THE SPIRITUAL COMPETENCE SCALE: VALIDATING A POPULATION-SPECIFIC MEASURE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE WITH A FAITH-BASED SAMPLE

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Abstract: *Cultural competence, including more focused forms of cultural competence such as spiritual competence, has been a topic of increasing professional attention over the past decade. Yet, while cultural competence is increasingly viewed as essential to effective service provision, few measures of cultural competence exist. To address the gap, the present study validates a new population-specific measure of spiritual competence with a random national sample of faith-based graduate students. Analysis suggests the eight item scale is a valid and reliable measure of spiritual competence. The instrument is designed to assess levels of competence in educational programs, but with modification it can be used in agency settings, or for individual self-assessment.*

Key words: *Cultural competence; Spirituality; Religion; Cultural sensitivity; Spiritual competence*

Due to changes in immigration policies in the mid-1960s, the United States has become an increasingly diverse society (Melton, 1999). The numbers of Muslims (Smith, 1999), Hindus (Williams, 1997) and many other cultural groups has grown significantly over the past forty years. U.S Census Bureau (2000) projections suggest the trend toward increasing diversity will continue for at least the next few decades.

The changing national mosaic has helped to focus professional attention on the issue of cultural competence (Dunn, 2002). Cultural competence has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Among the more influential, is the conceptual framework of Sue, Arredondo and McDavis (1992). These observers view cultural competence as an ongoing process characterized by the following three traits: 1) awareness of one's own assumptions, beliefs, biases, limitations, etc. 2) empathetic comprehension of a culturally different worldview, and 3) development of skill sets and intervention strategies that are relevant and sensitive to a culturally different worldview.

Regardless of how cultural competence is defined, its importance is increasingly recognized. Effective service provision is understood to be predicated upon the development of cultural competence (Dunn, 2002). In order to provide services to a growing collage of cultural groups, social workers must develop an attitude of acceptance, respect, and sensitivity toward worldviews that differ from their own. Without developing cultural competence, Dunn (2002) suggests that social workers will be unable to fulfill their ethical mission of providing services to all people groups.

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The growing professional interest in cultural competence is reflected in a number of social work forums, including the academic literature, the code of ethics, educational standards, and professional organizations. In their 1995 review of the social work literature, Schlesinger and Devore (1995) noted that content devoted to cultural competence had increased substantially over the course of the previous decade. They noted the emergence of a distinct literature devoted to adapting prevailing practice modalities for work with diverse groups.

In 1996, Congress (2002) notes that the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (1999) was revised to incorporate standards that specifically address cultural competency. Standard 1.05 in the current code of ethics, for example, stipulates that social workers must deliver culturally competent services that are sensitive to differences among people and cultural groups.

These changes are reflected in the most recent version of the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) (2001) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (Congress, 2002). Social work programs are required to provide content that educates students about diversity within and between groups. Curriculum content should be designed so that students are equipped to deliver services that meet the needs of various groups and are culturally relevant to the groups involved (EPAS, 2001: IV, B).

In 2001, NASW issued the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001). NASW referred to this document as "the first attempt by the profession to delineate standards for cultural competent social work practice" (NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice, 2001, p. 2).

Concurrent with increased interest in cultural competence, there has been a resurgence of professional interest in spirituality and religion (Canda & Furman, 1999). Although various conceptualizations of spirituality and religion exist, they are generally defined as overlapping entities, with spirituality commonly understood as the broader construct (Canda & Furman, 1999; Carroll, 1998). For many people, spirituality provides an interpretive framework for understanding reality that informs them of who they are and how they should live (Maslow, 1968). As is increasingly recognized, a particular spiritual orientation can foster a distinctive culture (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Van Hook, Hugen & Aguilar, 2001). As the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) state, spirituality and religion often form a nexus from which culture flows.

As is the case with cultural competence, the developing interest in spirituality and religion is manifested in a number of venues. Canda and Furman (1999) observed that the previous ten years had seen a rapid increase in publications addressing spirituality and religion. The new ethical standards that address cultural competence explicitly mention religion (NASW Code of Ethics, 1999, p. 1.05c), as do the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001). In other words, spiritual competence is recognized as a more focused form of cultural competence.

The number of social work programs offering courses in spirituality and religion has roughly tripled from 1995 to 2001 (Miller, 2001) and the extant data indicate that the vast majority of social work students are interested in taking a course on spirituality

and religion (Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999). The CSWE's (2001) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) address spirituality and religion and, CSWE recently added a specialized symposium on spirituality at their Annual Program Meeting (APM).

In keeping with the profound effect spirituality often has in shaping clients' worldviews, social workers and other helping professionals are increasingly being asked to conduct spiritual assessments (Plante & Sharma, 2001). For instance, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO, 2001), a major healthcare accrediting agency in the United States, now recommends that social workers conduct a spiritual assessment to ascertain how the client's spiritual and religious beliefs intersect the treatment process.

As might be expected given the recent interest in the topic, the measurement of cultural competence is still in its infancy (Boyle & Springer, 2001). Although widespread acknowledgment exists regarding the importance of cultural competence, only a few measures have been developed. Reviews of the more prominent instruments indicate the existence of some problems (Boyle & Springer, 2001; Kocarek, Talbot, Batka & Anderson, 2001; Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett & Sparks, 1994). In keeping with the work of Sue and associates (1992), cultural competency is commonly operationalized as an interrelated set of beliefs, knowledge and skills (Manoleas, 1994; Weaver, 1999). Clear three-factor structures have failed to emerge, however, leading observers to wonder about the exact nature of the construct being measured in some of the existing instruments.

Reliability has also been a problem in at least some instances. For example, the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-and-Skills Survey (MAKASS) has been used with social work students (Ben-David & Amit, 1999). With a sample of 334 Israeli social work students, a Cronbach's alpha of just .55 was obtained with the awareness subscale. This is similar to coefficient obtained by other researchers using non-social work samples (Kocarek, et al., 2001).

Based upon their review of cultural competence measures, Boyle and Springer (2001) made two recommendations: 1) that researchers should develop and validate new measures for use in social work settings (e.g., social work education), and 2) that the new instruments should be population specific. In other words, rather than develop global measures that attempt to assess cultural competence among all cultural groups, researchers should develop focused measures that tap cultural competence with a single group.

In light of the growing interest in cultural competence, the interest in spiritually based expressions of cultural diversity, and the need for new measures of cultural competence, the spiritual competence scale was created (see Table 1). This eight item instrument is designed to tap values essential for culturally competent practice with clients for whom spirituality and religion are salient life-dimensions. More specifically, the scale taps such values as openness, acceptance, respect, and sensitivity in tandem with a desire to understand, and assign a value to different spiritually-based cultures, perspectives, worldviews, beliefs, and narratives.

Scores are obtained by adding a constant and averaging the items together so that values range from 1 to 11 with higher numbers indicating higher levels of spiritual competence. Given the overlapping nature of spirituality and religion, both terms are used to provide a broader, more inclusive measure. Scale wording can be changed to assess levels of spiritual competence in specific classes, social work agencies, and other settings of interest to social workers (e.g., change wording "your social work program" to "your class on human diversity" or "your social work agency"). The scale can also be adapted for self-assessment, although focusing the items at the program level helps minimize social desirability bias while yielding information that may be just as useful in assessing levels of spiritual competence.

Table 1. Spiritual competence scale

1.	**To what degree does your social work program foster respect for religious and spiritual cultures?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Fosters extreme Disrespect										Fosters extreme Respect
2.	**How acceptable is it in your social work program to share religious or spiritual views?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Completely Unacceptable										Completely Acceptable
3.	**To what extent does your social work program foster sensitivity toward religious and spiritual beliefs?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Fosters extreme Insensitivity										Fosters extreme Sensitivity
4.	**To what extent does the atmosphere in your social work program foster respect for religious and spiritual perspectives?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Fosters extreme Disrespect										Fosters extreme Respect
5.	**To what degree are religious or spiritual believers free to be themselves in your social work program?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Must always censor or guard themselves										Totally free to be themselves
6.	**If religious or spiritual perspectives are shared in your social work program, to what extent are they valued?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Totally Disrespected										Totally Valued
7.	**To what extent does your social work program foster an empathetic understanding of religious and spiritual worldviews?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Fosters complete Misunderstanding										Fosters complete Understanding
8.	**When it comes to learning about the religious and spiritual worldviews that clients commonly affirm, how much openness does your program demonstrate?**										
	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
	Completely Closed										Completely Open

The spiritual competence scale was developed and validated in two stages. A stratified random sample of NASW affiliated graduate students was used for both development (N = 136) and validation (N = 303) of the instrument. Good psychometric properties were reported in the development and validation study (Hodge, in press).. All eight items loaded strongly on a single factor and the reliability coefficient was high (Cronbach's alpha of .921).

Proper validation, however, requires a series of studies, preferably using different samples (Jeffreys & Smodlaka, 1998). Although the NASW is the largest professional organization in social work, most graduate students do not belong to this organization (T. Lennon, Director of Information Services, CSWE, personal email communication, February 4, 2004). Further, given the nature of the construct of spiritual competence, it may be particularly important to validate the instrument with a sample of students who are more self-consciously engaged in spiritual issues.

Consequently, the purpose of this article is to validate the spiritual competence scale using a national sample of social work students who are unaffiliated with the NASW. If reliability and validity can be established with different populations, particularly those that are faith-based, then confidence that the instrument actually measures what it purports to measure is enhanced. Directly below, the method used to validate the scale is discussed.

METHOD

The sampling frame for this study consisted of graduate students affiliated with the National Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW). NACSW affiliated students were chosen for a number of reasons. The NACSW is the largest faith-based professional organization in the United States, an important consideration when validating a measure of spiritual competence. It has a national membership suggesting the results will not be unduly biased by regional characteristics. Its student membership is also likely to differ substantially from the NASW student membership, at least in terms of religious and spiritual demographics.

A telephone survey methodology was used in conjunction with systematic sampling design. Relative to mail surveys, telephone surveys tend to foster more accurate responses and a higher response rate (Babbie, 1998). The response rate was a particular concern given the low rate of return some researchers have obtained using mailed surveys in tandem with professional memberships (Canda & Furman, 1999; Gartner, Harmatz, Hohmann, Larson & Gartner, 1990; Ressler & Hodge, 1999).

To ensure that as many students as possible had completed at least one semester of social work education, calls were placed in the spring semester. The survey was conducted earlier in the semester to minimize the inconvenience to students. To maximize the response rate, up to eight calls were placed to reach potential respondents.

Eight-eight graduate students in nonfaith-based social work programs agreed to complete the survey, 7 individuals declined to participate and, in a further 30 instances, no one was reached at the listed number. Thus, it is possible to calculate at

least two response rates. If it is assumed the instances where no was reached represent potential respondents, then the response rate is 70% (88/125). Conversely, if it is assumed that the instances where no was reached do not represent potential respondents (e.g., student moved, wrong number, etc.), then the response rate is 93% (88/95). Both rates, however, are well above the 50% rate widely accepted as adequate for analysis and generalization to the wider population (Babbie, 1998).

Given the expected communalities and factor loadings, the sample size of 88 was judged to be sufficient for factor analysis. Based upon the development and validation of the spiritual competence scale with other national samples, it was possible to make projections about the psychometric properties of the scale. As MacCallum, Widament, Zhang and Hong (1999) illustrated, sample sizes of well below 100 are appropriate for factor analysis if the communalities are consistently high (greater than .60), especially with simple models consisting of few factors and more indicators (e.g., 7 indicators per factor as opposed to three).

Guadagnoli and Velicer's (1988) work highlights the importance of strong factor loadings in determining adequate sample size. These researchers argue that as long as a factor has four or more items that load at .60 or greater, then the factor solutions are reliable regardless of sample size. With expected high communality levels, and expected factor loading above .60, the present sample size should produce reliable solutions.

The demographics for the sample are reported in Table 2. The sample is largely Protestant with a diverse number of theologically liberal, mainline and evangelical Christians. The average respondent had spent close to five years in the social work profession and, counting the current semester as one, had had just over four semesters of social work education. This depth of experience would suggest that the respondents were well qualified to address issues of spiritual competence in their educational settings.

Analysis was conducted to explore the extent to which the NACSW sample differed from the NASW sample used in the original validation study (Hodge, in press). No significant differences emerged between the two samples in age, gender, marital status, race, number of semesters in social work education, or length of time in the social work profession.

Table 2. Sample Characteristics (N=88)

Characteristic	N	Missing	%	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Age	85	3		33.36	9.50	30.0	22	58
# of semesters of SW education	88	0		4.04	1.90	4.0	1	12
# of years of SW education	88	0		4.84	5.31	3.0	0	30
Gender	88							
Male	73			83.0				
Female	15			17.0				
Marital Status	87							
Single	37			42.5				
Married	39			44.8				
Widowed	1			1.2				
Separated	2			2.3				
Divorced	8			9.2				
Race	87							
White	68			78.2				
Black	4			4.6				
Hispanic	4			4.6				
Asian	6			6.9				
Native American	2			2.3				
Other	3			3.4				
Faith	86							
Protestant	79			91.9				
Liberal	7			9.0				
Mainline	17			21.8				
Evangelical	53			67.9				
Other	1			1.3				
Catholic	5			5.8				
Liberal	0			0.0				
Moderate	1			1.1				
Traditional	4			4.5				
Jewish	1			1.2				
Reform	0			0.0				
Conservative	0			0.0				
Orthodox	0			0.0				
Other	1			100.0				
Other type of faith	1			1.2				

Significant differences did emerge, however, on a number of religious and spiritual demographics. The NACSW sample was significantly more Protestant than the NASW sample (92% vs. 35%; $\chi^2 = 86.36$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Among those who self-identified as Protestants, the NACSW sample was comprised of significantly more evangelical Christians (60% vs. 8%, $\chi^2 = 39.86$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Among self-identified Christians of all strips, the NACSW sample was significantly more likely to report orthodox beliefs (96% vs. 50%; $\chi^2 = 54.50$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Based upon Hoge and Carroll (1978) measure of intrinsic motivation, the NACSW reported significantly higher levels of spiritual motivation ($M = 6.61$ vs. $M = 4.68$; $t = -18.38$, $df = 389$, $p < .001$).

Given the importance of validating new measures with different populations, the difference in spiritual demographics between the NACSW and NASW samples highlights the utility of the NACSW sample to validate a measure of spiritual competence. Particularly important is the fact that the majority of NACSW members are evangelical Christians. This population is the largest spiritual minority in the United States (Green, Guth, Smidt & Kellstedt, 1996), is disproportionately drawn from disenfranchised groups (Davis & Robinson, 1997), has developed its own subculture (Talbot, 2000), and is significantly underrepresented in social work circles (Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson, 1994). Given that social workers will likely encounter significant numbers of these Christians in their practice, it is critical to validate a measure of spiritual competence with these believers.

In addition to demographic items and the eight item spiritual competence scale, a number of questions were included to test concurrent and divergent validity. Cultural competence is widely viewed as existing along a continuum (Sue, et al., 1992; Manoleas, 1994). For instance, Maneleas (1994) posits a continuum ranging from culturally destructive to culturally proficient practice. Particular beliefs and attitudes are thought to be associated with each end of the continuum.

To test concurrent validity, a number of items from the code of ethics were used. As implied above, the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) lists four standards that explicitly mention religion (1.05c, 2.01b, 4.02 and 6.04d) and at least two standards that implicitly mention religion (1.05a, 1.05b) as a protected category toward which social workers should exhibit sensitivity. Compliance with the profession's ethical standards are widely held to represent attitudes and practices that fall on the culturally proficient end of a cultural competence continuum.

Individuals were read each ethical standard and asked to indicate their response on an 11-point response key, which ranged from complete violation of the ethical standard (-5) to complete compliance with the ethical standard (+5). A constant was added to each item so that the values ranged from 1 to 11 and the items were averaged to form a scale with higher values indicating higher levels of ethical compliance. The alpha coefficient for this six-item measure was .921. As implied above, it was hypothesized that perceptions of spiritual competence would be positively correlated with perceptions of compliance with the code of ethics' standards that address religion.

To test divergent validity, a measure of religious discrimination was included. Discrimination falls at the culturally destructive end of Maneleas' (1994) continuum and

is widely seen as representing a construct incompatible with cultural competence. Individuals were asked, "To what extent, if any, is religious discrimination a problem in your social work program." Individuals indicated their response on an 11-point response key ranging from "not a problem at all" to "religious discrimination permeates every aspect of the program." It was hypothesized that perceptions of religious discrimination would be negatively associated with perceptions of spiritual competence.

Four cases had missing data. Three cases had one missing value while one case had two missing values. The EM algorithm procedure was used to impute missing data. All variables were transformed so that the skewness and kurtosis values fell within a range of – 1 to + 1, values that approximate a normal distribution (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). After imputation and transformation process, analysis was conducted, the results of which are reported next.

RESULTS

Analysis proceeded by computing a correlation matrix and examining the interitem correlations. As can be seen in Table 3, the interitem correlations ranged from .542 to .790. These values all fall into a range that implies the items are all unique, as evidenced by the lack of correlations above .80, and appropriate for measuring the construct of spiritual competence, as evidenced by the fact that all the items exhibit strong correlations above .50 (Kline, 1998).

However, to confirm the suitability of these items for factor analysis, tests were conducted to explore that a) a substantive relationship exists among the variables and b) the variables were not so highly correlated as to be redundant). To ensure that a relationship existed, Barlett's test of Sphericity was computed. Consistent with the high interitem correlations, the test was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 553.16$, $df = 28$, $p > .0001$), indicating a substantive relationship exists among the variables in the matrix. To test for multicollinearity, the value of the determinant for the correlation matrix was computed. A value of .0013 was obtained. Since this value exceeds .00001, multicollinearity was judged not to be a problem (Field, 2000).

Given the sample size of 88, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic was computed to test the sampling adequacy. Values range between 0 and 1. Values closer to 0 indicate that the patterns of correlations are diffused while values closer to 1 indicate that the patterns of correlations are compact and therefore likely suitable for factor analysis. Values below .5 indicate that either more data should be gathered or different variables should be used while values above .90 are excellent (Kaiser, 1974). In this case, the KMO statistic was .933, which suggests that the factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors (Field, 2000).

Table 3. Inter-item correlations for spiritual competence scale

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1							
2	.651						
3	.678	.643					
4	.691	.704	.768				
5	.623	.703	.595	.759			
6	.709	.718	.630	.790	.765		
7	.721	.665	.629	.736	.736	.774	
8	.542	.551	.558	.617	.592	.590	.625

An anti-image correlation matrix was also computed and the KMO statistic was examined for each variable. All values exceeded .90, indicating that none should be excluded from the analysis (Kaiser, 1974). In short, initial analysis of the data confirmed its suitability for factor analysis.

A Principle Components factor analysis was conducted using Varimax rotation followed by Promax rotation (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987). Both methods of rotation produced virtually identical results. The communalities ranged from .553 to .813, although six items had values in the .600/.700 range. This set of communalities suggests that the factor solution is reliable with an N of 88 (MacCallum, et al., 1999).

To determine the number of factors, Kaiser's criterion was used in addition to an examination of the scree plot. Both methods indicated the existence of a single factor. An eigenvalue of 5.71 was obtained which accounted for 71.34 percent of the variance.

The factor loadings are reported in Table 4. As can be seen all items load strongly, with values ranging from .743 to .902. Thus, Guadagnoli and Velicer's (1988) criteria of at least four items loading in excess of .60 or greater was satisfied, indicating that the present sample size produces stable factor solutions. Although the results with Varimax are reported, the loadings with Promax rotation were identical.

Table 4. Principle Components factor loadings with Varimax rotation

Item	Loading
1	.832
2	.835
3	.813
4	.902
5	.858
6	.889
7	.874
8	.743

Reliability analysis indicated the eight item scale was highly reliable. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .943 was obtained, marginally better than the .923 obtained with

the NASW sample.

The measures of convergent and divergent validity performed as hypothesized. As posited, the spiritual competence scale was positively correlated with the ethics scale ($r = .513$, $p < .001$). Likewise, the spiritual competence scale was inversely associated with perceptions of religious discrimination. As hypothesized, the spiritual competence scale was negatively correlated with perceptions of religious discrimination ($r = -.682$, $p < .001$.) These two findings further enhance the validity of the scale by revealing that the construct of spiritual competence is related to other constructs in a manner that is consistent with theory.

DISCUSSION

This study validated an eight item measure of spiritual competence with a nationally representative sample of NACSW affiliated graduate students. The results suggest that the newly developed measure is a valid and reliable measure of spiritual competence. All items loaded strongly on a single factor, evidence of convergent and divergent validity was provided, and a Cronbach's alpha of .943 was obtained with the eight items.

The importance of developing and validating instruments that assess various forms of cultural competence is implied by the CSWE and NASW standards. The CSWE's (2001) EPAS indicate that social work programs should develop plans to evaluate program outcomes (Standard 8: 8.0, 8.1). Similarly, standard 10 of the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) state that the profession must develop measures to assess cultural competence.

The measurement of spiritual competence is an issue of critical concern to many clients. Social workers regularly interact with clients of faith. Further, in many instances, social workers are call upon to directly address spiritual issues. As mentioned in the introduction, JCAHO (2001), which accredits most hospitals as well as many other healthcare organizations in the United States, now recommends conducting spiritual assessments. If social workers are not well versed in spiritual competence, then harm may be perpetrated upon clients (Reddy & Hanna, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 2000).

The extant data on client perceptions suggest that the measurement of spiritual competence in educational and agency settings should be a priority. Among a Midwestern sample (N = 76) of evangelical Christians, 83% felt that social workers did not understand their religious beliefs and values, with the percentage rising to 94% for respondents that had received counseling (Furman, Perry & Goldale, 1996). Likewise, among a sample of evangelical church attendees (N = 145) in Wisconsin, Oklahoma and Nevada, only 26% agreed that "if I had to go to a social worker, I believe the person could be trusted" (Pellebon, 2000).

Similar concerns have appeared among observers of other faith traditions. Commentators have suggested that a number of Muslims (Altareb, 1996; Daneshpour, 1998; Kelly, Aridi & Bakhtiar, 1996), Hindus (Fenton, 1988; Goodwin & Cramer, 1998) and many other people of faith (Richards & Bergin, 2000) may be troubled about the level of sensitivity mental health professionals exhibit toward their cultural

norms and values.

These concerns among people of faith highlight the need to ensure that social work educational and agency settings are characterized by spiritual competence. Spiritual competence should not be assumed to exist in social work settings but rather, as implied by the CSWE and NASW standards, it should be measured and tracked over time. The spiritual competence scale provides a means for assessing fundamental values that are essential to culturally competent service provision.

In addition to discussing the strengths, it is also pertinent to note the limitations. It is important to emphasize that the scale measures perceptions of competence rather than actual competence. There is no guarantee that perceived levels of competence at the program, agency, or self-assessment level necessarily translates into actual competence in practice situations. Caution is further warranted by the fact that the scale only taps the values dimension of Sue and associates tri-dimensional conceptualization of cultural competence. Consequently, while a high score on the scale may indicated the presence of the values necessary for spiritually competent practice, it does not necessarily indicate the presence of the skills or knowledge necessary for spiritually competent practice.

Another set of limitations related to generalizability also exists. Approximately 12% of the NACSW students did not have a listed phone number. Although there is no reason to assume that individuals without phones differ in their perceptions from those with phones, it is not possible to assert that the sample is representative of the NACSW graduate student membership. Similarly, the respondents cannot be considered representative of other faith groups. Indeed, while the spiritual competence scale is designed as an ecumenical measure, the reliability and validity of the scale would be further enhanced by studies with other samples of social work students drawn from other groups, such as Muslims, Hindus and other people of faith.

In addition to further work in educational settings, subsequent research might explore the level of spiritual competence in social work agencies. As mentioned in the introduction, the wording can easily be adapted to address perceptions in agency settings. Longitudinal research might explore the relationship between perceptions of spiritual competence and client outcomes.

As society becomes increasingly diverse, social work must ensure that it provides services that are sensitive, relevant and respectful of clients' cultures. Exploring the perceptions of students, social workers, and clients provides valuable insight into the extent to which the profession is conforming to its stated ethical and educational standards. As Boyle and Springer (2001) indicated, researchers must develop population specific measures for use in social work settings. The spiritual competence scale represents the first attempt develop such a measure.

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