

Chaplaincy Certification Standards as a Curriculum Resource| in Clinical Pastoral Education

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Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a model of pastoral education focused on pastoral formation, pastoral reflection and pastoral competence. Board certification as a chaplain is a process of measuring competency using core standards considered to be essential for functioning as a professional chaplain. What do [board certification competencies](#) have to do with the action reflection process of [CPE](#)? Are board certification standards created to measure chaplain competency relevant for CPE participants who don't plan to become chaplains? These questions and others have been at the heart of the dialogue between pastoral care educators and professional chaplains regarding whether competencies for chaplaincy board certification should be addressed in CPE.

In 2004, six pastoral care cognate groups adopted a common set of [Standards for Professional Chaplaincy and Pastoral Educators](#) and also a [Common Code of Ethics](#). "Awareness of the Spiritual Care Collaborative Common Standards for Professional Chaplaincy" was added as a Level II outcome in the 2010 ACPE Standards.

As a participant in the original meetings of the six cognate groups held to work on common standards, I was aware of the careful process used to study and synthesize the competencies in each group's standards for training and certification. This work accounts for the congruence between the SCC Common Standards and the objectives and outcomes of Level I and Level II CPE as well as those of the other cognate groups.

Over the last several years, the CPE Faculty and board certified chaplains at Carolinas Healthcare System have worked on methods to meaningfully incorporate the SCC Standards into the curriculum of our CPE program. We have sought to do this in ways that give students the choice between "familiarity" and "mastery" of these competencies.

Three years ago, we began offering monthly Board Certification Consultation Seminars for our CPE Residents during the final unit of the program during which the unit theme focuses on professional development and leadership. Residents often have learning goals related to board certification so these seminars are relevant to their learning needs. The monthly meetings are an optional learning activity and facilitated by board certified chaplains from our center or from other facilities in our area. Each consultation focuses on one category of competencies and participants are asked to bring rough drafts of the essays they are writing for that particular category. The meeting begins with some time to discuss the standards focusing on use of clinical illustrations. Participants then divide into small groups, also often facilitated by board certified chaplains, to give and receive feedback on their essays.

We learned that the language of the competencies is often unfamiliar and therefore intimidating and easily misunderstood at first glance. As facilitators, the board certified chaplains enhanced understanding by providing simple clarifications of the standards and by offering concrete examples. We also identified specific competencies that needed more attention in our CPE curriculum. For example, some seminar participants had difficulty writing about and discussing the chaplain's role in health care ethics. To address this need we added educational components in our CPE program, such as additional reading, participation in Hospital Ethics Committee Meetings and reflection on ethical issues in verbatim reports. The Board Certification Consultation Seminars continue to be held and are now open to any chaplain in our area who is working on board certification. There are often chaplains from a wide variety of clinical settings including acute care, long-term care and hospice.

Another effort to address SCC Standards is through mentoring relationships. We have a list of board certified chaplains in our community who have agreed to mentor persons going through the BCC process. We encourage the mentor chaplains to be clear about the amount of time and feedback they offer and to hold those being mentored accountable to make good use of the mentoring process. Several of the mentoring chaplains have commented on the satisfaction they receive from coaching persons in the writing process as well as in preparing to meet with a committee.

Other strategies for addressing the Common Standards include asking Level II CPE Student to use the [BCCI Verbatim Cover Sheet](#) to identify SCC Competencies. We ask students to reflect on competencies used in the evaluation section of the verbatim so they get used to evaluating their work using the language of the competencies. During our mid-year consultations, we also offer residents the choice of including board certification essays as a part of their written materials if that is one of their professional development goals.

In the past three years our center has been proud to have had several staff chaplains and Level II or Supervisory residents complete the [BCCI board certification process](#). We have a number of resident chaplains currently working toward that goal.

In a recent unit, a chaplain resident who will be returning to parish ministry and is not pursuing board certification shared with me that many of the competencies she worked on will enrich her ministry in her congregation. In particular, her increased understanding of ethical principles as a guide in end of life care will help her support and advocate for individuals facing difficult end of life treatment decisions.

Our efforts to address the SCC standards have helped us do a better job of preparing persons who want to become board certified chaplains. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the SCC Common Standards have become a meaningful curriculum resource in our efforts to equip persons with skills needed for professional ministry in a diverse and changing world.

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