

# Multicultural Competence and Social Justice Training in Counseling Psychology and Counselor Education:

## A Review and Analysis of a Sample of Multicultural Course Syllabi

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This article presents the findings of a descriptive content analysis of 54 multicultural and diversity-related course syllabi drawn from counseling and counseling psychology programs accredited by the American Psychological Association and the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs. Results suggest that most courses adhere to the knowledge, awareness, and skills paradigm of multicultural competence. However, actual course content varies considerably. Whereas the findings identify social justice content as a growing presence in multicultural courses, there is a need to more clearly outline the fundamental points of distinction and overlap between multicultural competence and social justice advocacy in counselor and counseling psychology training.

Within the past three decades, the fields of counseling and counseling psychology have witnessed a significant shift toward the appreciation

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**Authors' Note:** We would like to convey our gratitude to all the instructors who provided syllabi, as well as to the anonymous reviewers and editor for their helpful feedback during the review process. Address correspondence to Alex L. Pieterse, PhD, George Mason University, Graduate School of Education, 4400 University Drive, MS 4B3, Fairfax, VA 22030; e-mail: [apieters@gmu.edu](mailto:apieters@gmu.edu).

of racial and cultural variables as essential considerations in research, training, and practice. The journey of multicultural counseling competencies aptly illustrates this development. The proposition that multicultural work requires a distinct set of competencies was first proposed in the landmark 1982 publication by Sue et al. and further elaborated in 1992 when Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis described a distinct set of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that they termed *cross-cultural counseling competence*. In this iteration, cross-cultural competence was evidenced by the counselor's attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills in three domains—namely, counselor awareness of personal values and biases, understanding the worldview of the “culturally different,” and development of cultural intervention strategies and techniques. Arredondo et al. (1996) operationalized each competency domain, and the multicultural guidelines published by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2003 reflected and were strongly influenced by these cross-cultural competencies. This coming of age of the multicultural counseling competencies may largely justify Pedersen's claim (1991) that multiculturalism represents the fourth force in counseling and psychology, but some now argue for the need to focus attention on a possible fifth force, namely, social justice (Ratts, D'Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004).

There is increasing evidence, in both the theoretical literature and the applied literature, of an emphasis on social justice as it affects training and practice in counseling and counseling psychology (Aldarondo, 2007). Perhaps unintentionally, the terms *multicultural* and *social justice* are used interchangeably when referring to these important aspects of counselors' preparation and functioning (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). Thus, we have increasing references to the multicultural–social justice movement in counseling (D'Andrea, 2006) and an attempt to present social justice advocacy within the rubric of multicultural counseling competence (Arredondo & Rosen, 2007). The extent to which multicultural competence and social justice advocacy are considered critical components of counselor and counseling psychology training should therefore be evident in the classroom instruction provided to students in these disciplines.

To shed light on current pedagogical approaches toward multicultural competence and social justice advocacy, this article presents a review and analysis of course syllabi drawn from a cross-regional sample of required multicultural and diversity-related courses in counselor and counseling psychology training programs. First, however, we define and contrast multicultural competence and social justice advocacy. We then describe current standards of accreditation that inform multicultural and social justice training, and we conclude this section by briefly reviewing the present status of multicultural and social justice training within the counseling professions.

## Definitions of Multicultural Counseling and Social Justice Advocacy

Whereas the tripartite model of multicultural competence is now widely accepted, the history of the multicultural movement reveals various definitions of multiculturalism and varied approaches to training for multicultural competence. Yet the definition provided by Pedersen (1991) continues to reflect the current understanding of multicultural. For Pedersen, *multiculturalism* referred to “a wide range of multiple groups without grading, comparing, or ranking them as better or worse than one another and without denying the very distinct and complementary or even contradictory perspectives that each group brings with it” (p. 4). Abreu, Chung, and Atkinson (2000) note, however, that the most common representation of multicultural counseling involves counseling relationships that cross race and ethnicity; subsequently, the multicultural counseling competencies are characterized by the development of knowledge, awareness, and skills as they relate to the ability to work in racially and ethnically diverse society (Arredondo et al., 1996).

With regard to social justice, a precise definition appears to be somewhat elusive in that when defining social justice, scholars and activists focus on the various elements that they view as being most critical. To illustrate, Love (2000) describes social justice from the perspective of developing a liberatory consciousness—that is, an intentional awareness of systemic forces of oppression. Watts (2004) notes that social justice inherently includes a political component and speaks to an active engagement in redressing social inequities, and Bell (1997) discusses social justice in terms of its goals—namely, being a society marked by full and equal participation by all groups. It is clear, however, that the central focus of social justice is that of responding to systemic inequalities that serve to marginalize and disenfranchise various groups of people (Vera & Speight, 2003). It is common then for social justice activists to focus on forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism (L. Smith, Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, & Sheehy, 2003). Perhaps the most precise definition of social justice as it relates to the counseling professions has been offered by Goodman et al. (2004), who conceptualize the work of social justice as being “the scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self determination” (p. 795).

Thus, whereas there is considerable overlap between multiculturalism and social justice, it appears from the above definitions that social justice might be more narrowly defined than multiculturalism. Although multiculturalism

focuses on diversity from the perspective of inclusion and acceptance, social justice adopts a more focused emphasis on oppression and marginalization that occur within the context of societal diversity (Vera & Speight, 2003).

## **Standards of Accreditation Associated with Multiculturalism and Social Justice**

The growing impact of the multicultural counseling competencies is shown by the presence of various multicultural and diversity-related criteria in accreditation requirements from such bodies as the Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) and the APA. Although a focus on diversity is required, the parameters of this focus remain quite broad. To illustrate, the APA's 2008 *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation* refers to multicultural training under Domain B—Program Philosophy, Objectives, and Curriculum Plan. The requirement mandates that students “acquire and demonstrate substantial understanding and competence” with regard to “issues of cultural and individual diversity” (p. 11). Cultural diversity is defined as “including but not limited to age, color, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status” (p. 9). Of note, the terms *multicultural* and *social justice* are not found in the APA accreditation guidelines.

In contrast, the CACREP accreditation standards refer specifically to social justice and consistently to multiculturalism. To illustrate, the section on social and cultural diversity states that a counselor's instruction should include education on

counselors' roles in social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, cultural self-awareness, the nature of biases, prejudices, processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination, and other culturally supported behaviors that are detrimental to the growth of the human spirit, mind, or body [and] theories of multicultural counseling, theories of identity development, and multicultural competencies. (CACREP, 2001, p. 13)

Thus, in the CACREP standards, multiculturalism and social justice are viewed as fundamental elements of a program's curriculum.

Regardless of the extent to which counseling training programs adhere to accreditation requirements, a focus on cultural and individual diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice is clearly accepted as a core requirement of that training. Although the precise nature of this training is left to

individual programs to develop, such programs requesting accreditation are unequivocally expected to provide evidence of learning that includes a focus on cultural diversity (broadly defined), as well as an emphasis on the presence of societal inequities and how mental health professionals can alleviate the effects of oppression and injustice.

## Current Status of Multicultural Training

Many scholars have emphasized the need to infuse multiculturalism into all aspects of counseling training programs (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Reynolds, 1995). It appears, however, that the single-course approach is still the tool most frequently used for multicultural training. In a survey of counseling psychology programs, most reported that multicultural issues were largely the domain of specific multicultural counseling courses (Abreu et al., 2000; Ponterotto, 1997).

Ancis and Rasheed (2005) have documented some of the challenges inherent in multicultural training, including relatively broad definitions of *culture* and ethnographic variables, as well as wide differences in the extent to which contextual variables of people's lives are emphasized. The authors conclude that no single approach to multicultural training has been found more efficacious than another. They suggest that a lack of agreement in defining terms and an absence of a unifying framework impede current efforts in training for multicultural competence. Providing an outline for implementation of multicultural guidelines in an urban counseling psychology program, Fouad (2006) identifies several critical elements, including the need for an explicit institutional and program-level commitment, active recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, and an examination of course content for a culture-centered emphasis. With regard to course content, Fouad encourages a review of course readings, course topics, and course assignments as critical areas for investigation.

Within skill-based and experiential training, a variety of approaches are adopted, including self-awareness exercises, multicultural skill development, and cultural immersion experiences (Kim & Lyons, 2005). For instance, experiential and didactic training, especially in relation to race and culture, has been noted to elicit various forms of resistance among students (Carter, 2001; Helms et al., 2003), a dynamic that might also shape the type of material emphasized by instructors in multicultural counseling courses. From our review of the literature, however, there appears to be no published record of the content of course instruction as documented by the syllabi of multicultural counseling courses.

## **Current Status of Social Justice and Advocacy Training**

A more recent development in the field is the growing drive to include social justice as a critical component of training counselors and counseling psychologists (Goodman et al., 2004; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). To illustrate, the American Counseling Association recently accepted Counselors for Social Justice as a new division and endorsed development of the advocacy competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). The Society for Counseling Psychology's Fourth National Conference (held in 2001) adopted social justice as its theme. Specifically, social action groups were designed to cover a range of social justice concerns within the profession, including the nature of counselor training for social change, the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration when attempting to effect social change, and the need to revisit the APA accreditation standards to ensure the inclusion of social justice advocacy (Fouad et al., 2004). It is important to note, however, that the direct implementation of the social action group guidelines established at the Houston conference has only been met with modest success. Additionally, as noted by Goodman et al. (2004), there has been limited discussion on the nature of social justice work; thus, the extent to which social justice is more than an aspirational aspect of the identity of counseling psychologists remains unclear (Baluch, Pieterse, & Bolden, 2004).

Calls to infuse social justice principles and training into counselor education and counseling psychology programs have become progressively louder in recent years (Constantine et al., 2007). Guidelines have been developed to identify what should be taught to future counselors about social justice (Lee, 2007), and articles have been published outlining the various program-level efforts in social justice training (Goodman et al., 2004; Palmer, 2004). To illustrate, most training approaches involve student placements in community agencies that emphasize social justice interventions and goals. These service-learning experiences often include a concurrent course with social justice content. Students may meet as a class every other week to learn about social justice approaches and skills and to discuss experiences at their sites. Constantine et al. (2007) suggest that counselor training include service-learning experiences where students practice social justice interventions within a community agency or in collaboration with a community action organization. The authors also suggest that legal, public policy, and educational institutions may provide important venues for

students' experiential learning. In another example, a social justice approach is integrated into all aspects of the training program (Talleyrand, Chung, & Bemak, 2006). Specifically, social justice is included in the mission statement of this approach, and contextual frameworks of social issues are emphasized as a core focus of training. Although these descriptions of social justice training give some idea of extant approaches, no comprehensive review has been done of the instructional content on social justice training based on an evaluation of course syllabi.

## **Purpose and Goals of the Study**

In sum, the establishment of the multicultural counseling competencies and the emerging focus on social justice provide evidence that these are key aspects of counseling and counseling psychology's efforts to better address the needs of a diverse society. The present article presents a data-driven review and analysis of multicultural course syllabi drawn from APA- and CACREP-accredited counseling psychology and counselor training programs. The hope is that the information gleaned will provide a lens through which current approaches in multicultural counseling competence and social justice training can be critiqued and improved on where necessary.

Although the infusion approach to multicultural training has been described as being the most effective (Abreu et al., 2000), the single-course method remains the dominant approach. We therefore restricted our review to courses identified as required courses. We ruled out elective courses because our intent was to review syllabi associated with courses that all students in a program must take. Our rationale was to gain a clearer understanding of course content as identified in the syllabi of required multicultural and diversity-related courses. For the purposes of cataloging course content, the categories emerged from the syllabi data, thus providing the study with a descriptive element. We did, however, also engage in an analysis of the identified content, focusing on the extent to which the content was consistent with multicultural competence or social justice advocacy as driven by selected definitions of these two constructs. The decision to include a social justice perspective was in response to a trend within the counseling-related literature that tends to treat multiculturalism and social justice as representing different aspects of a singular construct—namely, the multicultural–social justice movement (Constantine et al., 2007; D'Andrea, 2006).

## METHOD

### Procedure

We initially identified counseling and counseling psychology graduate programs in the United States from the listings of accredited programs found on the APA and CACREP Web sites. A review of these listing established a total number of 278 programs. We decided to target 200 schools as an initial study group, believing that it would be a sufficient number given expectations of attrition owing to difficulties obtaining specific information and a potentially low response rate.

Each academic program's Web site (if it had one) was reviewed to determine whether a course related to multiculturalism and/or social justice was offered and, if so, whether it was a required course or an elective. Each program's most recent schedule of classes was reviewed to compile a list of course instructors and their contact information. After these steps were conducted, the list of programs was narrowed to 169 because of difficulties obtaining all of the above information online. Between August 2006 and February 2007, an e-mail requesting the course syllabus was sent to each instructor of an identified course. Of the 169 instructors contacted, 62 sent syllabi, a response rate of 37%. A review of the syllabi revealed that 8 syllabi were associated with elective courses, thus not fulfilling our required-course criterion; those 8 were excluded from our analysis. The final tally of included syllabi was 54, of which 29 (52%) were from doctoral programs and 25 (46%) from master-level programs. Syllabi were obtained from all regions of the United States, including 27 from the South (50%), 13 from the Midwest (24%), 8 from the West (14%), and 6 from the Northeast (12%). Although the sample is admittedly small, reflecting 20% of combined APA- and CACREP-accredited programs, it is consistent with similar studies undertaken in other disciplines (see Stapleton & Leite, 2005). Furthermore, the regional representation is consistent with the manner in which regions are represented in such programs. To illustrate, the South accounts for 43% of all CACREP-accredited counseling programs, and in our sample 50% were drawn from programs in the Southern region of the United States.

### Development of Categories and Coding Procedures

After a review of the syllabi, the first author identified four content categories: course goals and objectives, required texts and reading lists, class schedule and content, and methods of grade assessment.

To code the syllabi for the required-texts category, two graduate students created a list of all texts appearing in the syllabi. They then tallied their frequency as required texts in the courses. Most syllabi included additional course readings (e.g., course readers and/or articles handed out in class). However, because of the volume of these readings and the fact that some syllabi did not list the readings, we chose to document only the required texts identified in the syllabi.

Coding for the course goals and objectives was derived from extant definitions of *multicultural competence* and *social justice* (listed below). The course goals and objectives as documented in the syllabi were evaluated for their adherence to those definitions. The definition of *multicultural competence*, taken from the competencies, describes it as comprising awareness (attitudes/beliefs), skills, and knowledge within three domains: “counselor awareness of own cultural biases and values,” “understanding the worldview of the culturally different,” and “appropriate intervention strategies and techniques” (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482). The *social justice* definition was taken from Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, and Israel (2006), defining such advocacy as a focus on forms of oppression that limit access and opportunity in society according to membership in various sociodemographic groups (e.g., race, sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity). Once these definitions were established, the graduate students coded the syllabi for adherence of the course goals to the definitions. Essentially, if the goal statement or course objectives included some reference to the tripartite model of multicultural competence and documented a focus on various forms of oppression, the syllabus was judged to include a focus on multiculturalism and/or social justice.

For the categories of class content and grade assessment, a multistep process was implemented to create criteria that emerged directly from the course syllabi. As such, the team of graduate students initially reviewed a cross-regional sample of 10 syllabi and proposed a preliminary catalogue of topics. The first author then reviewed the topics and made adjustments based on his review of the syllabi data. After further discussion and revisions, a final list of topics was created, and raters coded all 54 syllabi. Interrater reliability was assessed by obtaining the percentage of agreement across all the course content and grade assessment areas, established at 92%.

It is important to emphasize that the coding categories emerged directly from the syllabi, not from an a priori process. In short, the process documented what was present in the syllabi; that is, it did not assess whether the syllabi met predetermined criteria. Based on our review of the syllabi, the following categories of course content were identified: multicultural concepts, social

justice concepts, racial/ethnic identity, racial/ethnic groups, racism, specific populations, gender, multicultural interventions, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ), immigration, social class, religion/spirituality, diagnosis, worldview, forms of oppression, multicultural organizational development, social justice advocacy, and ethics. For a topic to be considered a distinct course element, the syllabus had to show that at least one class session was devoted to that topic. Because the above categories are by no means mutually exclusive and indeed overlap, we created subcategories to provide as much detail as possible. The subcategories reflect syllabi that document specific class content that fell within the larger category (see Table 1).

The grade assessment category followed a similar procedure. Here, topics were derived from any assessment of student learning and/or performance that became part of the final grade. Eight types of assessment emerged from the syllabi data: cultural autobiography, cultural immersion experience, midterm and final examinations, term paper, self-awareness exercise, counseling skills assessment, group project, and social justice advocacy project.

## Results

With regard to required texts, the courses used a variety of source material, as evidenced by 47 texts within the 54 syllabi. The most frequently employed texts are those that devote major sections to various racial, ethnic, and cultural populations. Examples include various editions of Sue and Sue's *Counseling the Culturally Different* (1999), used in 48% of courses, and Atkinson's *Counseling American Minorities* (2003), used in 12% of courses. At least 41 courses included a text that included a major section on "diverse populations." A smaller yet significant number of required texts focused more on aspects of power, oppression, and systemic inequalities associated with race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation. Examples of these were Ridley's *Overcoming Unintentional Racism in Counseling and Therapy* (2005) and Rothenberg's *Race, Class, and Gender* (2003). Twenty-six courses required a text that had aspects of systemic inequality, power, and oppression as its core focus, in comparison to text that included major sections covering various racial and ethnic groups.

The investigation of course goals and objectives found that the goals of multicultural courses were consistently driven by the tripartite model of multicultural competence, with 96% of syllabi incorporating some aspect of knowledge, awareness, and skills within the goal statement. The following examples were reflective of course goals and learning outcome statements associated with the tripartite model of multicultural competence.

**Table 1**  
**Content Categories**

| <i>Category</i>                 | <i>Respondents</i> |          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
|                                 | <i>n</i>           | <i>%</i> |
| Multicultural concepts          | 44                 | 81       |
| Racial identity                 | 47                 | 87       |
| African American                | 4                  | 7        |
| Biracial                        | 4                  | 7        |
| Latino/Latina                   | 3                  | 6        |
| Asian American                  | 4                  | 7        |
| Arab American                   | 2                  | 4        |
| American Indian                 | 1                  | 2        |
| White                           | 11                 | 20       |
| Jewish                          | 1                  | 2        |
| Multiracial                     | 3                  | 6        |
| Racial/ethnic groups            | 19                 | 45       |
| Asian/Pacific Islander          | 18                 | 43       |
| Latino/Latina                   | 19                 | 45       |
| Black/African American          | 19                 | 45       |
| White/Caucasian                 | 6                  | 11       |
| Native American                 | 18                 | 43       |
| Arab American/Middle Eastern    | 6                  | 11       |
| Appalachians                    | 1                  | 2        |
| Multiracial                     | 9                  | 21       |
| Racism                          | 26                 | 48       |
| Systemic racism                 | 2                  | 4        |
| Institutional racism            | 2                  | 4        |
| History of racism               | 5                  | 9        |
| Prejudice                       | 10                 | 19       |
| Affirmative action              | 1                  | 2        |
| Discrimination                  | 6                  | 11       |
| Stereotype                      | 12                 | 22       |
| Antiracism                      | 3                  | 6        |
| White privilege                 | 16                 | 30       |
| Power                           | 5                  | 9        |
| Unintentional racism            | 3                  | 6        |
| Special populations             | 15                 | 34       |
| Elderly                         | 11                 | 26       |
| Disabled                        | 12                 | 29       |
| Homeless                        | 1                  | 2        |
| Women                           | 13                 | 31       |
| Counseling interventions        | 17                 | 40       |
| Culture-specific interventions  | 8                  | 19       |
| Multicultural counseling skills | 4                  | 10       |
| Traditional forms of healing    | 4                  | 10       |

*(continued)*

**Table 1 (continued)**

| <i>Category</i>                                    | <i>Respondents</i> |          |
|--|--------------------|----------|
|  | <i>n</i>           | <i>%</i> |
| Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer         | 39                 | 72       |
| Identity models                                    | 5                  | 9        |
| Coming out   | 2                  | 4        |
| Same-sex marriage                                  | 1                  | 2        |
| Gender issues                                      | 20                 | 37       |
| Gender identity development                        | 2                  | 4        |
| Male privilege                                     | 2                  | 4        |
| Gender-based discrimination                        | 1                  | 2        |
| Immigration  | 10                 | 24       |
| Acculturation                                      | 7                  | 17       |
| Refugees   | 3                  | 7        |
| Social class                                       | 12                 | 22       |
| Socioeconomic status                               | 12                 | 22       |
| Social class worldview                             | 2                  | 4        |
| Poverty  | 7                  | 13       |
| Spirituality                                       | 17                 | 31       |
| Specific religions                                 | 4                  | 7        |
| Abortion as a religious concern                    | 2                  | 4        |
| Diagnosis  | 7                  | 13       |
| <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</i> (4th ed.) | 4                  | 7        |
| Health disparities                                 | 2                  | 4        |
| Culture-specific syndromes                         | 5                  | 9        |
| Worldview  | 30                 | 56       |
| Types of discrimination and social oppression      |                    |          |
| Types of discrimination                            | 8                  | 15       |
| Classism   | 8                  | 15       |
| Sexism   | 7                  | 13       |
| Ethnocentrism                                      | 3                  | 6        |
| Heterosexism                                       | 6                  | 11       |
| Homophobia   | 4                  | 7        |
| Ableism  | 4                  | 7        |
| Ageism   | 4                  | 7        |
| Anti-Semitism                                      | 3                  | 6        |
| Sizeism  | 1                  | 2        |
| Social justice concepts                            | 20                 | 37       |
| Counselors as social change agents                 | 7                  | 13       |
| Multicultural organizational development           | 6                  | 11       |
| Monocultural organizations                         | 2                  | 4        |
| Ethical issues                                     | 11                 | 20       |

*Attitudes:* “Examine the relationship between your cultural frame of reference and your clinical work.”

*Knowledge:* “Increase knowledge of culturally based counseling approaches and interventions.” “Increase knowledge of the relationship between clients’ contextual background and psychosocial functioning.”

*Skills:* “Implement purposeful, directional, and culturally relevant strategies and interventions with diverse clients who present with a range of clinical issues.”

The majority of instructors appeared to consider social justice to be within the rubric of multicultural counseling or diversity training; that is, 59% of the goal statements and objectives of the syllabi included a reference to social justice—for example, “students will demonstrate an understanding of the historical legacy of inequitable power, oppression and racism.”

The review of course content revealed a significant breadth of material covered in class and some consistency in the broader categories identified. For example, 40% ( $n = 22$ ) of the syllabi covered the same seven general topics: racial identity, multicultural concepts, worldview, racial and ethnic groups, racism, counseling interventions, and LGBTQ topics. Closer examination of the subcategories of the topics revealed a considerable range of content. Table 1 documents the frequency with which general topics were covered in the syllabi and, where available, information on specific content under the general topics. We briefly highlight some of the findings here. In reference to the most frequently covered topics, 81% of courses included content on multicultural concepts, 87% focused on some aspect of racial identity, and 45% included a focus on specific racial/ethnic groups. Within this latter topic, it is interesting to note that only 11% of courses included Whites as a racial/ethnic group—a finding that is consistent with the “ethnic-minority” focus that often accompanies multicultural training (Moodley, 2007). Thirty-four percent of syllabi included an emphasis on non-race-based or non-ethnic-based groups, such as individuals with disabilities (29%) and the elderly (26%), whereas 72% covered LGBTQ individuals as a specific population group. In terms of content specifically related to social justice, 48% of syllabi included a focus on social justice concepts—defined as content dealing with general forms of oppression and social inequity. Areas of focus included racism, classism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, and ageism.

In the final category, grade assessment, the most frequent assessments included cultural autobiography and immersion experiences. Components of the grade assessment that were less frequently represented included social justice activities and assessment of multicultural counseling skills (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Grade Assessments**

| <i>Assessment</i>  | <i>Respondents</i> |          |
|--|--------------------|----------|
|  | <i>n</i>           | <i>%</i> |
| Autobiography  |                    |          |
| Cultural autobiography   | 31                 | 57       |
| Self-awareness   | 12                 | 22       |
| Family genogram  | 8                  | 15       |
| Immersion experience   |                    |          |
| Participating in an event/experience that requires exposure and/or involvement with another culture or race that is different from one's own | 30                 | 56       |
| Field trip   | 2                  | 4        |
| Exams  |                    |          |
| Midterm  | 10                 | 19       |
| Final  | 23                 | 43       |
| Quizzes  | 4                  | 7        |
| Course content paper   |                    |          |
| Research paper   | 10                 | 19       |
| Clinically based paper   | 2                  | 4        |
| Literature review paper  | 9                  | 17       |
| Critical review of film, video, article, book, or assessment instrument  | 18                 | 33       |
| Case study review  | 5                  | 9        |
| Summary of course readings   | 3                  | 6        |
| Self-awareness exercise  |                    |          |
| Reaction paper   | 19                 | 35       |
| Personal journal   | 27                 | 50       |
| Student interviews   | 2                  | 4        |
| Course self-assessment   | 6                  | 11       |
| Story where you exhibited multicultural sensitivity  | 1                  | 2        |
| Consciousness-raising exercise   | 6                  | 11       |
| Skills assessment  |                    |          |
| Evaluation of counseling skills  | 4                  | 7        |
| Evaluation of multicultural competence through self-report or observation  | 7                  | 13       |
| Development of culturally responsive intervention  | 11                 | 20       |
| Intake form  | 1                  | 2        |
| Portfolio project  | 2                  | 4        |
| Class projects   |                    |          |
| Class facilitation   | 2                  | 4        |
| Class presentation   | 26                 | 48       |
| Group project  | 15                 | 28       |
| Group discussion   | 1                  | 2        |
| Online discussion  | 5                  | 9        |
| Social justice activity  | 8                  | 15       |

In sum, the findings of this review of a sample of 54 multicultural counseling courses exhibit significant consistency in the larger content categories and display a wider range of variability in specific content within those categories. Content that generally fell into a multicultural category was more prominent than content that was more consistent with a social justice focus. Grade assessments reflected self-awareness and acquisition of knowledge much more than counseling skills did.

## Discussion

An emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity is now an accepted and required part of training for counseling psychologists and counselors (Foaud, 2006). The multicultural focus can be viewed as being embodied within the multicultural counseling competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996). Goodyear and Guzzardo (2000) assert that the multicultural counseling competencies represent the most common training goal in counseling psychology. This statement is indeed supported by our findings, which found that nearly all multicultural courses include a stated purpose of engendering multicultural counseling competence in the areas of knowledge, awareness, and skills. Although the stated course goals appear to reflect the tripartite model of multicultural competence, the actual course content reveals an array of subject matter. We now review and address the patterns that emerged regarding the extent to which courses covered multicultural competence and social justice advocacy.

### Content Focused on Specific Populations

The “population-specific” approach to multicultural training—examining the history, culture, and values of selected groups, such as African Americans, Arab Americans, and Asian Americans—still appears to be a major focus of multicultural courses, as reflected by the frequency of such topics as racial identity, worldview as it relates to culture, and racial ethnic groups, as well as the frequent use of texts such as *Counseling the Culturally Different* (Sue & Sue, 1999). Results suggest that instructors have responded to the call to expand the boundaries of multiculturalism and diversity by including populations identified by age, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. The wider focus on specific populations is paralleled by inclusion of more contextual variables, such as socioeconomic status and religious/spiritual orientation, although there appears to be support for

the contention of Ancis and Rasheed (2005) that contextual variables are emphasized inconsistently. Although barely a third of the syllabi include a focus on gender, social class, or spirituality, instructors are starting to include a reference to the intersection of contextual and identity-based variables. That intersection, specifically in relation to oppression and diversity, has long been recognized as an important consideration for counselors (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). However, it does not yet appear to be an area of sustained and focused instruction.

### **Content Focused on Social Justice**

Evidence does appear that multicultural instructors are responding to the call to include social justice content as part of the knowledge base of counselors and counseling psychologists. To illustrate, a sizable number of syllabi include a focus on social justice as a goal or objective, although operationalization of this objective in the syllabi tends to be uneven. Of note, social justice content focuses largely on the nature of types of oppression, such as racism, classism, and heterosexism, whereas a small group of syllabi focus on the role of counselors in the process of social change and specifically on teaching strategies for social change.

In the review of current literature, we noted the call for social justice to be a central construct in counseling and counseling psychology (Fouad et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2004; Toporek et al., 2006). Social justice constructs are clearly not yet consistently represented in multicultural course syllabi. Whereas some scholars now refer to the multicultural–social justice movement (D’Andrea, 2006), it might be useful to view multiculturalism and social justice as distinct constructs while acknowledging areas of overlap. We contend that the current overlap in terminology might in fact maintain confusion in the field about the precise parameters of social justice and multicultural competence.

A clear illustration emerged from our review. One syllabus identified a course entitled *Multicultural Psychology* with content that primarily focused on different ethnic and racial groups. Examples of the class sessions were “Cross-Cultural Issues: Terms and Definitions,” “Ethnic Minority Health Review,” “African Americans,” “Appalachians,” “Native Americans,” “Hispanics,” “Asian Americans.” Another syllabus identified a course entitled *Multicultural and Special Populations*, with content focused on social justice. Examples of its class sessions were “What Are Racism, Discrimination, Oppression and Stereotypes,” “Social Justice—Conceptual Frameworks,” “Social Justice—Ableism,” “Social Justice—Sexism,” “Explorations of

Privilege, Oppression, and Diversity—Stories of White Privilege.” These courses might sound somewhat similar given the title, but their course content was vastly different.

Social justice educators and psychologists often refer to such topics as peace education, political ideology, liberatory consciousness, social activism, economic systems of oppression, poverty, principles of democracy, transformational learning, full and equal participation of all groups in society, and mental health interventions focused on prevention (Bell, 1997; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Friere, 1970; Lalas, 2007; Vera & Speight, 2007). These topics tend to be viewed as critical components of social justice instruction (Love, 2000; Pincus, 2000). Indeed, hooks (1994) asserts that education is a collaborative effort between instructor and student, focused not only on acquisition of knowledge but also on personal and societal transformation. Content areas reflective of the above areas of emphasis were uniformly missing from the class sessions outlined in our sample of syllabi. If counselors and counseling psychologists are indeed seeking to accept social justice as a central aspect of their training and identity, current efforts to address social justice at the level of counseling psychology and counselor training may be inadequate or not clearly articulated (Baluch et al., 2004), as reflected in the current review.

## **Counseling Skills Development**

It was surprising to find relatively infrequent attention given to skills training and counseling interventions in the course content, given that the population-specific focus remains the dominant approach to multicultural training. Although a high percentage of syllabi claimed to focus on all three arms of the multicultural competence model—knowledge, awareness, and skills—and on social justice advocacy, the knowledge and awareness components were found to have greater weight in instruction and were therefore accorded greater importance than that of skill development. Only 7 syllabi (13%) included instruction on applying and implementing social justice advocacy, lending further support to the notion that skills, in social justice and multicultural competence, may need more attention. Arredondo and Rosen (2007) have argued that it is largely within the skills domain that social justice advocacy overlaps with and complements the multicultural counseling competencies. Indeed, because social justice is action oriented, skill-based competencies can most clearly reveal this overlap. It is therefore disconcerting that required multicultural courses seem deficient in specific skill-based instruction.

## Grade Assessment

The methods of grade assessment reflected in the syllabi are consistent with standard pedagogical practices for assessing student learning. Courses had a balanced mix of assessments focused on academic and scholarly knowledge and assessments drawn from experiential learning. However, like course content, grade assessment gave less emphasis to skill development. Assessment of multicultural counseling skills has been a vexing question in the field (T. B. Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehwar, & Montoya, 2006). It is important to recognize that knowledge and self-awareness do not necessarily translate into clinical skills and that self-report multicultural competence inventories have significant associations with social desirability (Constantine & Ladany, 2000). It could be that in assessing students' social justice and multicultural competence, we need to move beyond self-assessment and toward behavioral inventories and observational assessments to examine students' commitment to practicing the principles of social justice and multiculturalism (Havens, 2007).

Another consideration involves the extent to which skill-based training for multicultural competence and social justice advocacy is present in instructional courses—for example, counseling skills, case conceptualization, diagnosis and assessment, and various practica and internships. A growing concern in practicum and internship experiences is that of the discrepancy in levels of multicultural competence between students and supervisors (Ladany, Friedlander, & Nelson, 2005). Supervisors trained before the advent of the multicultural counseling competencies might well be less effective in dealing with cultural diversity and might not have had exposure to concepts of social justice and advocacy. Because much skill development takes place in practica and internships, it becomes imperative for counselor and counseling psychology training programs to provide opportunities for multicultural and social justice skill development in foundational and advanced-level skill-based courses.

## Limitations

It is important to note that a review of syllabi can provide only a partial picture of what is actually covered in multicultural courses. The detail provided by instructors in their syllabi varies, and we cannot be certain that each syllabus is an accurate representation of what transpires in class. What is implied by each syllabus may differ from what the reader infers in interpreting the course material and assignments, which thus affects the internal

reliability of this study to a certain degree. Many syllabi allude to the use of readings and resources outside the required texts. Most likely, instructors selected these readings based on their individual perspectives and preferences. Therefore, our ability to ascertain the complete breadth of topics explored in each class was limited in respect to social justice. At present, there is a limited number of texts focusing on social justice counseling and advocacy. Therefore, by eliminating the additional readings from the current analysis, we could have omitted additional information regarding the nature of social justice training. Finally, the findings could possibly be reflective of a self-selection bias: Educators who felt confident and satisfied with their syllabi might have been more willing to respond than those who saw their syllabi as works in progress. This snapshot of a limited sample might not reflect the field as a whole, and our findings are about multicultural courses, not multicultural and social justice training at the program level. Thus, the current results are provided with some caution.

## **Future Directions**

This review prompts consideration of a few fundamental questions regarding multicultural and social justice instruction in counseling and counseling psychology. Specifically, what are the most critical elements of multicultural and social justice training that students need as they graduate from their programs? Which professional body within the field should be granted authority to offer a precise identification of the critical elements, if needed? In multicultural education, how much latitude should be allowed for instructor biases and personal preferences about course content, and what role should political ideology play in social justice training for all counseling and counseling psychology students?

We recognize the potentially polarizing nature of some of the questions; as such, given the findings in this review, we argue that current efforts in multicultural and social justice training can be strengthened by a sustained effort to respond to the questions. Given the limitations of the current investigation, a next step in the examination of multicultural and social justice content at the course level might be include an expanded review of course syllabi from other required courses. This could lead to an understanding of the extent to which multicultural and social justice concepts are being infused across the curriculum, an approach consistently posited as the most effective in training for multicultural counseling competence (Ancis & Rasheed, 2005). Additional information can also be gleaned by the course sequencing across programs. Specifically, are multicultural courses viewed

as fundamental courses offered early in the training, or are they typically viewed as advanced-level courses typically offered toward the end of the program? Finally, the advent of social justice advocacy, outreach, and prevention in counseling and counseling psychology (Vera & Speight, 2007), although taking us back to our roots (see Kiselica & Robinson, 2001), might require a fundamental shift in our current approach to counselor training. Because standards of accreditation are highly influential and somewhat restrictive, counselor educators and counseling psychologists who are committed to infusing social justice may need to advocate for a clearer and more focused inclusion of social justice principles in current accreditation criteria.

## Summary and Conclusions

It is gratifying to note that by and large, instructors are attempting to provide multicultural instruction that is consistent with the accepted knowledge, awareness, and skills paradigm of multicultural counseling competence. It is also evident that attempts are being made to include social justice as an element of multicultural counseling instruction. We hope that our review and analysis have shed light on multicultural instruction at the course content level and have provided an informed vantage point for ongoing critique and modification of multicultural and social justice training for counseling and counseling psychology students.

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