



**North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)**

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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

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

### **Assessing Spiritual Competence**

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**Primary course:** Practice with Individuals; Small Groups and Families (MSW)

**Secondary course:** Micro Practice (BSW)

## **I. Core Competency Addressed:**

**Educational Policy 2.1.7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.**

## **II. Specific Practice Behaviors Related to the Module:**

Social workers apply theories and knowledge from the liberal arts to understand biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development. Social workers will

- utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation; and
- critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.

## **III. Materials Needed and/or Assigned Readings:**

Birnbaum, L., & Birnbaum, A. (2008). Mindful social work: From theory to practice. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 27(1), 87-104.

Social work continues to move toward holistic theories that acknowledge the existence of a metaphysical reality. Mindfulness has emerged as a concept in practice to support self-observation or knowing that can gradually lead to acceptance, letting go, trust, non-judgment, and self-awareness. Mindfulness also may effect change in the social work practitioner and beyond.

Sherman, E., & Siporin M. (2008). Contemplative theory and practice for social work. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 27(3), 259-274.

Sherman and Siporin suggest that the social work profession consider contemplative theory and the psycho-spiritual development of clients and social workers. The use of the concept of mindfulness, within the contemplative theory, can be considered as a feasible process in social work practice relevant to individual, families, and group modalities as well as support the spiritual competence of social work practitioners.

## **IV. Description of the Module:**

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss and critique in class. Class discussion will be facilitated through questions that encourage students to thoughtfully consider the importance of spiritual competence in their work with clients.

Discussion will be encouraged using the following questions:

- What major faith traditions or spiritual practices are students aware of?
- How does culture interact with spirituality?
- What is the students' understanding of the concept of mindfulness?
- How might spirituality & mindfulness contribute to the change process?
- What current practice issues are affected by spirituality?

## **V. Additional Class Activities and Assignments:**

Class Activity I

1. Students will complete a modified version of the Spiritual Competence Scale (Hodge, 2007) as an exercise.
2. Class discussion will focus on students' assessing their level of spiritual competence.

### Assignment I

1. Students will write a reflection paper to discuss their spiritual values/beliefs and how they will interact with clients with differing beliefs. Students are expected to discuss how they will...
  - a. Value and respect diversity.
  - b. Support spiritual beliefs that differ from one's own.
  - c. Uphold client self-determination.
  - d. How they may represent clinical, social, or ethical perspectives that differ from client's respectfully and while maintaining personal and professional integrity.

### Class Activity II

1. Students will discuss their understanding contemplative theory and the concept of mindfulness.
2. Students will give their perspective on how mindfulness can empower clients in acceptance, letting go, trust, non-judgment, and self-awareness.
3. Students will discuss how mindfulness may effect change in them and in their practice of social work.

### Assignment II

1. Students will write a spiritual history and assess an individual client's relationship to a faith tradition or spiritual practice that include:
  - Spiritual strengths and/or barriers to change.
  - Spiritual resources appropriate to the planned change.
  - Identify points of divergence and convergence in the helping relationship.
  - Include a spiritually-informed intervention appropriate to the client and situation.

### Class Activity III

1. Students will form groups of 2-4 students and discuss one major faith tradition or spiritual practice that differs from their own.
2. Students will discuss how they might struggle with the different faith traditions they may encounter with their clients.