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# Expanding Access to the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies through a Spanish Translation

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## Abstract

Understanding the mechanisms and competencies of incorporating religion and spirituality in the Latinx community for mental health is key to detangling the nuances of coping within this fast-growing community. Hence, it is important for counselors who work with bilingual clients and address spiritual and religious matters in counseling to access the Spanish version of the ASERVIC (Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling) Competencies. This article outlines the translation process to make these available to counselors and counselor educators.

## Keywords

Latinx – mental health – spirituality – religion – competencies – counseling

On January 8, 2021, the Board of Directors of the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) voted unanimously to approve the Spanish translation of the competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling. The translation for the ASERVIC competencies

can be found in Table 1 (see Appendix) and on the ASERVIC website (<https://www.aservic.org>).

This article aims to discuss the rationale surrounding the ASERVIC leadership's decision to recommend translation of the competencies and briefly review the need to expand access to the competencies to Spanish speakers in the counseling profession. In addition, this article archives the Spanish translation process of the competencies in the journal sponsored by the organization.

Latinx (a gender-neutral term for individuals from Latin America) will be used throughout the manuscript to honor inclusivity and gender neutrality in our community. We also recognize that all Latinos/ Hispanics may not widely use this term.

## Latinx Community in the United States

### *The Role of Religion and Spirituality in the Latinx Community*

Nationally, Latinx individuals constitute nearly one-fifth (18.7%) of the total population, currently more than 56 million people, with projections that the number of Latinx people will exceed 119 million by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Given the current and expected rapid population growth in the United States, adopting a culturally responsive approach to counseling that includes cultural knowledge and practices of the Latinx experience is important. The Pew Research Center (2012) found that 83% of Latinos claimed a religious affiliation. Religiosity and social support provided through religious practices have contributed to the resilience and mental well-being of Latinx immigrants (Driscoll & Torres, 2013; Da Silva et al., 2017; Revens et al., 2021).

Recent quantitative studies indicated that more Mexican-born participants reported the use of religious coping strategies (77.8%) than U.S.-born Mexican-Americans (30.8%) (Noyola et al., 2020). In 20 qualitative interviews with Latinx immigrants, Moreno et al. (2020) found support for the vital role of religious practices in the migration process and the U.S. lived experiences of Latinx immigrants. Stressors can play a role and influence the level of connections that Latinx immigrants, specifically those who are Mexican-born, have to their religious communities and practices (Moreno et al., 2017). Moreno et al. (2017) described how social connections, significant life stress and corresponding needs in the United States, and a family tradition of religious engagement from an early age were connected among Mexican-born first-generation immigrants. These findings speak to the social connections and family traditions important to an individual's religiosity in collectivistic cultures (Cohen et al.,

2016; Cukur et al., 2004). They suggest that religious practices may serve as important coping mechanisms for immigrant populations.

The training of counselors and counselors in training around diversity issues allows them to be attuned to multicultural and social justice issues in their clients' lives. Therefore, focusing on multicultural competencies, including religious and spiritual issues, can support the Latinx client's mental health journey (Mintert et al., 2020). Counselors must be well-versed in the overall professional competencies as delineated by the American Counseling Association while having both knowledge and practice of the spiritual and religious competencies within the Latinx community (ACA; see Toporek et al., 2010).

The counseling field and other allied fields strive for multicultural competency and the ability to address diverse issues that include language needs and an understanding of religious and spiritual issues, for example, struggles with the Divine, demonic struggles, and struggles as to the meaning of life (Pargament et al., 2013). Furthermore, substantial evidence supports the need for more Spanish-language competencies among counselors (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Seto & Forth, 2020). Often, bilingual counselors do not receive formal training in Spanish and must navigate the complexities of English and Spanish while also providing psychological services in the two languages (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). There are also limited studies on the training and supervision of bilingual counselors that can provide deeper insights into the reality of counseling linguistically diverse clients (Seto & Forth, 2020). Since 73% of Latinx individuals speak Spanish at home (Pew Research Center, 2021), counselors who are working with bilingual or predominantly Spanish-speaking clients must have access to the competencies in the native language of those clients.

### *Expanding Access to the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies and Multicultural Implications*

The ASERVIC competencies were developed as a best-practice counseling tool for other evidence-based approaches for counselors working with clients from various religious and spiritual traditions and beliefs (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). The Spiritual Competencies were aligned with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) to "recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts" (p. 3). Spanish translation of the competencies would seek to further the reach and inclusion of the bilingual counseling professional community, thereby serving the ASERVIC mission of integrating spiritual and religious values in the counseling process. The translation of foundational coun-

seling practice materials places more tools in the hands of counselors, allowing them to assist non-English-speaking clients better (Bermúdez et al., 2019).

### *Advocacy Through Spanish Translation of the Competencies*

Considering the positive and supportive role that spirituality and religion can provide Latinx clients, who make up 35.1 % of all mental health clients (U.S. National Alliance for the Mentally Ill [NAMI], 2020), a Spanish translation of the ASERVIC competencies was required. The Spanish version of the competencies provides three benefits to bilingual providers. The first is that access expansion through linguistic equity communicates the counselor's responsibility to ethically engage in the best clinical and cultural best practices. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) promoted this expansion as a means to address the complexities of counselor-client interactions (Ratts et al., 2016), including diverse topics such as religion and spirituality. The second is the overt recognition of the importance of providing resources to the counselor and the client in the client's preferred language. The last is to augment the counselor's cultural responsiveness and ability to incorporate the competencies in their work with Spanish-speaking clients.

### **Translation Procedure**

During a board meeting in 2020, ASERVIC President Dr. L. Marinn Pierce proposed the translation of the ASERVIC competencies into Spanish. All members verbally agreed that this translation aligned with ASERVIC's mission and desire to make this resource accessible to bilingual counselors. The first author started the translation project and later convened a team, completing the translation by the end of 2020. The completed translation was shared during the January 21, 2021, board meeting with the 2020-2021 President, Dr. Ryan Foster, 2021-2022 President Elect, Dr. Daniel Gutiérrez, and the board members. Leadership approved the translation and recommended a manuscript be written to disseminate the Spanish version of the ASERVIC Competencies.

The following procedures outline the steps taken to complete this translation project, that included careful and mindful consideration in formulating a team. A translation team is critical in conducting high-quality translation activities to widen the availability of clinical tools and assessments in other languages (Lenz et al., 2017). There are four variables to consider in selecting a translation team: the size of the team, language proficiency, professional identity and expertise, and familiarity with concepts (Lenz et al., 2017). For the ASERVIC project, a small translation team of three interdisciplinary members

was selected. The members were all proficient in Spanish and English. They had diverse professional setting experiences and spiritual/religious backgrounds.

Best practices in translation recommend that at least one translation team member should have working knowledge of the construct or work to be translated. In our team, two members had a working knowledge of the ASERVIC competencies and active ASERVIC membership. The first member is a licensed professional counselor, certified as an approved clinical supervisor, and counselor educator with clinical experience working with clients in Spanish and presenting issues with religion and spirituality. In addition, this member translated clinical training materials from English to Spanish for the wide-scale dissemination of a research-proven family therapy model for a Latin American country (Patoja, 2015), and other clinical resources for therapists, supervisors, program managers, and consultants. The second member is a licensed mental health provider and supervisor who works with Spanish-speaking clients and supervisees, where religion and spirituality are often broached. The third member is an ordained minister with a Master of Arts and doctoral training in theology. This member has conducted pastoral counseling and translated theological resources in ecclesiastical and governmental settings. Two of the three members were born in Latin American countries and immigrated to the United States in their late teens, while the other was born in the United States. Although the members have differences in conversational Spanish due to slight dialectical differences, these did not impact the translation nor the translation process.

### *The Translation Process*

Translation is based on the theory that it is possible to abstract the meaning of a text from its forms and reproduce that meaning in a second language (Rose, 1991). Rose (1991) provided an overview of the translation task, by which the text to be translated is reviewed in the source language so that the translator discovers the meaning of the text. This meaning is to be re-expressed through translation into the second language. This translation approach was adopted in the review of the ASERVIC competencies.

The first team member completed a forward translation, translating a source text into a second language while reflecting the intended population's developmental level and cultural experiences (Lenz et al., 2017). During the translation review, the first and third members discussed any need for rephrasing terms to capture the linguistic style of Spanish through decentering the text content from the source language in English. However, these team members determined that this forward translation was accurate. The second member completed a back translation which refers to the process by which the text received

a literal translation, without inferences, to reflect without the general content and meaning of the ASERVIC competencies. The second member reviewed the back-translated version of the source document. The team then reviewed both the forward and backward translations to produce a universal document that included the review of any cultural nuances. A final revision was completed by reaching a consensus with all team members. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary with a Latinx background approach provided the opportunity to review the ASERVIC competencies with a fresh and cohesive lens and gain consensus in approving the final version of the translation.

### *Future Direction and Clinical Training Implications*

Competency training in counselor education programs for most emerging bilingual counselors occurs in English regardless of their Spanish fluency (Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2021). In line with the ACA Code of Ethics, the ASERVIC Competencies, and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC), it is imperative that students and counselors develop counseling competencies that include the acquisition of knowledge, awareness, and skills along with multicultural competency. Culturally responsive counselors who speak the preferred language of clients (apart from English) also need to understand clinical concepts and terms in Spanish through translated materials that can be used while working with Spanish-speaking clients. Future research initiatives can examine the Spanish ASERVIC competencies and conduct a cross-cultural analysis of the competencies using comparison groups of Latinx and majority culture scholars to determine overall utility. Further studies can assess how these competencies sufficiently capture the Latinx spiritual experience.

### **Conclusion**

Counselors' competency in religious and spiritual issues can help them provide practical guidance for training new counselors and work more effectively with clients. Translation of the ASERVIC competencies into Spanish offers Latinx counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators a relevant tool for Latinx clients who view religiosity and spirituality as part of their culture and daily life. The profession calls for cultural responsiveness, and counselors competent in religious and spiritual matters can be a resource for clients in the counseling process. ASERVIC's commitment to a diverse and rich community is manifested in the translation of the Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling. The translation of other ACA and ACA Division Competencies can support the counseling community and widen the reach of bilingual counselors.

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## Appendix

TABLE 1 Spiritual Competencies in English and Spanish

Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling	Competencias para Abordar Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosas en la Consejería
<b>Preamble</b>	<b>El Preámbulo</b>
<p>The Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling are guidelines that complement, not supersede, the values and standards espoused in the ACA Code of Ethics. Consistent with the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), the purpose of the ASERVIC Competencies is to “recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (p. 3). These Competencies are intended to be used in conjunction with counseling approaches that are evidence-based and that align with best practices in counseling.</p>	<p>Las Competencias para Abordar los Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosos en la Consejería son pautas que complementan, pero no reemplazan, los valores y estándares expuestos en el Código de Ética de ACA. De acuerdo, al Código de Ética del ACA (2005), el propósito de las Competencias de ASERVIC es “reconocer la diversidad y adoptar un enfoque intercultural en apoyo del valor, la dignidad, la potencia y la singularidad de las personas dentro de sus contextos sociales y culturales” (pág. 3). Estas Competencias están destinadas a ser utilizadas en conjunto con enfoques de consejería que están basados en evidencia y que se alinean con las mejores prácticas en consejería.</p>

TABLE 1 Spiritual Competencies in English and Spanish (*cont.*)

Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling	Competencias para Abordar Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosas en la Consejería
<p><b>This Preamble must accompany any publication or dissemination, in whole or in part, of the ASERVIC Competencies.</b></p>	<p><b>Este Preámbulo debe acompañar cualquier publicación o disseminación, total o parcial, de las Competencias de ASERVIC.</b></p>
<p><b>Culture and Worldview</b></p>	<p><b>La Visión del Mundo y Cultura</b></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The professional counselor can describe the similarities and differences between spirituality and religion, including the basic beliefs of various spiritual systems, major world religions, agnosticism, and atheism.</li> <li>2. The professional counselor recognizes that the client's beliefs (or absence of beliefs) about spirituality and/or religion are central to their worldview and can influence psychosocial functioning.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. El consejero profesional puede describir las similitudes y diferencias entre la espiritualidad y la religión, incluyendo las creencias básicas de varios sistemas espirituales, las principales religiones del mundo, el agnosticismo y el ateísmo.</li> <li>2. El consejero profesional reconoce que las creencias (o la ausencia de creencias) del cliente sobre la espiritualidad y/o la religión son fundamentales para su visión del mundo y pueden influir en el funcionamiento psicosocial.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Counselor Self-Awareness</b></p>	<p><b>La Auto Conciencia del Consejero</b></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The professional counselor actively explores their own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion.</li> <li>4. The professional counselor continuously evaluates the influence of their own spiritual and/or religious beliefs and values on the client and the counseling process.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. El consejero profesional explora activamente sus propias actitudes, creencias y valores sobre la espiritualidad y/o religión.</li> <li>4. El consejero profesional evalúa continuamente la influencia de sus propias creencias y valores espirituales y/o religiosos sobre el cliente y en el proceso de consejería.</li> </ol>

TABLE 1 Spiritual Competencies in English and Spanish (*cont.*)

Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling	Competencias para Abordar Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosas en la Consejería
<p>5. The professional counselor can identify the limits of their understanding of the client's spiritual and/or religious perspective and is acquainted with religious and spiritual resources and leaders who can be avenues for consultation and to whom the counselor can refer.</p>	<p>5. El consejero profesional puede identificar los límites de su comprensión de la perspectiva espiritual y/o religiosa del cliente y está familiarizado con los recursos y líderes religiosos y espirituales quienes pueden ser vías para la consulta y a quien el consejero puede referirse.</p>
<p><b>Human and Spiritual Development</b></p>	<p><b>El Desarrollo Humano y Espiritual</b></p>
<p>6. The professional counselor can describe and apply various models of spiritual and/or religious development and their relationship to human development.</p>	<p>6. El consejero profesional puede describir y aplicar varios modelos de desarrollo espiritual y/o religioso y su relación con el desarrollo humano.</p>
<p><b>Communication</b></p>	<p><b>Comunicación</b></p>
<p>7. The professional counselor responds to client communications about spirituality and/or religion with acceptance and sensitivity.</p> <p>8. The professional counselor uses spiritual and/or religious concepts consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and acceptable to the client.</p> <p>9. The professional counselor can recognize spiritual and/or religious themes in client communication and address these with the client when they are therapeutically relevant.</p>	<p>7. El consejero profesional responde a las comunicaciones de los clientes sobre la espiritualidad y/o religión con aceptación y sensibilidad.</p> <p>8. El consejero profesional utiliza conceptos espirituales y/o religiosos que son consistentes con las perspectivas espirituales y/o religiosas del cliente y son aceptables para el cliente.</p> <p>9. El consejero profesional puede reconocer temas espirituales y/o religiosos en la comunicación del cliente y es capaz de abordarlos con el cliente cuando sean terapéuticamente relevantes.</p>

TABLE 1 Spiritual Competencies in English and Spanish (*cont.*)

Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling	Competencias para Abordar Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosas en la Consejería
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evaluación</b>
10. During the intake and assessment processes, the professional counselor strives to understand a client's spiritual and/or religious perspective by gathering information from the client and/or other sources.	10. Durante los procesos de admisión y evaluación, el consejero profesional se esfuerza para entender la perspectiva espiritual y/o religiosa de un cliente, reuniendo información del cliente y/o de otras fuentes.
<b>Diagnosis and Treatment</b>	<b>Diagnóstico y Tratamiento</b>
11. When making a diagnosis, the professional counselor recognizes that the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives can a) enhance well-being, b) contribute to client problems, and/or c) exacerbate symptoms.	11. Al hacer un diagnóstico, el consejero profesional reconoce que las perspectivas espirituales y/o religiosas del cliente pueden a) mejorar el bienestar; b) contribuir a los problemas del cliente; y/o) exacerbar los síntomas.
12. The professional counselor sets goals with the client that are consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives.	12. El consejero profesional establece metas con el cliente que son consistentes con las perspectivas espirituales y/o religiosas del cliente.
13. The professional counselor can a) modify therapeutic techniques to include a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and b) utilize spiritual and/or religious practices as techniques when appropriate and acceptable to a client's viewpoint.	13. El consejero profesional puede a) modificar técnicas terapéuticas para incluir las perspectivas espirituales y/o religiosas de un cliente, y b) utilizar prácticas espirituales y/o religiosas como técnicas cuando sea apropiado y aceptable para el punto de vista del cliente.

TABLE 1 Spiritual Competencies in English and Spanish (*cont.*)

Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling	Competencias para Abordar Asuntos Espirituales y Religiosas en la Consejería
14. The professional counselor can therapeutically apply theory and current research supporting the inclusion of a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and practices.	14. El consejero profesional puede aplicar la teoría y la investigación actual de forma terapéutica, apoyando la inclusión de las perspectivas y prácticas espirituales y/o religiosas de un cliente.
Revised and Approved, 5/5/2009 ©ASERVIC 5/5/09	Revisado y Aprobado, 5/5/2009 ©ASERVIC 5/5/09
NOTE: The American Counseling Association (ACA) has now endorsed <i>The Spiritual Competencies</i>	NOTA: La Asociación Americana de Consejería (ACA) ahora ha respaldado <i>Las Competencias Espirituales</i>

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