards a secular orientation. One of the reasons for this movement was the general secularization of society, which replaced a moral explanation of human problems with a scientific, rational one (Fauri, 1988; Popple & Leighninger). This shift resulted in a complex relationship between religion and social work often characterized by conflicts between social work goals and values and religious teachings. In response to this uneasy alliance, social work has largely ignored or neglected the arena of religion and spirituality—a policy that has been challenged by many as antithetical to social work's commitment to holistic practice (Canda, 1988, 1989; Joseph, 1987, 1988; Loewenberg, 1988; Marty, 1980; Ortiz, 1991; Siporin, 1985; Spencer, 1961). These authors propose that inattention to religious or spiritual issues produces social work practitioners who are ill equipped to deal with the real needs of clients and communities.

Such assertions are supported by offerings in the literature that underscore the necessity for social workers to understand the importance of religion and spirituality to various client groups. For example, Berthold (1989) describes the importance of spiritism as a belief system

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for many Caribbean Hispanics and identifies methods of assessment and intervention that social workers should consider when working with this client population. Canda and Phaobtong (1992) examine the role of the Lao and Khmer temples in the United States and discuss the need for culturally sensitive services for Southeast Asian refugees. Haber (1984) similarly describes the significance of church-based programs for African-American caregivers of the elderly and the importance of this resource to social work practice. Others discuss the need to address spiritual matters in providing hospice services to the terminally ill (Leh & Corless, 1988; Millison & Dudley, 1990).

These studies are consistent with research on the general public that shows that religion and spirituality continue to be important in the lives of most Americans (Gallup & Castelli, 1989). Indeed, we seem to be experiencing a resurgence in interest in the spiritual realm evident in a variety of forms—"in Eastern religions, in evangelical and fundamentalist teachings, in mysticism and New Age movements, in Goddess worship and other ancient religious rituals, in the mainline churches and synagogues, in Twelve-Step recovery groups, in concern about the environment, in holistic health, and in personal and social transformation" (Roof, 1993, p. 5).

These developments suggest that content on religion and spirituality should be included in any comprehensive social work program. However, in a recent study of 328 social work practitioners, 83% of respondents stated that they received little or no training in the area of religion and spirituality during their graduate studies (Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 1992). These practitioners also reported that, on average, 33% of their clients presented religious or spiritual concerns during the course of their work with them.

These findings on the role of religion and spirituality in people's lives, coupled with evidence of a lack of emphasis in schools of social work, suggest that it may be time to re-examine the place of religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum. One of the key factors related to curriculum revision in any area is the faculty perspective. Dudley and Helfgott (1990) explored this area by surveying 53 faculty members from four schools of social work in two Northeastern states. They found that although there was considerable support for introducing spirituality content into the curriculum, primarily as an elective, there were also opposing views on the subject and varying opinions on the role of religion and spirituality in practice.

The current study attempts to continue exploration of faculty views by an expanded replication of this earlier work with a larger sample of social work educators in the Southeast. This geographical location was selected in contrast to Dudley and Helfgott's previous sample to provide further knowledge about faculty perspectives from a different pool of social work educators. Furthermore, the Southeast is known for its strong religious roots and traditions; thus, questions concerning the inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in schools of social work in this region seem particularly germane.

Methodology

Design and Data Collection Procedures

The current research utilized a cross-sectional, correlational design implemented through a survey mailed in February 1993. The targeted population comprised faculty from 25 schools of social work located in 12 Southeastern states and Washington, DC, all having accredited graduate programs (Council

on Social Work Education, 1992).[1] Each school was requested to send a list of its full-time faculty to the researchers, resulting in a sampling frame of 498 social work educators. Each faculty member was mailed a questionnaire and detailed cover letter requesting their participation in the study. Two weeks later, a follow-up letter was mailed to those who had not responded. Four names from the original sampling list were deleted because they were not full-time faculty members. A total of 280 completed questionnaires were returned, representing an overall response rate of 57%.

Sample Characteristics

The sample was composed of 53% ($n=145$) females and 47% ($n=129$) males, with an average age of 50.43 ($SD=8.27$).[2] The respondents were predominantly Caucasian (76.8%, $n=209$), followed by African-American (14.3%, $n=39$), Hispanic-American (3.7%, $n=10$), Asian-American (2.9%, $n=8$), and bi-racial or "other" ethnicity (2.2%, $n=6$). Respondents reported that they had been teaching at the university level for an average of 14.91 years ($SD=8.79$). About half (51.4%, $n=144$) taught only in graduate programs, 2.5% ($n=7$) taught only in undergraduate programs, 1.4% ($n=4$) taught only in doctoral programs, and 44.6% ($n=125$) taught in a combination of programs. Only 22.1% ($n=61$) of the respondents indicated that content on religion or spirituality was currently a part of their program's curriculum, and only 9.0% ($n=25$) reported that their school currently offers a separate course on religion and spirituality in social work.

The Study Questionnaire

The study was undertaken to better understand social work faculty views about the inclusion of religious and spiritual content in the social work curriculum. To clarify definitional issues, the questionnaire began with a specification of what was meant by "spirituality" and "religion." Specifically, spirituality was defined as "the human search for purpose and meaning of life experiences, which may or may not involve expressions within a formal religious institution." Religion was defined as "a systematic body of beliefs and practices related to a spiritual search." Respondents were asked to note that, for the purposes of this study, spirituality was more broadly defined than religion. These definitions are consistent with conceptualizations currently found in the literature (Canda, 1988, 1989; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Emblen, 1992; Joseph, 1988; Millison & Dudley, 1990).

The survey instrument consisted of 52 questions, which included both single-answer items and scaled-response items. In addition to demographic queries, the survey included questions on personal religious/spiritual affiliation, belief, and background items, a scale assessing respondents' views of the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice, two questions on previous training in religion and spirituality, several ques-

[1] Faculty from the following 25 schools of social work participated in the current study: University of Alabama, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Barry University, Catholic University of America, Clark Atlanta University, East Carolina University, Florida International University, Florida State University, University of Georgia, Grambling State University, Howard University, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, University of Louisville, University of Maryland, Norfolk State University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of South Carolina, University of South Florida, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of Southern Mississippi, Southern University at New Orleans, University of Tennessee, Tulane University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

[2] Valid percentages were computed for all questions, as some questions were not answered by every respondent. Thus, although cumulative percentages equal 100%, the total number of respondents may equal less than 280 in a given area.

tions on agreement with proposed curriculum rationales and guidelines, questions on whether presenting content on religion and spirituality would produce conflicts in a number of areas, one question on how respondents would vote if a course on religion and spirituality was proposed at their school, and one open-ended question asking for any additional comments on the topic of religion and spirituality. Some of these questions were drawn from Dudley and Helfgott's earlier study (1990); the remainder were developed or selected for the current study.

Findings

Personal Factors Related to Religion or Spirituality

Several questions addressed the personal experiences of respondents relative to religion and spirituality. First they were asked to identify their current religious affiliation or spiritual orientation. The largest category of response was "Christian" (57.8%, $n=160$). (Of the respondents who reported themselves as Christian, 62.6% [$n=82$] identified their particular religious affiliation as "Mainline Protestant," 30.5% [$n=40$] identified it as Catholic," and 6.9% [$n=9$] as "Evangelical Protestant.") The second largest category was "Jewish" (11.6%, $n=32$), followed by "Agnostic" (5.1%, $n=14$), "Atheist" (4.7%, $n=13$), "Existentialist" (4.3%, $n=12$), "None" (4.3%, $n=12$), "Muslim" (1.4%, $n=4$), "Spiritist" (1.1%, $n=3$), and "Buddhist" (.4%, $n=1$). Another 9.4% ($n=26$) stated that they had some "other" religious affiliation or spiritual orientation. When these responses are collapsed into "non-faith" (Atheist, Agnostic, and None) and "faith" (all other responses) categories, the sample emerges as having considerably more respondents reporting faith than non-faith affiliations or orientations (86.1%, $n=241$ vs. 13.9%, $n=39$, respectively).

Respondents were also asked to select a belief orientation that most correctly reflected their own from six ideological positions, ranging from belief in a personal God to views that notions of God or the transcendent are illusions and irrelevant (Lehman, 1974). The most frequently selected category was belief in a personal God (37.5%, $n=99$), followed by a belief in a divine dimension found in all nature (23.9%, $n=63$) (see Table 1). Only 1.1% ($n=3$) stated that notions of God or the transcendent are illusionary products that have no relevance to the real world.

The survey also contained a series of questions on respondents' participation in both religious services and personal religious/spiritual practices. Most respondents reported weekly religious attendance as a child (68.0%, $n=189$); current attendance, however, was reported less frequently. Only 4.3% ($n=12$) reported daily attendance, 38.5% ($n=107$) weekly attendance, 10.4% ($n=29$) monthly attendance, 29.9% ($n=83$) attendance a few times a year or occasionally; and 16.9% ($n=47$) reported no attendance. In addition, 42.9% ($n=117$) reported that they participate in a personal religious or spiritual practice—such as prayer, meditation, or scripture reading—on a daily basis. Others reported the frequency of such practices as follows: a few times a year or occasionally (25.6%, $n=70$); not at all (16.1%, $n=44$); and once a week (15.4%, $n=42$). These findings are similar to those obtained by Roof (1993) in a study of the baby boom generation, which indicated that many individuals do not connect their personal faith and spirituality to traditional institutional forms.

A final measure of personal religious or spiritual factors was a query on respondents' relationship to an organized religion or spiritual group. Over half of the respondents reported either "active participation, high level of involvement"

Table 1. **Personal Ideology of Respondents**

Ideology Type	Percent	Number
There is a personal God of transcendent existence and power whose purposes ultimately will be worked out in human history.	37.5%	99
There is a transcendent aspect of human experience some people call God but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history.	10.6%	28
There is a transcendent or divine dimension that is unique and specific to the human self.	9.5%	25
There is a transcendent or divine dimension found in all manifestations of nature.	23.9%	63
The notions of God or the transcendent are illusionary products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence.	17.4%	46
The notions of God or the transcendent are illusionary products of human imagination; therefore, they are irrelevant to the real world.	1.1%	3

(23.6%, $n=65$) or "regular participation, some involvement" (29.5%, $n=81$) in such groups. Another 26.9% ($n=74$) reported "identification with religion or spiritual group, but very limited or no involvement." A little more than 17% ($n=47$) reported "no identification, participation, or involvement with religion or spiritual group" and 2.9% ($n=8$) reported "disdain and negative reaction to religion or spiritual tradition."

Views on the Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice and Previous Training

Faculty views on the role of religion and spirituality in practice were assessed through responses to 19 scaled items, which included statements such as "Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human," "It is important for social workers to have knowledge about different religious faiths and traditions," and "It is against social work ethics to ever pray with a client." Three of the scaled items were drawn from Dudley and Helfgott's (1990) study, with the remainder coming from a previous study on the views of practitioners (Sheridan et al., 1992). The scale was found to have good face and content validity and obtained a satisfactory estimate of reliability for the sample (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the 19 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Following reverse scoring for some items, responses to all items were summed into a single score for each respondent. As a whole, respondents showed a high mean rating on this measure, indicating a relatively positive or accepting attitude towards the role of religion and spirituality in practice. The possible range of each respondents single summed score is from 19 to 95; respondents reported ratings from 27 to 92, with a mean rating of 70.90 ($SD=7.80$).

It is interesting to note that although respondents had relatively high scores on the "Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice" scale, they indicated that they received little training in this area during their graduate social work studies. Specifically, 59.0% ($n=164$) stated that content related to religious or spiritual issues was "never" presented; 29.7% ($n=83$) said that it was "rarely" presented; 8.6% ($n=24$) reported "sometimes," and 2.7% ($n=8$) reported "often." Thus, a substantial majority (88.5%, $n=247$) reported receiving little or no graduate training in this area—a finding that corresponds to results obtained by Sheridan et al. (1992) in a study of social work practitioners.

In addition, satisfaction with the amount of education and clinical training received was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = low satisfaction to 5 = high satisfaction. Respondents as a whole reported a moderate position in regard to satisfaction with their education and clinical training in this area ($M=3.08$, $SD=1.43$). However, examination of individual responses reveals that almost an equal number of respondents were generally satisfied (ratings of 4 or 5) with the amount of training they received (37.5%, $n=102$), as were generally dissatisfied (ratings of 1 or 2) with their training (36.5%, $n=100$).

Views on Curriculum Issues Related to Religion and Spirituality

Attitudes about the inclusion of content on religion and spirituality were addressed in several ways. First, participants were asked to respond to two positions that are often offered as rationales for including such content in social work curriculum (Canda, 1989; Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Goldstein, 1983; Joseph, 1987; Loewenberg, 1988; Marshall, 1991; Meystedt, 1984). The first rationale presents an argument for including religious and spiritual content because of its relevance to multicultural diversity. That is, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices are part of multicultural diversity. As such, social workers should have knowledge and skills in this area in order to work effectively with diverse client groups.

The second rationale takes the position that religion and spirituality are part of an important dimension of human existence that lies beyond the biopsychosocial framework currently used to understand human behavior. Thus, social work education should expand this framework to include the spiritual dimension.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with these two statements using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Although both positions were generally endorsed, the "multicultural diversity" rationale received considerably stronger support than the "spiritual dimension of existence" rationale. Specifically, 90.1% ($n=247$) rated the first rationale as "agree" or "strongly agree" ($M=4.26$, $SD=.78$), compared to only 61.3% ($n=169$) rating the second rationale as "agree" or "strongly agree" ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.25$).

Respondents were also asked to indicate their agreement with seven proposed guidelines for including religious or spiritual content in social work education. These guidelines were taken from Canda's (1989) proposal for a comparative approach to presenting such content. Table 2 summarizes the findings of faculty views on these seven propositions.

Generally, respondents indicated moderate to relatively high agreement with all seven guidelines, but some variation was noted. Specifically, the proposition that "Dialogue should be explicit about value issues and should respect value differences" was rated most highly ($M=4.49$, $SD=.66$), while the guideline rated most unfavorably was "Diverse religious be-

Table 2. **Mean Ratings of Agreement with Proposed Curriculum Guidelines**

Proposed Curriculum Guidelines	Mean	Stand. Deviation
Religion and spirituality should be examined as general aspects of human culture and existence.	4.38	.66
Diverse religious behaviors and beliefs should be compared and contrasted.	3.51	1.18
Content should avoid both a sectarian and anti-religious bias.	4.13	1.01
Dialogue should be explicit about value issues and should respect value differences.	4.49	.66
Both the potential benefit and harm of religious beliefs and practices should be examined.	4.15	1.00
Content should emphasize the relevance of having a working knowledge about religion and spirituality for effective practice with clients.	4.06	.98
Students should be encouraged to critically explore their own perspectives and biases about religion and spirituality.	4.33	.84

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Guidelines from Canda, E. R. (1989). Religious Content in Social Work Education: A Comparative Approach. *Journal of Social Work Education, 25*(1), pp. 36-55.

haviors and beliefs should be compared and contrasted" ($M=3.51$, $SD=1.18$).

In another question related to curriculum issues, respondents were asked if they perceived that the introduction of content on religion and spirituality would conflict with any of the following five areas: social work's mission, the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics, clients' beliefs, the respondent's beliefs, or the Constitutional principle of separation of church and state. The majority of respondents identified no areas of conflict. Over 90% stated that there was no conflict between presenting content on religion and spirituality and social work's mission, NASW ethics, or personal beliefs. A little more than 10% (10.4%, $n=29$) reported that there was a possible conflict with clients' beliefs and almost twice as many (19.4%, $n=54$) reported conflict with the principle of separation of church and state. In addition, 25.0% of respondents ($n = 70$) indicated their perception of some "other" area of potential conflict—the most common being "conflict depending on how the content was presented or taught." Other conflicts mentioned were "conflict with other competing material" and "conflict with some faculty members."

A final curriculum question asked respondents whether or not they would be in favor of a course on social work and religion and spirituality if one were offered in their program. They could select one of four responses: oppose the course; support it only as an elective; support it as a requirement in the clinical track only; and support it as a required course. The majority indicated that they would support it as an elective (62.4%, $n=171$); 16.1% ($n=44$) said that they would vote against such a course; 13.8% ($n=38$) said

that they would support it as a required course for all students; and 6.2% ($n=17$) stated that they would support it as a required course for clinical students only. Four other respondents (1.5%) commented that they would rather see such content infused into existing courses.

Predictors of Support for Course on Social Work and Religion/Spirituality

Multivariate analyses were conducted to identify significant predictors of faculty views on the inclusion of such a course in the curriculum. Discriminant function analysis was selected as a statistical technique that allows investigation of differences between two or more groups relative to several variables simultaneously (Klecka, 1980). In the current study, three groups were formed based on respondents' views on offering a specialized course in their curriculum. Group 1 consisted of the 44 faculty who voted against such a course ("Against Course"); Group 2 consisted of the 171 faculty who voted for such a course as an elective only ("Course as Elective"); and Group 3 included the 55 faculty who either voted for such a course as a requirement for clinical students or for all students ("Course as Required").

A total of 22 variables were tested as predictors of group membership: 4 demographic variables (age, gender, race, years of university teaching); 6 religious and spiritual background variables (religious/spiritual affiliation, personal ideology, past attendance at religious services, present attendance at religious services, current participation in religious/spiritual practices, and current relationship to organized religion or spiritual group); 3 practice-related variables (scores on the "Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice" scale, ratings of amount of training received in graduate school, and ratings of satisfaction with graduate training); and 9 curriculum-related variables (ratings on 2 rationales for content inclusion, summated scores on the curriculum guidelines items, and ratings on the 6 conflict items). Because of the exploratory nature of the analysis, variables were entered using a stepwise procedure that minimizes Wilks' lambda, a measure of the discriminating power in the predictor variables.

Although two functions emerged, three statistical indicators suggest that Function 1 is the more important (Klecka, 1980). First, Function 1 accounts for 78.48% of the explained variance among the variables, indicating that this function provides substantially more information about group differences than Function 2 (21.52% of explained variance). Second, the canonical correlation coefficient, a measure of the degree of association between the discriminant scores and the groups, was .69 for Function 1 compared to .45 for Function 2. And third, Wilks' lambda was .42 for Function 1 compared to .80 for Function 2. (Because lambda is an "inverse" measure, values near zero denote high discrimination.) Given these statistical indicators, Function 1 is the only function that will be interpreted further.

Function 1 is comprised of 9 variables, including 1 demographic variable (years of university teaching), 3 religious/spiritual variables (personal ideology, current affiliation, and current attendance), 3 practice-related variables (scores on "Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice" scale, and ratings on amount of and satisfaction with graduate training), and 2 curriculum-related variables (ratings of conflict with personal beliefs and clients' beliefs). Structure coefficients, or discriminant loadings, are measures of the relative importance of the variables comprising the discriminant function (Klecka, 1980). It is evident from these coefficients that scores on the "Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice Scale,"

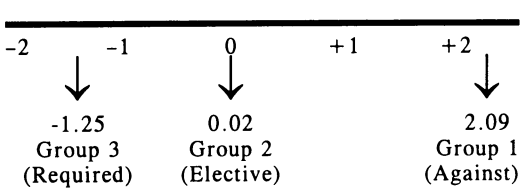
Table 3. **Structure Coefficients of Discriminant Variables in Function 1**

Discriminant Variables	Structure Coefficients
"Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice" Scores	-.79
Satisfaction with Graduate Training in Religion and Spirituality	.57
Current Attendance at Religious Services	-.39
Perceived Conflict with Personal Beliefs	.37
Belief in a Personal God	-.26
Amount of Graduate Training in Religion and Spirituality	-.20
Faith Affiliation/Orientation	-.19
Perceived Conflict with Clients' Beliefs	.19
Years of University Teaching	.19

which is negatively correlated with Function 1 (-.79), and satisfaction with graduate training, which is positively correlated (.57), emerge as the two most salient predictors of group membership (see Table 3).

Examination of group centroids contributes further clarity regarding the discriminatory power of Function 1. Group centroids represent the most typical positions for each group on a particular function (Klecka, 1980). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relative position of the three groups on Function 1, which allows us to gain a conceptual understanding of group differences.

Figure 1. **Group Centroids Relative to Function 1 for the Three Faculty Groups: "Against Course," "Course as Elective,"and "Course as Required."**



Based on group centroids, Group 1 members ("Against Course") are generally satisfied with the amount of graduate training received in the area of religion and spirituality, perceive possible conflict with proposed course content in terms of both personal beliefs and clients' beliefs, and have taught more years at a university level than other respondents. Additionally, Group 1 members generally have less positive or accepting views of the role of religion and spirituality in practice, attend religious services less often, have personal ideologies that do not include belief in a personal God, had little education on religion and spirituality in graduate school, and do not report current faith affiliations or orientations.

Conversely, Group 3 members ("Course as Required") tend to have the opposite profile, while Group 2 members ("Course as Elective") tend to hold a mid-position on these variables.

Classification of Cases

A second major purpose of discriminant function analysis is to determine how well the discriminant function allows one to identify the group to which an individual respondent most likely belongs. As is evident from Table 4, the discriminant function achieves a relatively high percentage of correct classifications (74%) for the overall sample. In predicting specific group membership, the function most successfully classifies Group 3 ("Course as Required" = 84.3%), followed by Group 2 ("Course as Elective" = 71.3%), with Group 1 ("Against Course") having the lowest correct classification rate (69.7%). These findings suggest that Group 3 is the most homogeneous group—a conclusion supported by a visual examination of the scatterplots of the three groups, which shows Group 3 to be more cohesive than the other two groups. This also means that there are variables other than those included in the current analysis that are related to faculty views, especially for Groups 1 and 2.

Discussion

Findings must be interpreted within the present study's limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional, correlational design does not allow for inferences about causal relationships among variables, but only provides information about significant associations. Second, the sample involved full-time faculty from 25 schools of social work in a particular area of the country; thus, no generalizations can be made to all social work educators. Furthermore, as responses of those faculty who returned the questionnaire may be substantially different than those faculty who did not participate in the study, no definite conclusions can be drawn about the total sampling frame. However, the current research does represent the largest study of social work faculty on the topic of religion and spirituality thus far, and therefore contributes to our knowledge of this area.

Several themes emerged concerning respondents' professional experiences and viewpoints. In terms of their views of

Table 4. **Discriminant Function Analysis: Classification Results**

Actual Group Membership	*n*	Predicted Group Membership: Group 1 (Against)	Group 2 (Elective)	Group 3 (Required)
Group 1 (Against)	33	23 (69.7%)	7 (21.2%)	3 (9.1%)
Group 2 (Elective)	157	19 (12.1%)	112 (71.3%)	26 (16.6%)
Group 3 (Required)	51	1 (2.0%)	7 (13.7%)	43 (84.3%)

Note. Percent of groups cases correctly classified for total sample = 74%; tau = .65 (65% reduction in classifcation errors over chance). 31 cases were excluded from the classification process due to at least one missing discriminating variable.

practice issues, most respondents expressed the belief that some attention to religious and spiritual issues in social work practice is appropriate, or even desirable, even though, as a group, they received very little graduate training in this area. It should be noted, however, that many respondents wrote various qualifying comments beside their ratings on the "Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice" scale. For example, although the majority of faculty agreed with the statement "It is sometimes appropriate for a social worker to share his or her own religious or spiritual beliefs with a client," ratings were often accompanied by comments such as "But never in a proselytizing way" or "Only if the client brings up the issue first."

These comments, plus responses to the final open-ended question on the survey, reflect some concern and uneasiness with how religious or spiritual issues might be handled in practice. Many stressed the need to keep one's personal beliefs separate from the client's and cautioned against possible harm that worker bias might produce. Some respondents had particular concerns about the potential clash between fundamental Christian beliefs—most notably, those concerning abortion and homosexuality—and the social work values of client self-determination and support for diversity. Several other respondents commented that any attention to religious or spiritual issues in practice was overstepping the bounds of the profession. Thus, although the majority of respondents indicated support for these issues within the practice realm, there were many qualifying, and even opposing, viewpoints on the subject. It is very important that differing opinions be heard and understood if we are to fully and objectively consider this content area for inclusion into the curriculum.

These differing opinions emerged quite clearly on the vote for the hypothetical course on social work and religion and spirituality. Although a substantial majority said they would support the offering of such a course in their own programs, there was much more support for the course as an elective than as a required class. Furthermore, a sizable minority said they would vote against it while others stated that they would rather see it infused into existing courses. Thus, it is probably best at this point in our development to offer content on religion and spirituality through an elective course, rather than as a required course or as integrated content in other courses. This would provide an opportunity for thoughtful development of such a course by faculty with interest and expertise in the area, while avoiding competition with other required content in the curriculum.

Most respondents expressed the belief that some attention to religious and spiritual issues in social work practice is appropriate, or even desirable, even though, as a group, they received very little graduate training in this area.

In addition to these varying positions on offering a specific course, respondents revealed other philosophical differences on the issue of curriculum development. First, more respondents supported the inclusion of content on religion and spirituality based on its relevance to multicultural diversity than on the rationale that there is a spiritual dimension to human existence that should be addressed by social workers. Clearly, many of these social work educators are not comfortable with spirituality being on an equal footing with the biopsychosocial components of social work's current human behavior framework. Thus, the orienta-

tion of a specialized course should designate religion and spirituality as important components of personal and cultural identity that should be understood to effectively provide services.

Second, most of the respondents endorsed Canda's (1989) seven proposals for a comparative approach to teaching about religion and spirituality, suggesting that these guidelines offer a useful framework for course development. However, some guidelines were more enthusiastically supported than others. Specifically, ratings were lowest on the proposal that "Diverse religious behaviors and beliefs should be compared and contrasted," perhaps relecting the fear that certain religious or spiritual traditions might be promoted over others, or that negative judgments about different faiths or practices might be made in class.

Indeed, Canda (1989) stresses that a comparative approach must encompass all relevant belief systems and that analysis should not be biased toward any one religion nor, conversely, be biased against all religion. Rather, he recommends that a comparative approach must respect diverse religious and spiritual commitments while considering both the benefits and potential harm arising from religious beliefs and practices. As Dudley and Helfgott (1990) suggest, instruction in differing religious and spiritual perspectives, either through team-teaching or selected outside speakers, would increase the likelihood that a diversity of views and experiences would be discussed and that no single perspective would dominate.

In terms of possible areas of conflict with other social work arenas, most respondents did not view the inclusion of religious/spiritual content as being oppositional to social work's mission, ethics, or values. There was concern by some faculty, however, that the presentation of religious or spiritual content might violate the principle of separation of church and state, or create other areas of conflict within their programs. Again, many respondents noted that conflicts might arise depending on how the content was taught; this suggests that many feel there is a right and wrong way to handle the subject both in practice and in the classroom.

These data suggest that the design and delivery of this content are critical to its effectiveness in social work education. As a first step, the overall goals of the course must be determined. Should the course strive to simply increase the understanding and sensitivity of students to religious and spiritual diversity? Or should it also cover how to appropriately address religious and spiritual factors during assessment and intervention? Research on social work practitioners (Sheridan et al., 1992) reveals that many social workers feel ill equipped to deal with religious and spiritual issues with their clients, even though they recognize the importance of this area. Furthermore, the present study and Dudley and Helfgott's (1990) earlier work show that most faculty also agree that religion and spirituality is relevant to social work practice. These findings support assertions that practice-relevant content should be taught in social work programs (Canda, 1989; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Joseph, 1987; Marshall, 1991; Netting, Thibault & Ellor, 1990; Ortiz, 1991; Sheridan & Bullis, 1991), although there is, as of yet, no clear consensus about how this should be done.

Finally, multivariate analyses revealed that several variables were significant factors for predicting faculty support for inclusion of content on religion and spirituality. Although the discriminant model included both personal and professional variables, the most powerful predictors that emerged were faculty views concerning the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. Those who favored a required course showed the most positive attitudes on the relevance of religion

and spirituality to practice, while faculty who were against a specialized course showed the most negative attitudes. This is potentially good news, in that questions about what is relevant to social work practice and what entails sound social work preparation are appropriate subjects for faculty discussions on curriculum. However, it is quite possible that personal ideology influenced both views about practice and support for a course on religion and spirituality in the current sample, raising questions about what criteria faculty may be using in making curriculum decisions. In any event, the relationships among all of these variables need to be explored in future research. Findings could be useful in determining the appropriate criteria for inclusion of such content in the social work curriculum.

Perhaps this is the next step. As more research is done on religion and spirituality in regard to the lives of clients and the views of practitioners, educators, and students, we can begin an informed and open conversation about this controversial but important area. As with the inclusion of any new content area into the curriculum, differing viewpoints and value stances must be critically analyzed and debated to create the most balanced, relevant, and effective approach to social work education. Given the apparent disparity between the importance of religion and spirituality in respondents' lives and the current lack of training on the subject in schools of social work, it is incumbent upon social work educators to struggle with the hard questions of content focus and teaching approaches in order to adequately prepare students for social work practice.

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