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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

**CURRICULUM MODULE ON INTEGRATING FAITH AND
SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

Personal Spiritual Assessment

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Primary course: Practice with Individuals, Small Groups and Families

Secondary course(s): Introduction to Practice

I. Core Competency Addressed:

EPAS Standard 2.1.2—Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

II. Specific Practice Behaviors Related to the Module:

1. Recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice.
2. Apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

III. Materials Needed and/or Assigned Readings:

Barker, S. L. (2007) The integration of spirituality and religion content in social work education: Where we've been, where we're going. *Social Work & Christianity*. 34 (2) 146-166.

This article gives a historical perspective on incorporating content on spirituality and religion into the social work curriculum. It defines terms, looks at CSWE policies, and the types of theories that must be considered when incorporating spiritual content into the social work classroom.

Council on Social Work Education (2008) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards www.cswe.org.

The CSWE accreditation standards include content on spirituality and instructors could bring a copy for students to read and then use for class discussions. A discussion regarding the EPAS standard could help students understand the context of social work educational goals and values. The discussion could clarify for students the need for including spirituality as a matter of diversity so that they will want to incorporate it into their education and practice.

Dolgoff, R., Lowenberg, F., M., & Harrington, D. (2008). *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice*. Belmont, CA: Cengage/Wadsworth.

The book discusses ethical decision making in social work practice. The highlight of the book is decision making models or screens that can help practitioners see the hierarchy of each ethical decision and how to prioritize between different levels of decisions.

Sherwood, D.A., and (2007) Moral, believing social workers: Philosophical and theological foundations of moral obligation in social work ethics. *Social Work & Christianity*. 34 (2) 121-145.

The article discusses the need for social workers to understand the foundations and underpinnings of social work ethics.

Spano, R., and Koenig, T. (2008). What is sacred when personal and professional values collide? *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* 4 (3).

The article proposes a six-stage model for addressing ethical decision making in the context of one's personal beliefs and predominant societal views.

Reamer, F.G., (2006). *Social Work Values and Ethics*: New York: Columbia University Press.

The textbook explores the early beginnings and thoughts that established the current values and ethics of the social work profession. It discusses ethical dilemmas in decision making and social work practice.

National Association of Social Workers NASW Code of Ethics (2008). <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp> retrieved 9/14/09.

IV. Description of the Module:

A. Discussion: The discussion would be based on the following format:

1. Have each student draw a personal time line of their spiritual activity throughout life
2. Draw a line and divide it into the decades you have lived
3. Look at each decade of your life and write down any spiritual events that took place
4. Discuss what impact, if any, those spiritual events have on you today
5. Are there any events that stand out that would impact your ability to deal with spiritual matters?

B. Class activities and projects

Review the six core values described in the NASW Code of Ethics

1. What does the code say?
2. Is the value aligned with my personal beliefs?
3. Can I support this value?
4. Is there a potential conflict?
5. What is the conflict?
6. How can I resolve it?
7. What does it look like when I follow this value in professional practice?

C. Primary assignment

Write a paper that is based on the integration of personal spiritual beliefs with the NASW Code of Ethics. Write about each of the six core values and how your beliefs align and differ from the NASW core values. Then review each section of the NASW Code of Ethics to discuss whether there are any conflicts between your personal beliefs and those of the social work profession. The sections of the code are broken down in the following way:

- how to comport oneself on a personal level,
- with colleagues,
- with clients,
- as an employee of an agency,
- as a member of the social work profession,
- as a global citizen.

As part of the assignment, review each level of practice listed above and discuss how each one can be integrated to your personal beliefs, identify any areas of conflict. Please address each issue with references from both professional and faith based literature.

V. Additional Class Activities and Assignments:

Alternative assignments:

1. Students will engage in interactions with a panel made up of members with differing beliefs regarding spirituality and religion. Each student will be responsible for contributing at least two questions or personal examples for discussion. Following the assignment students will write a four to six page response paper discussing what they learned about different spiritual beliefs and practices and how they can integrate the six core professional values into their own personal spiritual beliefs.
2. Review the steps in the Dolgoff, Lowenberg, and Harrington, or the Spano and Koenig model for ethical decision making. Discuss how the steps can be applied to case examples provided by the instructor.
 - Case example 1 A client asks the social worker to pray with them
 - Case example 2 A client asks the social worker to set up an abortion for them

- Case example 3 A client asks a social worker to help them find ways to stay in a destructive relationship because divorce is not considered an option in the clients' faith
- Case example 4 A client does not want to seek medical treatment because it is against their faith
- Case example 5 A client wants "everything done" for her relative because she believes God will work a miracle. Medical personnel have determined the patient is brain dead.

Notes for Alternate Assignments:

- A. Assignment will be evaluated on the level of thought exhibited as the student applies the decision making models (personal understanding of own spiritual beliefs, understanding of impact of those beliefs on social work values and practice).
- B. The module could be used in any practice course to review ethical decision making.
- C. The module could be used in a different context where social work ethics are being taught at professional conferences.
- D. The module would be the same in either a public, private or Christian school except perhaps to change the case examples to be more explicit for the particular setting.