

AN EVALUATION OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY  
IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study evaluated how BSW students at two Texas universities, one publicly funded and one privately funded, perceive their level of preparedness, comfort and the importance of addressing / using religion and spirituality in social work.

In this study 41 students nearing the completion of their baccalaureate degree and enrolled in a field placement, were invited to complete a multi-faceted questionnaire consisting of 92 very specific questions. Of the 41 students invited to participate in the study, all subjects chose to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used gathered some information regarding the students' personal religious and spiritual affiliation however, the majority of questions focused on student

perception of the following: the importance of religion and spirituality in social work practice; their comfort addressing these issues in practice; their level of preparedness in addressing these issues in practice; and their perceptions regarding classroom and field education received in this area.

Data collected were scaled to develop a score specifically in the areas of importance, preparedness, comfort, field education and classroom education. Data were evaluated using descriptives, t-tests and chi-square analyses. Tests of the research hypotheses revealed there was a statistically significant difference in student perceptions of the importance of religion and spirituality in social work, with more students from the private university indicating this is important. Analysis found no major difference between overall education received between schools however, descriptives indicate difference between classroom and field education. No differences were found between student perception with respect to comfort and preparedness, although a significant difference was found between students' perception of the education received and the perception of their preparedness. Specifically, less than half reported receiving education in the field or classroom regarding religion and spirituality, but a large majority reported comfort and preparedness in using these in practice.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As the social work profession enters its second century, the roots of this “helping profession” should be studied to explore the transition from religious origins to secularism. Social work emerged in the early twentieth century and emphasized justice and charity which was rooted in the religious concept of “love for one’s neighbor” (Loewenberg, 1988). Social work, however, removed itself from its religious roots moved toward a secular orientation (Fauri, 1988). The profession of social work has recently seen a movement toward a balance between religion and secularism. Researchers are evaluating the role and relevance of religion and spirituality in social work practice.

The resurgence of spirituality is occurring in a variety of facets in social work practice. Recent research has demonstrated a high efficacy rate when traditionally effective interventions such as CBT are augmented with spiritual approaches. The following pages provide an overview of the literature on the efficacy of spirituality in social work interventions. Next, the literature also describes the education of direct practice social workers and their attitudes toward spirituality. The research proposal emphasizes the relevance, importance and role of spirituality in social work.

## 1.1 Defining Religion and Spirituality

The definitions of spirituality and religion are important to understand. Although these words have been used interchangeably, Joseph (1988) defined religion as, “the external expression of faith, comprised of beliefs, ethical codes, and worship practices” (p.444). Later, Bullis (1996) asserted that, “spirituality, by its nature is eclectic and inclusive” (p. 2) and refers to the inner feelings and experiences with people or something that transcends them.

Further studies and research have been conducted in an attempt to define the intangible concept of spirituality. One such study conducted by Cook (2004) failed to identify one definition of spirituality. This study concluded however, that 13 conceptual components of spirituality reoccur in the literature: (1) relatedness defined as interpersonal relationships; (2) transcendence defined as the recognition of a transcendent dimension to life; (3) the distinctiveness of humanity; (4) an inner core, force of soul of a person; (5) meaning/purpose for each person; (6) authenticity/truth relating to the validity of being; (7) values of importance and worth; (8) spirituality is non-material; (9) spirituality is different from religion since religion is defined and distinguished by rules and doctrines; (10) wholeness in that spirituality promotes the fulfillment of wholeness and completion; (11) self-knowledge and self-actualization can be achieved through spirituality; (12) creativity is linked to spirituality of the human agent, and (13) consciousness and awareness (Cook, 2004).

By reviewing these and other aspects, concepts and definitions of spirituality, people can begin to draw a clear picture of how individualized the concept of spirituality can be.

People can have their own definitions and experiences of spirituality. This lends further credence to the importance of exploration of this aspect for each and every client. Further, clinicians must provide a “tableau rasa” for clients as they learn to define themselves as spiritual beings and evaluate the ways in which they can best meet their spiritual needs. The United States’ religious roots predispose most American clients to have some knowledge of religion and belief systems which tell them how they may presume to become spiritual beings. For many clients, this may work well. For others, this may be a significant barrier to overall wellbeing. Clinician should explore this aspect of clients to ascertain what strengths and/or barriers stem from such deeply rooted, intangible, and personal self-concept.

## 1.2 Religion and Spirituality in Practice

### *1.2.1 Addiction Treatment*

In social work, the area of addiction treatment has most consistently utilized spirituality as part of the change process with the most success. One of the most common treatment modalities for addictions is the “12-step” treatment modality. This modality was first implemented over 50 year ago in Alcoholics Anonymous. Due to its success and practical principles, it has been adapted to treat a variety of addictive disorders including eating disorders, codependency, substance dependencies, and other problematic behaviors.

The 12-step modality is founded on the spiritual principle of the existence of some sort of “higher power.” That is, something or someone which transcends the individual. Through this belief the person is able to admit powerlessness over problematic behaviors and relinquish control to this conceptual being or force. Consequently, clients develop a relationship with their “higher power.” In doing this individuals begin to replace old

behaviors with new ones as they begin to define, develop, and nurture their spiritual nature (Forcehimes, 2004).

The spiritual component of this intervention makes it difficult to research exactly what generates the changes. Does this “spiritual awakening” cause some sort of change to the brain’s chemistry? Is this treatment modality simply a program for behavior modification marketed as a mystical transformation? Many experts have an array of answers to these questions, but the fact remains that a large population of persons, addictive and otherwise, effectively change behavior (Forcehimes, 2004).

This program promotes changing a lifetime of learned behaviors. Therefore, relapse is considered a part of recovery. As any behaviorist will attest, it takes time to rewrite old behaviors and the more psychosocial in peoples’ lives, the more likely they are to revert to old patterns of behavior. For this reason, success rates for 12-step programs are often skewed as different researchers will have a different definition for what constitutes success. Research has shown that the majority of persons who “work the program,” that is, incorporate it into a way of life, are able to successfully alter unwanted behavior. (Forcehimes, 2004)

### *1.2.2 Mental Health Treatment*

There has long been a tenuous relationship between spirituality and mental illness. Literature dating back to the time of Hippocrates and other ancient Greek philosophers links the existence of mental illnesses to some sort of religious or spiritual misconduct (Longo & Petersen, 2002). This philosophy laid the foundation for centuries of mental health treatment which promoted a belief system that mental illness was some sort of punishment.

Application of the medical model began toward the end of the eighteenth century. At that time a shift in philosophy began to emerge from mental illness being a punishment for moral inadequacies to the realization of real illnesses. By the end of the nineteenth century, the transformation was basically complete with the full backing of the medical profession that religious deviation not related to mental illness. Rather, a form of physiological defect was hypothesized to cause mental health problems and science set out to pinpoint the cause of the phenomenon and develop an appropriate medical treatment.

The past hundred years has brought a wide array of treatment theories and modalities. A majority of the current literature on mental health research rarely includes religion or spirituality. Recently however, some researchers have begun to investigate the relationship between religion or spirituality and overall wellbeing. Research is suggesting a positive relationship between those who engage in some sort of spiritual activities and overall mental health and well-being (Leibrich, 2002).

Studies have been conducted which compare the success rates of Christian and Islamic based psychotherapy for the treatment of depression with that of secular cognitive-behavior therapy. The results demonstrated statistically significant increased rate of recovery for the faith-based interventions compared with the secular counterpart. These studies not only concluded that integration of spirituality increased recovery rates, but it also decrease the rate of re-hospitalization (Longo & Petersen, 2002).

Additional studies have demonstrated that the integration of spirituality whether through religious doctrine or by allowing the client to address their spiritual needs through non-indoctrinated methodologies, displayed increased mental health with populations

diagnosed with affective disorders. Specifically, the closer the individuals reported feeling to “God” or to their spiritual side, the greater the incidence of mental wellbeing. Conversely, the individuals reporting lower levels of connectedness to spiritual aspects demonstrated lower rates of recovery and higher incidences of re-hospitalization (Carr, 2000).

In light of increasing research which supports the benefits of integrating spirituality into mental health treatment, various treatment modalities have begun to incorporate and conduct studies to demonstrate the effective use of spirituality with specific treatment modalities. Two such modalities are cognitive-behavior therapy and psychosocial education.

### *1.2.3 Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*

While spirituality has long been thought to be at direct odds with logic, cognition, and science, a recent shift toward a “new science” encompasses science and religion with therapy and spirituality. In light of this new trend, studies are now being conducted to evaluate the efficacy of utilizing spirituality in cognitive behavioral therapy to determine the overall benefits relating to extinguishing hopelessness and despair, improving collaboration, and reducing relapse rates.

The difference between spiritually augmented cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on meaning, purpose, and connectedness within the context of the client’s belief system. This process provides for validation and inclusion of the client’s beliefs and rituals which promote feelings and attitudes of meaning and hope. This approach is said to provide comfort as it directly addresses and condones aspects of the client’s belief system, which the client believes to be important and promote feelings and attitudes of meaning and hope. As in traditional CBT, problem-solving is utilized as an important component in reducing

anxiety and increasing mastery of various concepts including spiritual ones. The encouragement and the promotion of social connectedness help to reduce isolation and anxiety while allowing clients the opportunity to develop their own sense of meaning.

Another difference between some forms of spiritually augmented CBT and traditional CBT is the environment in which services are delivered. Rather in traditional settings such as an office, spiritually augmented CBT can be delivered in an area which the client has identified as a healing environment such as a quiet room, a prayer room, or meditation area.

The cognitive focus of spiritually augmented CBT is in four key areas: Acceptance, hope, achieving meaning and purpose, and forgiveness. Relaxation and meditation are typically utilized in the beginning to promote the “healing environment.” Traditional CBT theories and interventions are then applied. For example, after meditating clients may discuss some sort of issue they are having with forgiving a relative. The intervention would focus on what benefit clients are receiving by holding on to the resentment: What would clients gain by letting go: What is the best choice for them and then how is that choice going to be best accomplished?

A study reported by D’Souza & Rodrigo (2004) concluded that in a controlled study with 16 sessions of spiritually augmented cognitive behavioral therapy as described above, clients benefited by extinguishing hopelessness and despair, improved treatment collaboration, reduced relapse rates, and enhanced functional recovery.

#### *1.2.4 Psychosocial Education*

As stated earlier, despite the fact that many people report spiritual beliefs as being central to their core perceptions of themselves, most professionals are still reluctant to utilize

spirituality in treatment. Psychosocial education however, has found spirituality to be a component which is not only highly effective, but also one which is easy to incorporate (Leibrich, 2002).

A variety of new instruments are available to assist practioners in evaluating an individual's spiritual beliefs, including the Index of Core Experiences, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale; the Spiritual Health Inventory; and the Spirituality Assessment Scale. These scales provide information regarding spiritual beliefs, well-being and health. This information can be of paramount importance in assessment and in assisting the clinician as they seek to determine whether the client's current spirituality is a strength or potential barrier to treatment (Longo & Petersen, 2002).

Once a thorough assessment of a client's spirituality has been completed, the practioner can then provide education and incorporate spiritual concepts into psychosocial education. Since psychosocial education concerns itself with the education and development of social supports, self-esteem and coping skills, integration of spirituality is easily accomplished. Further, addressing this aspect of the human can be of paramount importance in assisting the client with evaluating their belief system and in determining which aspects of their own spirituality help and/or hinder them. A well-trained educator will then be able to assist the client as they seek to capitalize on positive spiritual aspects while re-evaluating or replacing those that are troublesome. Studies conducted regarding the use of spirituality within this intervention revealed that spiritual well-being defined as an active relationship with a "higher power" was positively correlated with good mental health. (Longo & Petersen, 2002)

### *1.2.5 Death and Dying*

Perhaps one area of social work which has historically dealt more with spirituality than any other, is the work with hospice patients and those experiencing some form of terminal illness. While addiction has long capitalized on the benefits of spiritual transformations, work with end-of-life patients presents with a somewhat different focus. Most clients seen under these settings are not so focused on changing behavior as they are on finding meaning and purpose (Koenig, George & Titus, 2004).

A study conducted by Breitbart, Gibson, Poppito and Berg (2004) concluded that 78% of subjects requested and responded positively to a series of eight existential psychotherapy sessions focusing on spirituality and end-of-life issues. The study found that the following concepts are necessary to successful intervention with this population: Understanding of and respect for the client's capacity for self-awareness, i.e. everyone has the potential to continually grow and "become" until we die; the client has freedom and responsibility even though they are nearing the end of their life; the clients have a need for spiritual centre and a need for others; the client has the right to search for meaning; the client's need for understanding of anxiety as a condition of living; and the right to explore their awareness of death and nonbeing.

The conclusions of this study indicated that issues of meaning and spirituality are essential components of the experience of persons facing end-of-life experiences. These components greatly shape how individuals view themselves, their illness, and their futures. Traditionally, the details of these end-of-life transitions have been handled by the medical profession. This research supports the need for some sort of structured individual or group

therapeutic intervention to offer a therapeutic and healing alternative in assisting patients as they confront the existential challenges presented by end-of-life illnesses. (Breitbart, 2004; Koenig, George & Titus, 2004)

Table 1.1. Areas of Social Work Practice demonstrating successful integration of religion and spirituality in treatment

	<b>Addiction</b>	<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</b>	<b>Psychosocial Education</b>	<b>Death &amp; Dying</b>
<b>Author, Year, Title &amp; Journal</b>	Forcehimes, A.A. (2004). DeProfundis: Spiritual transformations in alcoholics anonymous. Wiley InterScience, JCLP/In Session, Vol 60(5), 503-517 (2004).	Leibrich, J. (2002). Making space: spirituality and mental health. Mental Health, Religion & Culture. Volume 5, Number 2, 2002.	D'Souza, R.F. & Rodrigo A. (2004). Spiritually augmented cognitive behavioural therapy. Australasian Psychiatry, Volume 12, No. 2, June 2004.	Longo, D.A. & Peterson, S.M. (2002). The role of spirituality in psychosocial rehabilitation. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, Volume 25, Number 4, Spring 2002.	Breitbart, W. & Gibson, C., et.al (2004). Psychotherapeutic interventions at the end of life: a focus on meaning and spirituality. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 49, No 6, June 2004.
<b>Intervention Description</b>	Participants received 28 days inpatient treatment utilizing a 12-step treatment modality with continued care through support groups	Examines healing as connectedness not control. Utilizes spirituality to promote a sense of connection with the surroundings and within oneself.	16 sessions of cognitive behavior therapy is augmented with spirituality. Particular areas of focus include forgiveness, meaning, values, empowerment and enhancement.	Practitioners incorporate spirituality in various areas of psychosocial education	Eight sessions of existential psychotherapy designed to address certain spirituality and finding meaning issues are provided to end-of-life patients.
<b>Study Description</b>	Case Studies of 6 recovering alcoholics	Qualitative case studies of a variety of mentally ill patients including, mood disorders, thought disorders and anxiety disorders	Quantitative study of persons receiving spiritually augmented CBT compared with those receiving traditional CBT	Qualitative case studies of patients utilizing spirituality in the delivery of psychosocial education interventions	Qualitative case studies of patients facing end-of-life illnesses
<b>Outcomes</b>	5 of the 6 maintained long term sobriety, defined as < 1 year through ongoing participation in a 12 step program	Promotion of connectedness increases overall wellbeing for mentally ill clients affected with mood and anxiety disorders. While spirituality may be beneficial in the treatment of schizophrenics – spirituality in terms of connectedness did not demonstrate statistically significant improvement.	Significant improvement in treatment groups over controls in the second to third week. These results were for schizophrenic and depressed patients. All groups significantly improved feelings of hopelessness, despair, depression and overall improved the quality of life.	Participants demonstrated statistically significant higher levels of wellbeing, better ability to incorporate coping skills, build social supports and present with overall higher levels of self-esteem.	Participants report higher states of mental wellbeing, fewer depressive symptoms, increased cognitive functioning and better understanding and acceptance of their illnesses.

### 1.3 Religion and Spirituality in Education

More and more, the literature is demonstrating support and efficacy regarding the integration of spirituality in a variety of social work settings. Contrary to the results of the efficacy studies and the research which identifies this as a life area clients need, the literature also indicates the strong resistance to utilize spirituality in social work interventions. A variety of reasons for this may encompass funding concerns to issues of individual bias. Social work as a profession however, has never shied away from a challenge – not when it's in the best interest of the client. Why then the reluctance? A review of selected studies conducted regarding education received in the arena of spirituality in social work practice, may provide some answers.

A great amount of research has been done regarding social worker attitudes toward spirituality and the appropriateness of its use in practice. Further, studies have been conducted regarding the education received by social workers in this area. A survey conducted by Derezotes (1995) of 340 National Association of Social Worker members found that 92% of respondents agreed that they “considered spiritual issues in practice.” Moreover, 55% reported that they “need to work with clients’ spirituality.” However, only 27% reported that they received any content on religion and spirituality in their Graduate Social Work Program.

In a study conducted by Sheridan, Wilmer and Atcheson (1994) which surveyed 280 full-time faculty members from 25 schools of social work in 12 states, found that the majority held positive attitudes toward the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. However, 88% of these reported having had little or no training in this area in their

own graduate education. Over 62% favored elective courses in spirituality, with 14% stating such courses should be required.

In an earlier study conducted by Dudley and Helfgott (1990) on a smaller scale (n=53), over 75% of faculty “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human. However, only 47% agreed or strongly agreed that social workers should become more proficient in addressing spiritual matters. Similarly, over 63% of the faculty favored courses specific to spirituality as electives and 8% favored them as core subjects.

A 1988 study conducted by Joseph indicated that 82% of those surveyed thought that religion and spirituality are at least “somewhat important” in the lives of their clients, but only 46% reported that it was either “very important” or “important” for social workers to focus attention on religion or spirituality in practice. Table 1.2 provides a summary of these studies.

Table 1.2. Studies evaluating the importance of spirituality and religion  
in social work education

Author, Year, Title & Journal	Stated Focus of Investigation	Who Was Studied	Methodology	Findings & Outcomes
Derezotes, D.S. (1995). Spirituality and religiosity: Neglected factors in social work practice. <i>Arte</i> , 20(1), 1-15.	Explored practioners views on the use of spirituality in social work practice.	NASW members in Utah and Idaho N=340	Survey	92% report considering spiritual issues in practice. 55% report “need to work with” client on these issues. Only 27% report having had any content on religion and spirituality in their graduate social work classes. Findings suggest need to integrate more of this education into curriculum.
Dudley, J.R., & Helfgott, C. (1990). Exploring a place for spirituality in the social work curriculum. <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> , 26, 287-294.	Explored the views of social work educators regarding the inclusion of religious and spiritual content in their programs	Full-time faculty from four schools of social work in two eastern states. N=53	Survey	75% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human. 47% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that social workers should become more educated. 63% support this education as an elective. 8% support education as requirement.
Joseph, M.V. (1988). Religion and social work practice. <i>Social Casework</i> , 69, 443-452	Explored the extent to which practitioners considered religions and spiritual issues significant factors in the client situation and how much they addressed this in treatment	MSW program field instructors of church-related school of social work. N=57	Survey	82% reported religion was at least “somewhat important” in the lives of clients, but 46% reported it was “important” or “very important” to address spiritual issues in treatment. 16% reported receiving education regarding skills specific to the use of spirituality in practice; 66% reported it should be included in curriculum.
Sheridan, M.J., Wilmer, C. & Atchenson, L. (1994). Inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum: A study of faculty views. <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> , 30, 363-376.	Educators’ views and experiences related to religion and spirituality in social work practice and education.	Full-time faculty from twelve southeastern states and DC. N=280	Survey	88% reported receiving little or no training in this area in their own graduate education. 62% reported favoring courses on spirituality and religion as electives. 14% support education as requirement. Respondents had a moderately positive attitude toward the role of spirituality and religion in practice.
Sheridan, M.J. & Amato- von Hemert, K. (1999). Students’ perspective on spirituality in social work. <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> , Winter 99, Vol. 35 Issue 1, p125, 17p.	Student’s perspectives on the use of spirituality in social work practice.	MSW students at two school’s of social work. One in the Midwest and one in the mid-Atlantic. N=208	Survey	49% reported spirituality / religion as being addressed in at least one course area. 58% reported it should be covered in curriculum. 93% report gathering and using information regarding the client’s spiritual / religious experience is appropriate.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH RATIONALE

#### 2.1 Background

The social work profession strives to “take the client from where they’re at” and utilize his or her strengths in order to improve the quality of life. Given, that between 95 & 99% of Americans report identification with some sort of spirituality (Longo & Petersen, 2002), if social work is truly going to live up to its promise of treating the *whole* individual and taking that person from where they are at, there exists an obligation to obtain an education that allows us to fulfill that promise.

Social work must begin to look at the increasing research which supports the fact that spiritual interventions can be effective. Further, as more and more research demonstrates the efficacy of spirituality as an intervention; more and more funding sources are going to continue to require that effective treatment approaches be employed. Thus, more and more social workers are going to be utilizing this with clients. Without appropriate education, spiritual interventions are likely to be reflective of the workers own limited spiritual views and values thus becoming potentially harmful to the client being served no matter how well

intentioned. However, if social workers are taught about the various forms of spirituality and spiritual interventions, much as they are regarding sexuality and cultural sensitivity, they could then effectively guide clients in discovering what forms of spirituality work best for them or assist them in identifying what aspects of the clients' spirituality is creating a detriment.

Many of these aspects go unaddressed due to a lack of education or a fear of stepping on toes. In actuality, if social workers were educated regarding spirituality and the various means by which people get their spiritual needs met, the probability of "stepping on toes" would be significantly reduced. Social workers are required to learn about various cultures and develop sensitivities to this life area. Likewise proper education and exploration of various forms of spirituality would reduce offenses, abuses and limit the pushing of the workers' views onto the client, thus increasing effective intervention. As Mahoney and Pargament state in their article:

"Because religion is embedded in life journeys of many clients, greater attention to the spiritual conversion can help uncover the strivings people place at the center of their lives and the pathways they pursue to achieve their goals. A careful assessment and exploration of clients' spiritual experiences can reveal deep wellsprings of vulnerability, fear, hope and inspiration" (p. 482).

Spirituality can have a variety of meanings and people can meet their spiritual needs in a wide variety of ways. For this reason, social workers must realize that spirituality is a very unique and individual concept for each person (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004). It is also

important to realize that there is no right or wrong when it comes to spirituality. Some spiritual experiences equip clients with strengths, which should be capitalized upon.

Another's spiritual experiences may provide a deep-seeded belief system which prohibits progress. This belief system must be carefully and *skillfully* addressed in terms of its benefit (or detriment) to the client's well-being. As additional research is being conducted, it will be of utmost importance to focus on and begin to identify components of spirituality and understand their unique contributions to healing and recovery.

## 2.2 Research Proposal

Very little debate lingers over the role of spirituality in human beings. With this said, it is intriguing to see that so many social workers and educators demonstrate reluctance in addressing or learning how to appropriately address this aspect of the person in professional intervention. Social work prides itself on the fact that it looks at the entire person and their interactions with their environment. This is the very quality that differentiates social work from the other helping professions, yet the statistics suggest that we are falling short. The studies infer that social work has an exception to its own rule. In reviewing the literature, it appears social work continues to strive toward addressing all aspects of the individual and their environment. This is further supported by the recent addition of requirements by the CSWE to integrate religion and spirituality in social work education. Therefore, the time is appropriate to conduct research to see how we are progressing toward this goal.

While the number of studies conducted regarding the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of social workers and educators regarding this issue is relatively small, the number of studies regarding student's views, experiences and expectations in this area is even

smaller. While this is not intended to be an exhaustive review of all literature written on this subject, diligent research only found one study which even included students responses in the outcomes (Sherridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999).

This study targeted students from two schools of social work. One school was located in the mid-Atlantic area and the other in the Midwest. This study was careful to select schools which were not religiously affiliated. Further, this study distributed surveys to students in various stages of learning within the MSW programs offered by these schools. The study focused on a variety of areas, but did not address the student's comfort with using spirituality in practice nor did it address the amount of education received. The study also failed to address the comfort the students have in utilizing spiritual interventions that are different from and / or in direct conflict with their own personal spiritual belief system.

In the studies reviewed which looked at the social work "educators," there was no differentiation made between the classroom educators versus the "in-vivo" or field educators. This is an aspect which needs to be researched. The role of the field educator is paramount in solidifying the concepts presented in the classroom setting. In fact, if a student is taught from a book or lecture that looking at the spiritual aspects of a person is important, but is then placed in a field setting where this is not reinforced or is even contradicted, there will be an impact on the student's likelihood to address this later in practice. Moreover, this is likely to impair to social worker's ability to develop skills necessary to proficiently deal with this aspect of the client. Failure to develop such skills, could result in unintentional harm toward the client.

With this in mind, the proposed study focused on bachelor level students' experiences, views, attitudes, and expectations regarding classroom and field education received on how to effectively use and address religion and spirituality in social work practice. Further, the study will evaluate the students' perceptions of their competency as well as their comfort level in using spirituality and religion in social work practice: i.e. with clients who meet their spiritual needs in a manner like that of the student; in a manner different than that of the student; and in a manner which is in direct opposition to the students' personal religion or spiritual belief system.

### 2.3 Research Question

How do BSW students at two Texas universities, one publicly funded and one privately funded, perceive their level of preparedness, comfort and the importance of addressing / using religion and spirituality in social work practice. The specific hypotheses that will be answered are as follows:

- 1a. Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will indicate they believe it is important to be able to address religious issues in social work practice.
- 1b. Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will indicate they believe it is important to be able to address spiritual issues in social work practice.
- 2a. Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will perceive themselves as prepared to address religious issues in social work practice, but fewer will report comfort with addressing religion in social work practice, especially when the clients' religion is different or directly opposed to that of the student.

- 2b. Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will perceive themselves as prepared to address spiritual issues in social work practice, but fewer will report comfort with addressing spirituality in social work practice, especially when the clients' spiritual belief system is different than or directly opposed to that of the student.
- 3a. There will be similarity in students' perceptions of the amount of education they have received regarding the use of religion in social work practice between those students at privately versus publicly funded universities.
- 3b. There will be similarity in students' perceptions of the amount of education they have received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice between those students at privately versus publicly funded universities.
- 4a. Regardless of educational institution, there will similarity between students' perceptions about the amount of education received regarding the use of religion in social work practice between classroom and field placement education.
- 4b. Regardless of educational institution, there will similarity between students' perceptions about the amount of education received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice between classroom and field placement education.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample and Setting

Survey participants were bachelor level senior students enrolled in the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Arlington and bachelor level senior students enrolled in the Social Work Program at Texas Christian University. These students were in the process of completing their field placement and attended the accompanying seminar for classroom instruction.

According to its website, The University of Texas at Arlington is a comprehensive research, teaching and public service institution whose stated mission is the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence. This University is committed to the promotion of lifelong learning through its academic and continuing education programs and to the formation of good citizenship through its community service learning programs. The diverse student body shares a wide range of cultural values and the university community fosters unity of purpose and cultivates mutual respect.

The University of Texas at Arlington is a publicly funded educational institution. Specifically, it receives its funding and is governed by the Texas legislature and student tuition. Therefore, the institution is accountable to the state of maintaining certain standards of operation. This university offers a free-standing School of Social Work offering

baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degree programs. The school is governed by a dean who is a social worker and each of the degree programs are run by directors who are also social workers reporting directly to the dean.

Texas Christian University's stated mission is to educate individuals to think and act as ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global community. According to the website, their vision is to be a prominent private university recognized for their global perspective, their diverse and supportive learning community, their commitment to research and creative discovery, and their emphasis on leadership development. The TCU core values are academic achievement, personal freedom and integrity, the dignity and respect of the individual and a heritage of inclusiveness, tolerance and service.

Texas Christian University is a privately funded educational institution. Although it has historically been related to, it is not governed by the Disciples of Christ, a Protestant denomination that encourages a reasoned faith, commitment to ecumenism and understanding among the world's religions. More than 45 religious groups are represented in the university's student body including Muslim, Southern Baptist, Jewish and Catholic. The University is governed by a Board of Trustees which includes businessmen, community and civic leaders. It receives its funding through tuition and private donations. Rather than a free-standing school of social work, this university offers a program of social work in the School of Health and Human Services. This school is run by a dean who is a registered nurse and the social work program has a program director who is a social worker. The social work program offers a baccalaureate degree.

Although there are significant differences between the publicly funded University of Texas at Arlington and Texas Christian University with respect to how they are set up and governed, there is one primary component each school has in common - both schools offer educational programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Each university regardless of public or private funding source is required to adhere to the same educational standards when it comes to educating its social work students. Therefore, the types of education received by students should be comparable between these two institutions.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional design with information gathered through the use of a questionnaire distributed to BSW students enrolled in a field placement at the University of Texas at Arlington's School of Social Work. Likewise, students enrolled in a field placement at Texas Christian University's Social Work Program in the School of Health and Human Services will be surveyed.

After completing the IRB process, arrangements were made with UTA field seminar instructors to distribute surveys to willing participants during field seminar classes. Likewise, arrangements were made with the TCU field office director to distribute surveys to willing TCU field students as well.

At the beginning of each of the three field seminars attended, university faculty were asked to leave the room and this researcher explained the purpose of the project as outlined in Appendix C. The voluntary nature of survey participation was stressed. Likewise, students were informed if they chose to participate their information would be completely confidential. The only distinguishing characteristic on the surveys was the small TCU in the

upper left hand corner of TCU participant surveys. Upon conclusion of the research description students wishing to participate were asked to complete a consent form like the one found in Appendix B. Once all consent forms were collected, questionnaires were distributed to all who completed a consent form.

### 3.3 Data Collection

A questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to collect data. The majority of survey questions (77 of 92) were ordinal Likert scale items. The remaining 15 questions were comprised of 14 nominal items and 1 scale item (age). Once questionnaires were completed and collected by the researcher, each participant was assigned a research identification number. All data collected were entered by identification number into SPSS for Windows version 12.0.

### 3.4 Research Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was multifaceted consisting of 92 questions most of which were ordinal and nominal items. The questionnaire addressed five areas: demographics; students' perceptions of the importance of religion and spirituality in social work practice; students' perceptions regarding training and experience in the classroom about religion and spirituality in social work practice; students' perceptions regarding training and experience in the field placement about the use of religion and spirituality in social work practice; and the students' perceptions related to their competency and comfort in addressing religious and spiritual issues in social work practice.

### *3.4.1 Demographics*

The questionnaire contained seven questions specifically designed to gather the following demographic data: age, gender, race, religious affiliation, spiritual affiliation, area of field work, and anticipated graduation date. This section also had four ordinal questions designed to gain information about the students' personal religiosity and spirituality. These questions asked for the student to respond on a 1-4 scale with 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree and 4 = strongly disagree. Each question distinguished between religion and spirituality and asked about the students' involvement in spiritual and religious activity and their perception of the importance of spiritual and religious activity in the students' life.

### *3.4.2 Perceptions of the Importance of Spirituality and Religion in Social Work Practice*

Questions 2 – 19 asked specific questions regarding the students' perception about the importance of spirituality and religion in social work practice. These 18 questions required students to respond with strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree for each statement. Due to the fact that differentiation between religion and spirituality is encouraged in social work, questions throughout the questionnaire asked specifically about religion and others about spirituality. Therefore in this section, nine questions were asked about the students' perception of the importance of religion in social work practice and nine similar questions were asked about the students' perception of the importance of spirituality in social work practice.

In effort to further data analyses, responses to the nine questions relating to the importance of religion in social work practice were added together to create an "importance score" for each participant. These scores ranged from 9 to 36 with lower scores representing

agreement that religion is important in social work and higher scores indicating disagreement. Likewise, the nine questions relating to the importance of spirituality in social work practice were scored as well.

#### *3.4.3 Students' Perceptions of Classroom Education about Spirituality and Religion*

Questions 20 – 35 asked specific questions regarding the students' perception about their perceptions with respect to classroom education received about using and addressing spirituality and religion in social work practice. Again, each question distinguished between religion and spirituality. Eight questions were asked about spirituality and eight similar questions about religion. Student responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

#### *3.4.4 Students' Perceptions of Field Education about Spirituality and Religion*

Information about students' perception of the field education they received related to integrating spiritual and religious issues into practice was obtained from questions 36 – 49. As with the other questions, students were asked to respond on a 1 – 4 / Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree scale. Similar to the questions about classroom education, general and specific questions were asked about students perception of the types of education received in the field. Of these fourteen questions, seven were asked about religion and seven about spirituality.

To further data analysis, all 15 questions relating to education received about religion (in both the classroom and the field) were added together to create a “religion education score.” These scores ranged from 15 – 60 with lower scores representing greater level of education. The 15 questions regarding education received about spirituality were scored using this same method.

### *3.4.5 Perceptions of Preparedness and Comfort in Addressing Religion and Spirituality*

The remaining Likert scale questions asked students to report their perceptions about their level of preparedness and comfort with using and addressing issues of religion and spirituality in social work practice. Questions were also asked about student perception with respect to their overall level of education regarding various and differing religious and spiritual belief systems. Eight questions were asked about student perception of their preparedness (questions 50 – 57), eight questions were asked about student perception of their comfort (questions 62 – 69), four questions were asked about student perceptions of their own biases related to differing religious and spiritual belief systems (questions 58, 59, 70, 71) and four questions were asked about students' perception of their overall knowledge with respect to various and differing religious and spiritual belief systems (questions 60, 61, 72, 73). Consistent with the rest of the questionnaire, separate but like questions were used to measure student perceptions of religion and spirituality and all responses were provided on a strongly agree – strongly disagree Likert scale.

As was done with the questions about student perceptions of the importance of religion and spirituality in social work practice, responses to the eight questions relating to comfort with using or addressing religion in social work practice were added together to create a “comfort score” for each participant. These scores ranged from 8 to 32 with lower scores representing greater comfort and higher scores indicating less comfort. The eight questions relating to comfort with spirituality in social work practice were scored as well. Using this same method, two “preparedness scores” were created for each subject, one for religion and one for spirituality.

#### *3.4.6 Open Ended Questions Regarding Comfort and Preparedness*

The final eight questions of the survey provided respondents with an opportunity to identify specific religious and spiritual belief systems with which they feel prepared / unprepared and comfortable / uncomfortable.

#### 3.5 Validity

Although the items on the questionnaire do not have known or tested validity, the questions have been constructed in a manner that directly ask about what the question is designed to measure. For example, in assessing student classroom education about religion in social work, students are asked to indicate whether they strongly agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement, “In the classroom, I received education on how to use religion in social work practice.” Question content is further directed to specific types of education received in each setting, i.e. role plays, exploration of biases, education on varieties of religious belief systems, etc. Direct questions are used to measure student perceptions in each area the study addresses; importance, education (field and classroom), preparedness and comfort. These types of direct questions demonstrate the questionnaire’s face and content validity.

#### 3.6 Data Analysis

The original data analysis plan was to evaluate similarities and assess statistical differences between the two groups. However, as discussed in the next chapter even with all potential subjects completing the questionnaire, only a small sample of subjects were available. Thus the data analysis mainly consists of comparisons of the two groups utilizing descriptive outcomes. However, chi-square and t-tests were used whenever possible.

Although these types of analyses are most often used with larger samples, chi-square and t-tests are used with very small samples as well, such as in program evaluation (Orme, 1997).

Demographic information was gathered through participant self report. Students were asked questions about their age, gender, race, religious affiliation, spiritual affiliation, area of social work field placement, and anticipated graduation date. This information was coded so that it could be analyzed in SPSS. In the event one of the choices did not apply to the respondent, students were provided an opportunity to write in responses for the questions relating to religious affiliation, spiritual affiliation and field placement. For the purposes of data analysis, many responses were grouped together. Specifically, students reporting their religion as Assembly of God, Baptist, Episcopal and Church of Christ were coded as Protestant; and those reporting Non-Denominational, Mormon and Jehovah's Witness were coded as other western religions.

Descriptives were then used to report information on demographic information gathered. Next, chi square analyses were used to compare differences between the responses of students from the two universities.

Descriptives were also used to report student responses to all items on the questionnaire related to the students' perceptions of the importance of the use of religion and the use of spirituality in social work practice as well as their perceptions of their preparedness and comfort with addressing religion and spirituality in social work practice.

Likewise, descriptives were used to report student perceptions of classroom and field education they received about addressing religious and spiritual issues in social work practice. Next, questions related to comfort, preparedness, field and classroom education

were grouped, and scaled. Lastly, descriptives, t-tests and chi square analysis were used to test each hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Description of Sample

A total of 41 students attended the seminar classes on the dates the questionnaires were offered. All 41 students chose to participate. There were 21 participants from TCU and 19 participants from UTA.

##### *4.1.1 Gender*

The total sample (n=41), was comprised of 90.2% female and 9.8% male. A review of gender by institution shows 86.4% of TCU participants were female and 13.6% were male. While 94.7% of UTA participants were female and 5.3% were male. Given that social work as a profession has a significantly larger percentage of females compared to males, the larger number of female respondents is to be expected.

##### *4.1.2 Race*

Racial makeup of the total sample was comprised of , 68.3% Caucasian , 12.2% African American, 7.3% Asian / Pacific Islander, 7.3% Latino / Hispanic, and 4.9% Bi-racial (African American / Caucasian). Racial makeup of TCU students reveals 90.9% of participants were Caucasian, 4.5% were Latino and 4.5% were bi-racial (African American

/ Caucasian). Racial makeup of UTA students shows wider diversity with 42.1% Caucasian, 26.3% African American, 15.8% Asian / Pacific Islander, 10.5% Latino and 5.3% Bi-racial (African American / Caucasian).

#### *4.1.3 Age*

The total sample mean age was 24.73 years. Ages for TCU students ranged from 20 – 23 years with a mean age of 21.68 years. Ages for UTA students ranged from 21 – 57 years with a mean age of 28.26.

#### *4.1.4 Anticipated Graduation Date*

The total sample indicated 90.2% of participants projected their graduation date in May 2005 and 9.8% reported a projected graduation date in August 2005. TCU respondents indicated 86.4% reporting projected graduation in May 2005 and 13.6% reported a projected graduation in August 2005. UTA respondents reported 94.7% projecting graduation in May 2005 and 5.3% projecting graduation in August 2005.

#### *4.1.5 Religious Preference*

Responses to questions regarding the sample's personal religious preference revealed 63.4% identified as Protestant, 14.5% identified as Catholic, 9.8% identified as Christian, 7.3% identified as other (2-Muslim, 1-Mormon) and 4.9% reported having no religious preference. Of the TCU respondents 86.4% identified as Protestant, 13.6% identified as Christian and 4.5% identified no religious preference. UTA respondents provided much more diversity in religious preference with 57.9% identified as Protestant, 10.5% identified as Catholic, 10.5% identified as Muslim, 10.5% identified as other western religion, 5.3% identified as Christian and 5.3% identified as no religious preference.

#### *4.1.6 Spiritual Preference*

When prompted to provide information regarding personal spiritual preference, only 20 of the students provided a response, 10 from TCU and 10 from UTA. Of these 20 respondents, 76.2% used the name of a religion to describe their spiritual preference while 23.8% used some form of statement which began with “I believe..” in describing their preference. Examples of belief statements include, “I believe there is a God” and “I believe music is spiritual.”

Analysis of responses by university indicated 83.4% of The TCU respondents identified a religion as their spiritual preference while 16.6% used a belief statement to describe their spiritual preference. UTA respondents had 66.7% identify a religion as their spiritual preference and 33.3% use a belief statement to describe their spiritual preference.

#### *4.1.7 Religiosity*

Through the use of four questions, information was gathered regarding the subjects’ level of religiosity and spirituality. Analysis of the total sample established that 75.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed involvement in a religious activity is an important part of their life and 65.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly participate in a religious activity. Interestingly, higher percentages were reported with respect to spirituality. Specifically, 80.5% agreed or strongly agreed involvement in a spiritual activity is an important part of their life and 78% agreed or strongly agreed they regularly engage in a spiritual activity.

Analysis by university revealed 72.7% of TCU students reported involvement in a religious activity is an important part of their life and 63.6% report regular involvement in a

religious activity. Further, 72.7% of TCU students reported involvement in a spiritual activity is an important part of their life and 72.7% report regularly engaging in spiritual activities.

Similarly, analysis of UTA responses revealed 73.7% of respondents stated involvement in religious activity is an important part of their life and 68.4% reported regular involvement in a religious activity. However, a higher number of UTA respondents (89.5%) report involvement in a spiritual activity is an important part of their life and 84.2% report regular engagement in a religious activity.

#### *4.1.8 Field Placements*

Review of the sample indicates 71.8% of participants are completing a field placement working with families and children; 10.3% in a school setting; 7.7% in a medical setting; 5.1% working with the homeless population; 2.6% working with chemical dependency and 2.6% working in community development.

Analysis of field placements by university reveals significant difference. TCU students have students reporting field placements in six different areas of social work; 52.4% children and families; 19% in school social work; 14.3% in medical social work; and 4.8% in chemical dependency, homeless population and community development. This is contrasted with UTA student responses which indicate 94.4% were working with children and families and 5.6% were working with the homeless population

#### *4.2.9 TCU versus UTA Students*

Although participants from both universities were similar, bi-variate analysis revealed several differences in respondents from TCU and UTA. In general, TCU students tended to

be younger with an age range of 21 – 23 years, Caucasian (90.9%), and Protestant (86.4%). UTA students tended to be older with an age range of 21 – 57 years, and although the majority were Caucasian (57.9%) and Protestant (42.1%), they tended to have greater diversity with respect to race, religious preference and spiritual affiliation.

In terms of field placement, TCU provided a much more diversified sampling of social work fields. Although the majority of TCU students were working with children and families (52.4%) there were several other social work fields represented. This is contrasted with UTA's students over 90% of whom are working with children and families with only one other field of social work being represented.

## 4.2 Tests of Hypotheses

### *4.2.1 Hypothesis 1a*

Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will indicate they believe it is important to be able to address religious issues in social work practice.

This hypothesis was not supported. Only 39% of respondents agreed that it is important to address religion in social work practice. Upon analysis by university, 45.5% of TCU students indicated it is important to address religious issues in practice compared to only 31.6% of UTA students.

Student responses to questions about the importance of addressing religion / religious issues in practice were scaled. Independent t-tests were run to determine whether or not a statistically significant difference exists between university responses. At the .05 level of significance, there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of students

at the privately funded university versus those at the publicly funded university ( $t = -2.163$  ;  $p < .05$ ).

Table 4.1. TCU v. UTA Importance of Religion in Practice

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
ImptReg	-2.163	27.738	.039*	-1.471

\* This represents a statistically significant difference at the .05 level of significance.

Given that lower mean scores indicate higher agreement, it can be concluded that students at the privately funded university ( $m = 1.48$ ) tend to believe it is more important to address religious issues in practice than those at the publicly funded university ( $m = 2.95$ ).

#### 4.2.2 Hypothesis 1b

Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will indicate they believe it is important to be able to address spiritual issues in social work practice.

This hypothesis was marginally supported in that 58.5% of students agreed that it is important to be able to address spiritual issues with clients. Interestingly, only 50% of TCU students agreed it is important to address spiritual issues in social work practice while 68.4% of UTA students agreed that this is an important part of work with clients. This would seem to indicate that respondents from the publicly funded university believe it is more important to address spiritual issues in practice than those at the privately funded university. However, after scaling student responses to all questions relating to the importance of addressing various aspects of spirituality in practice, mean scores indicate it is the privately funded institutions ( $m = 1.38$ ) tended to believe more so than the publicly funded university ( $m = 3.00$ ) that addressing spiritual issues in practice is important. Independent t-test determined this relationship is significant at the .05 level of significance ( $t = -2.269$  ;  $p < .05$ ).

Table 4.2 TCU v. UTA Importance of Spirituality in Practice

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
ImptSprit	-2.269	38	.029*	-1.619

\* This represents a statistically significant difference at the .05 level of significance.

#### 4.2.3 Hypothesis 2a

Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will perceive themselves as prepared to address religious issues in social work practice, but fewer will report comfort with addressing religion in social work practice especially when the clients' religion is different or directly opposed to that of the student.

This hypothesis was not supported. While 55% of respondents report being prepared to address religion in social work practice, more students (58.5%) report comfort addressing religion in social work practice.

Student responses to each item about preparedness and comfort addressing religion in social work practice were scaled. While students at the privately funded university consistently demonstrated higher scores of preparedness and comfort than the publicly funded university, independent t-test established there is no statistically significant difference between the two universities with respect to preparedness ( $t = -1.285$  ;  $p = .207$ ) or comfort ( $t = -.462$  ;  $p = .647$ )

Table 4.3 Difference in Religion Preparedness between Universities

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
PrepReg	-1.285	38	.207	-.358
ComftReg	-.462	39	.647	-.158

Although there were no significant differences between student responses about their level of comfort and preparedness, a surprisingly large percentage of students (95.1%) report being comfortable working with clients whose religious beliefs are different than their own.

#### 4.2.4 Hypothesis 2b

Most students surveyed, regardless of educational institution, will perceive themselves as prepared to address spiritual issues in social work practice, but fewer will report comfort with addressing spirituality in social work practice especially when the clients' spiritual belief system is different than or directly opposed to that of the student.

This hypothesis was not supported. Although 50% of students surveyed reported being prepared to address spirituality in social work practice, a larger percentage (53.7%) reported being comfortable with addressing spirituality in practice.

Student responses to each item about preparedness and comfort addressing spirituality in social work practice were scaled. While students at the privately funded university consistently demonstrated higher scores of preparedness and comfort than the publicly funded university, independent t-test established there is no statistically significant difference between the two universities with respect to their perceptions of preparedness ( $t = -1.222$  ;  $p = .229$ ) or comfort ( $t = -.041$  ;  $p = .968$ )

Table 4.4 Differences in Spirituality Preparedness between Schools

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
PrepSprt	-1.222	37.549	.229	-.368
ComftSprt	-.041	39	.968	-.014

Although there were no significant differences between student responses about their level of comfort and preparedness in addressing spirituality in social work practice, a surprisingly large percentage of students (97.6%) report being comfortable working with clients whose spiritual beliefs are different than their own.

#### 4.2.5 Hypothesis 3a

There will similarity in students' perceptions of the amount of education they have received regarding the use of religion in social work practice between those students at privately versus publicly funded universities.

This hypothesis is supported. In general there was not a wide difference in student perceptions regarding the amount of education they received at the privately versus the publicly funded universities. Specifically, 27.25% of TCU students and 31.55% of UTA students agreed or strongly agreed they received education regarding the use of religion in social work practice.

Chi square analysis indicates there is not a statistically significant difference between student perceptions at the privately funded TCU and the publicly funded UTA with respect to education received regarding the use of religion in social work practice ( $X^2 = 2.819$ ;  $p = .093$ ). Specifically, 73.8% of student responses regarding education received about religion can be explained or predicted by factors other than the university.

Table 4.5. TCU v UTA Education on Religion

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.819(b)	1	.093
N of Valid Cases	41		

#### 4.2.6 Hypothesis 3b

There will be similarity in students' perceptions with respect to the amount of education they have received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice between those students at privately versus publicly funded universities

This hypothesis is supported. In general there was not a wide difference in student perceptions regarding the amount of education they received at the privately versus the publicly funded universities. Specifically, 25% of TCU students and 28.95% of UTA students agreed or strongly agreed they received education regarding the use of spirituality in the social work practice.

Chi square analysis indicates there is not a statistically significant difference between student perceptions at the privately funded TCU and the publicly funded UTA with respect to education received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice ( $X^2 = 1.82$  ;  $p = .177$ ). Specifically, approximately 78.9% of students perception regarding education received about spirituality can be explained or predicted by factors other than the university they attend.

Table 4.6. TCU v. UTA Education on Spirituality

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.820(b)	1	.177
N of Valid Cases	41		

#### 4.2.7 Hypothesis 4a

Regardless of educational institution, there will be similarity in students' perceptions about the amount of education received regarding the use of religion in social work practice between classroom and field placement education.

This hypothesis is supported. 24.4% of students reported receiving education in the classroom regarding the use of religion in social work practice while 34.1% of students reported receiving this type of education in the field.

Although this is a small sample, student responses to questions about classroom and field education received regarding the use of religion in social work practice were scaled and t-tests were then run on the sample and by school. While the percentages of students reporting they received education regarding the use of religion in social work practice was slightly higher in the field setting (34.1%) than in the classroom (24.4%), t-tests did not establish a statistically significant difference between classroom and field education responses regarding religion in social work practice ( $t = 1.193$  ;  $p = .240$ ).

Table 4.7. Differences in Field v. Class Religion Education

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
FieldEduReg - ClassEduReg	.462	2.415	1.193	.240

Although both universities had a higher percentage of students reporting receiving education about religion in the field (TCU = 31.8%; UTA = 36.8%) versus the classroom (TCU = 22.77%; UTA = 26.3%), t-test comparison of means by school found no statistically significant difference in field and classroom education.

Table 4.8. Difference in Field v. Class Religion Education by School

School	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
TCU	.190	2.112	.413	.684
UTA	.778	2.756	1.197	.248

#### 4.2.8 Hypothesis 4b

Regardless of educational institution, there will be a similarity between students' perceptions about the amount of education received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice between classroom and field placement education

This hypothesis is supported. Specifically, 29.3% of students reported receipt of education regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice while 31.7% reported receiving education in the field regarding the use of spirituality in practice.

Although this was a small sample, student responses to questions about classroom and field education received regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice were scaled. T-tests were then run on the sample and by school. While the percentages of students reporting they received education regarding the use of spirituality in social work practice was slightly higher in the field setting (31.7%) than in the classroom (29.3%), at the .05 level of significance t-tests did not establish a statistically significant difference between classroom and field education responses regarding religion in social work practice ( $t = 1.854$ ;  $p = .071$ ).

Table 4.9. Differences in Field v. Classroom Spirituality Education

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
FieldEduSprit - ClassEduSprit	.615	2.073	1.854	.071

Although both universities had a higher percentage of students reporting receiving education about spirituality in the field (TCU = 31.8%; UTA = 31.6%) versus the classroom (TCU = 18.2%; UTA = 26.3%), t-test comparison of means by school found no statistically significant difference in field and classroom education.

Table 4.10. Differences in Field v. Classroom Spirituality Education by School

School		Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
TCU	FieldEdu Spirit – ClassEdu Sprt	2.86	1.793	.730	.474
UTA	FieldEduSprt - ClassEduSprt	1.00	2.351	1.804	.089

### 4.3 Summary of Findings

Generally, less than half (39%) of students surveyed reported it is important to address religion in social work practice. More students (58%) agreed it is important to address spirituality in social work practice. In both cases, there were a significantly greater number of students from the privately funded university that agreed religion and spirituality are important.

A small majority of students perceived themselves as prepared to address religion and spirituality in social work practice while a slightly larger percentage of the sample reported comfort addressing religion and spirituality in practice. Interestingly, a very large percentage of the sample reported comfort and preparedness in working with people from differing religious and spiritual backgrounds. There were no significant differences noted between school responses regarding preparedness and comfort in addressing spirituality and religion in social work practice.

In evaluating students' perceptions regarding the amount of education received at the privately funded and publicly funded institutions, statistical analysis established that educational institution did not predict or explain differences in student responses about education received regarding the use of religion and spirituality in practice. Further,

statistical analysis could not establish a significant difference between education received in the field versus the classroom in the areas of religion and spirituality.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research study was to explore student perceptions of the importance of spirituality and religion to social work practice and their perceived level of preparedness, education and comfort with addressing this aspect of the client in practice. This study also compared responses from students at public and private institutions to determine if there are significant differences between attitudes and education with respect to religion and spirituality in social work. Finally, this study sought to determine if there was a significant difference between the field and classroom education received regarding the use of spirituality and religion in practice.

#### 5.2 Limitations of the Study

The largest limitation of the study is the sample size. Due to the small sample, the likelihood that these results are not representative of the general student population increases. Other limitations which could be related to the sample size include, the under-representation of social workers of color and the disproportionate number of students working with families and children. It is possible results could differ if there was greater representation from students working in mental health or chemical dependency.

Other studies have suggested there is a positive correlation between age and spirituality (Gardner, 2003). Therefore, it appears that age could also be a limiting factor for this study as the mean age was under 25. The fact that all students surveyed attend a university in the same county is another limiting factor.

Although this study sought to compare student perceptions at publicly funded versus privately funded universities, due to the numerous differences which exist among private institutions, it is not possible to generalize these findings to all private institutions. Therefore the fact that only one private institution was included in the study is a further limitation.

Finally, the fact that 95.1% of respondents report some form of religious or spiritual affiliation in their own life provides a limitation on several levels. An argument could be made that the fact that such a large majority of students find religion and spirituality important in their own lives could impact their views about its importance in social work practices. Further, the students' personal affiliation could affect the students' perception of preparedness. As indicated in the study, only 36.6% of respondents agreed they had received education in the classroom and 34.1% of respondents agreed they had received education in the classroom on the use of religion in social work practice. Moreover, only 29.3% of respondents agreed they had received education in the classroom and 26.8% of respondents agreed they had received education in the field on the use of spirituality in social work practice. These percentages don't support the assertion that the majority of these students are prepared through field and classroom education to address spirituality and religion in practice. Yet a large majority reported they were prepared to do just that. It is possible that

had more participants in the study not had a set of personal spiritual or religious beliefs to draw from, the percentage reporting preparedness would be lower.

### 5.3 Implications for Social Work Research, Practice and Education

#### *5.3.1 Implications for Research*

Due to the limitations discussed above, more research needs to be done to determine if these results are representative of a more diverse sample of students from diverse geographical regions and differing private institutions. Future research should also focus on obtaining student perceptions regarding the differences between spirituality and religion. In this study, over 87% of students reported they agreed there is a difference between religion and spirituality. Yet 76.2% of those who answered the question regarding their spiritual affiliation used the name of a religion to define this.

In future research, it might be useful to collect data to identify where students perceive they have received most of their knowledge regarding spirituality and religion. It may also prove beneficial to ask students questions regarding their comfort level with specific religions and spiritual belief systems.

Finally, this study demonstrated that further research is needed to explore the relationship which exists between education received about differing religions and spiritual belief systems, the students' perceptions of having explored their religious and spiritual biases, and the students' perceived competence in addressing this in practice.

#### *5.3.2 Implications for Social Work Practice*

Everyday, more and more research is proving the efficacy of interventions which capitalize on the use of spiritual and religious belief systems as client strengths to promote

healing. Conversely, more and more research is proving that there are forms of pathology which stem from deep rooted spiritual and religious belief systems. Whether spirituality and religion serve as a strength for change or a barrier to recovery, issues surrounding spirituality and religion are going to be ever-present in social work practice and will require skilled professionals to appropriately address them.

The findings of this study indicate that approximately half of the students surveyed agree that spirituality and religion are important in social work practice. Similarly about half state they are prepared to address this in practice. This means approximately half of these students going into practice do not see this as important nor do they feel prepared to address this issue. This could have significant implications for practice in that half of these workers will not address this most fundamental issue with clients. Failure to address this aspect of clients in practice could cause the worker to fail to capitalize on an incredible strength or worse, could result in failure to identify a core barrier to client progress.

Finally, the fact that over 90% of those surveyed report they having explored biases regarding differing religious and spiritual belief systems and over 90% report feeling comfortable and prepared to work with clients from differing religious and spiritual belief systems is cause for additional concern when these percentages are compared with the significantly lower percentage of students reporting they feel prepared and have received education in this area. The fact that these students feel comfortable and prepared working with something they report having received little education about, could result in workers addressing such issues inappropriately.

### *5.3.3 Implications for Social Work Education*

Although steps have been made by the CSWE to incorporate education about religion and spirituality in practice, it appears there is still progress that needs to be made. In this study, only 58.5% of students reported being “educated” on a variety of religious and spiritual belief systems. However, less than half reported receiving this education in the classroom or in the field. Further, over 90% of respondents report they are comfortable working with these individuals of differing belief systems. If that preparedness didn’t come from their education – where did it come from? The profession of social work has a responsibility to provide accountability and education which promotes social workers’ ability to appropriately address this aspect of the human experience. Some recommendations to improve education so that students are appropriately prepared to address this in practice include:

1. Classes educating students on differences between spirituality and religion.

Education needs to be provided on a variety of religious and spiritual belief systems to all social work students. If students are truly going to evaluate their religious and spiritual biases, and develop skills to meet the client where the client’s at, they need to know something about the wide variety of religious and spiritual belief systems. This type of education needs to be a mandatory component for every student.

2. Provide classes which teach students how to work with a variety of religious and spiritual belief systems both in terms of their potential strengths and detriments. There are some “unconventional” belief systems which may make members of the “conventional” religions and spiritual belief systems uncomfortable. This doesn’t necessarily mean they are

a source of pathology for client. Conversely, many clients may have “conventional” belief systems which are serving as a detriment to client progress.

3. Provide classes which teach students how to ethically capitalize on religious and spiritual belief systems as strengths. Many students report being able to identify these belief systems as client strengths, but how does a social worker use that strength in work with a client?

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Religion and spirituality are an identified part of the lives of 95 – 99% of Americans (Longo & Petersen, 2002). With this in mind, it is not logical to assume it to be an issue which will not arise within the context of social work practice. Therefore, it is imperative that further research be done to determine what modifications need to be made to current social work education so that social workers are prepared to address this in a fashion which is in line with social work values and ethics. Students need to receive this education, by schools of social work, on the appropriate ways to use and address spiritual and religious belief systems within the scope of social work practice, rather than being left to their own “preparedness”.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS  
AT ARLINGTON

**SUBJECT CONSENT FORM**

I have been asked to participate as a subject in the research project entitled \_\_\_\_\_

*An Evaluation of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Education*

under the direction of *Sharina Branum*

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

I understand that the purpose of this study is to \_\_\_\_\_

Have students share their views about the importance of spirituality & religion in social work and share their views about the education they received about the use of spirituality & religion in social work practice.

**PROCEDURES**

Students will be asked to voluntarily complete a survey asking questions about the students' views and opinions. This information will be evaluated using a statistical processing program.

**NUMBER OF SUBJECTS PARTICIPATING**

There will be approximately 20 UTA students asked to participate and approximately 25 TCU students asked to participate.

**Article I. RISKS OF PARTICIPATION**

I understand that the potential risks from participation in the study are \_\_\_\_\_

Given that this is an anonymous survey, there are no identified risks associated with taking the survey.

**BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT**

I understand that the direct benefits to me include:

I understand that I will not benefit from my participation in the research project.

**ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT**

There is no alternative way to participate. Subjects may choose NOT to complete the questionnaire if they wish.

SUBJECT STIPEND FOR PARTICIPATION

I understand that I will be paid in the amount of \$ 0 for participation in this study.

COSTS OF PARTICIPATION

There are not costs associated with participation in this study.

STANDARD CLAUSES

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons in this project.

The principal and alternate procedures, including the experimental procedures in this project, have been identified and explained to me in language that I can understand.

3. The risks and discomforts from the procedures have been explained to me.

4. The expected benefits from the procedures have been explained to me.

5. An offer has been made to answer any questions that I may have about these procedures. If I have any questions before, during or after the study, I may contact:

Ms. Sharina Branum at (817) 404-2274  
or Dr. Debra Woody at (817) 272-5228  
or pager # \_\_\_\_\_

6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or stop my participation in this project at any time. All new findings during the course of this research which may influence my desire to continue or not to continue to participate in this study will be provided to me as such information becomes available.

7. If I have any questions regarding my rights as a subject participating in this study or research-related injury, I may contact Office of Research Compliance at (817) 272-3723.

I voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in the above named project. I understand that I will be given a copy of the consent form I have signed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject and/or his/her authorized representatives.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please remember that your participation is strictly voluntary and completely confidential. Neither the classroom instructor nor the field supervisor will be given information regarding individual student responses. Only group results will be reported in written or verbal form.*

**THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS**

**I. Demographics**

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Race: (please circle)

African American

American Indian / Alaskan Native

Asian / Pacific Islander

Caucasian

Latino

East Indian

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Religious Affiliation: (please circle)

None Protestant Catholic Jewish Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Spiritual Affiliation : \_\_\_\_\_

6. On a scale of 1 – 4 with 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree

Please rate the following statements.

I regularly engage in religious activity	1	2	3	4
I regularly engage in a spiritual activity	1	2	3	4
Involvement in religious activity is an important part of my life	1	2	3	4
Involvement in a spiritual activity is an important part of my life	1	2	3	4

7. In what area of social work is your field placement?

Mental Health Chemical Dependency Families & Children

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Expected date of graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1 – 4 please rate the following statements.  
 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree

1.	There is a difference between spirituality and religion.	1	2	3	4
2.	As a social worker, religion is an important part of work with clients.	1	2	3	4
3.	As a social worker, spirituality is an important part of work with clients.	1	2	3	4
4.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's past religious beliefs.	1	2	3	4
5.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's past religious practices.	1	2	3	4
6.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's current religious beliefs.	1	2	3	4
7.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's current religious practices / involvement.	1	2	3	4
8.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's past spiritual beliefs.	1	2	3	4
9.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's past spiritual practices / involvement.	1	2	3	4
10.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's current spiritual beliefs.	1	2	3	4
11.	As a social worker, it is important to gather information regarding a client's current spiritual practices / involvement.	1	2	3	4
12.	As a social worker, it is important to support a client's use of religious books, writings, songs, language, etc.	1	2	3	4
13.	As a social worker, it is important to support a client's use of spiritual books, writings, songs, language, etc.	1	2	3	4
14.	As a social worker, it is important to support a client's participation in religious practices, rituals, etc.	1	2	3	4
15.	As a social worker, it is important to support a client's participation in spiritual practices, rituals, etc.	1	2	3	4
16.	As a social worker, it is important to have knowledge of and make referrals to religious leaders e.g. deacons, pastors, shamen, etc,	1	2	3	4
17.	As a social worker, it is important to have knowledge of and make referrals to spiritual leaders / programs e.g. AA / NA sponsors, druid leaders, etc.	1	2	3	4

On a scale of 1 – 4 please rate the following statements. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree				
18. As a social worker, it is important to talk with clients about their religious values.	1	2	3	4
19. As a social worker, it is important to talk with clients about their spiritual values.	1	2	3	4
20. In general, in the classroom, I received enough information on the use of religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
21. In general, in the classroom, I received enough information on the use of spirituality in social work practice. received practice.	1	2	3	4
22. In the classroom, I received education on how to use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
23. In the classroom, I received education on how to use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
24. In the classroom, application exercises (such as role plays) were used to demonstrate how to effectively use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
25. In the classroom, application exercises (such as role plays) were used to demonstrate how to effectively use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
26. In the classroom, religion was identified as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
27. In the classroom, religion was identified as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
28. In the classroom, spirituality was identified as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
29. In the classroom, spirituality was identified as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
30. In the classroom, I received education on how to work with a client whose religious beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
31. In the classroom, I received education on how to work with a client whose spiritual beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
32. In the classroom, I received education which allowed me to explore my own personal biases regarding differing spiritual belief systems.	1	2	3	4

On a scale of 1 – 4 please rate the following statements. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree				
34. In the classroom, I received education on a variety of religious beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
35. In the classroom, I received education on a variety of spiritual beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
36. In the field, I received education on how to use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
37. In the field, I received education on how to use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
38. In the field, application exercises (such as role plays) were used to demonstrate how to effectively use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
39. In the field, application exercises (such as role plays) were used to demonstrate how to effectively use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
40. In the field, religion was identified as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
41. In the field, religion was identified as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
42. In the field, spirituality was identified as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
43. In the field, spirituality was identified as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
44. In the field, I received education on how to work with a client whose religious beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
45. In the field, I received education on how to work with a client whose spiritual beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
46. In the field, I received education which allowed me to explore my own personal biases regarding differing spiritual belief systems.	1	2	3	4
47. In the field, I received education which allowed me to explore my own personal biases regarding differing religious belief systems.	1	2	3	4
48. In the field, I received education on a variety of religious beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
49. In the field, I received education on a variety of spiritual beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4

On a scale of 1 – 4 please rate the following statements. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree				
50. I am prepared to use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
51. I am prepared to use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
52. I am prepared to identify religion as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
53. I am prepared to identify religion as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
54. I am prepared to identify spirituality as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
55. I am prepared to identify spirituality as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
56. I am prepared to work effectively with a client whose religious beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
57. I am prepared to work with a client whose spiritual beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
58. I have explored my own personal biases regarding differing spiritual belief systems.	1	2	3	4
59. I have explored my own personal biases regarding differing religious belief systems.	1	2	3	4
60. I am educated on a variety of religious beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
61. I am educated on a variety of spiritual beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
62. I am comfortable to use religion in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
63. I am comfortable to use spirituality in social work practice.	1	2	3	4
64. I am comfortable to identify religion as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
65. I am comfortable to identify religion as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4
66. I am comfortable to identify spirituality as a potential strength for client progress.	1	2	3	4
67. I am comfortable to identify spirituality as a potential detriment to client progress.	1	2	3	4

On a scale of 1 – 4 please rate the following statements. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree				
68. I am comfortable to work effectively with a client whose religious beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
69. I am comfortable to work with a client whose spiritual beliefs are different than my own.	1	2	3	4
70. I have explored my own personal biases regarding differing spiritual belief systems.	1	2	3	4
71. I have explored my own personal biases regarding differing religious belief systems.	1	2	3	4
72. I am educated on a variety of religious beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4
73. I am educated on a variety of spiritual beliefs and practices	1	2	3	4

***Please answer the following in the space provided:***

1. The religion / religious belief system I am most comfortable working with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_
2. The religion / religious belief system I am most uncomfortable working with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The spiritual belief system I am most comfortable working with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_
4. The spiritual belief system I am most uncomfortable working with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_
5. The religion / religious belief system I am most prepared to work with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_
6. The religion / religious belief system I am most unprepared to work with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_

7. The spiritual belief system I am most prepared to work with in social work practice is:

\_\_\_\_\_

8. The spiritual belief system I am most unprepared to work with in social work practice is: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
SURVEY DISTRIBUTION SCRIPT

## ***SURVEY DISTRIBUTION SCRIPT***

**INTRODUCTION:** My name is Sharina Branum. I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am currently working on my thesis and would like to invite you to complete the survey I am using to gather my data. Participation is completely voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. There are no right or wrong answers to the survey questions and it should take 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of my research is to evaluate student perception with respect to: the importance of spirituality and religion in social work practice; the amount of education received regarding the use of spirituality and religion in practice; the differences between classroom and field education provided on this topic; the student's comfort with using spirituality and religion in social work; the student's perception of his / her preparedness in using this in practice.

My research questions is: How does the education received by BSW students at two Texas universities, effect the students' perceptions with respect to the use of religion and spirituality in social work practice? Specifically; how important is it for them to use or address religion and spirituality in social work practice?; How prepared or competent are they in addressing / using religion and spirituality in social work practice; and how comfortable are they in addressing / using various forms of religion and spirituality in social work practice?

**CONSENT:** In order to participate, you will need to sign a consent form. The consent form states (read the consent form)

CONCLUSION: Please remember that participation is voluntary. All answers will remain confidential. Only group results will be reported in written or verbal form. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Thank you.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The author earned her Bachelor of Social Work from The University of Texas at Arlington. Her primary research interests are in the areas of social work education, religion and spirituality, and mental health program evaluation. She is currently the director of the Millwood Clinic and Milestones Adult Rehabilitation Program at Millwood Hospital in Arlington, Texas. Her future plans include completing a Ph.D. in Social Work, conducting further research and pursuing a career in academia.