

Twelve Guiding Questions for Incorporating Research into a CPE Curriculum

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Incorporating research into a CPE curriculum can be done in many ways: from focusing on research itself to simply using published research articles to explore topics of interest to chaplains. The following twelve questions should be helpful in assessing how research may be suited for a particular program, taking into account factors of the curriculum, available resources, and characteristics of students.

Curricular Factors:

1) Is the chaplaincy program related to a health care setting?

The great deal of research currently being published on Spirituality & Health makes incorporating research into a health care-based program relatively easy. Programs in non-health care settings (e.g., community-based programs) may at first seem less well suited for incorporating research, but a wide variety of literature is available, allowing for an exploration of the value of research to virtually any area of interest to chaplains. (Supervisory Education programs should look at how research may inform education and assessment.)

2) Are students expected to do research projects?

If “yes,” focus should be placed on basic research methodology and proper institutional procedure through the Institutional Review Board. If “no,” consider focusing on how to *find* and *critically read* research articles as part of chaplains’ professional practice.

3) Is there a regular place in the schedule to discuss research or research-based articles?

A one or one-and-a-half hour block each month provides a regular (distributive learning) opportunity to think about and discuss research, be it for research projects or for a “journal club” about articles of interest.

4) Are students expected to learn about literature sources for chaplaincy?

If “yes,” highlight research articles in pastoral care journals and research-based articles from the health care literature that are pertinent to chaplaincy. If the program consults with a reference librarian, make him/her aware of such special interest.

Resource Factors:

5) Do students have access to a medical library and to health care literature databases?

If “yes,” be sure that students are oriented to on-line databases (e.g., Medline, CINAHL, PsychINFO, and the Health & Psychosocial Instruments databases) or print indices (e.g., *Index Medicus*). If “no,” a careful introduction to general Internet and public library resources may be necessary. Also, nearby unaffiliated medical libraries may be open to helping CPE students, if asked.

6) Is there a researcher who can serve as a consultant to the program and mentor to students?

It may be relatively easy to find a local researcher who has published in the field of Spirituality & Health, but any health care researcher could be helpful. Nurses are often fine resources, because of both their potential camaraderie with Pastoral Care in the holistic care of patients and their usual familiarity with qualitative methodology that may be appealing to chaplain students.

7) Is there someone on the Institutional Review Board who can be a consultant?

Establishing a contact with the IRB can be invaluable for programs requiring research projects. However, any program may benefit from consultation with an IRB member, not only in terms of issues of scientific methodology but also research ethics.

8) Is there a statistician available to the program?

The availability of a statistician gives great opportunity for student research projects using quantitative methodology.

Student Factors:

9) Do students seem able/ready to read academic journal articles?

If “no,” choose—at least initially—articles that are clearly written, have straightforward headings, avoid an extensive presentation of statistics, and are relatively short in length. (Research projects should not be encouraged of students unable to engage the literature.)

10) Are students familiar with the form and style of writing that is common to research literature?

If “no,” specifically orient students to how the research literature tends to be written, and make the form and style of every article a topic for every article discussion. Challenge students to think about how research demands preciseness of language.

11) Are students familiar with the use of statistics in research articles?

If “no,” it may be best to guide students *around* the statistics in an article, while encouraging them to bring a critical sensibility to all other parts of the study. Qualitative studies may be preferable to quantitative ones for such students.

12) Are students interested in the topic of research per se?

If “no,” select research articles based upon *subjects* of interest, and consider research (methodology) aspects of the articles secondarily. If students seem to feel uneasy about the relationship of research to religion/spirituality/chaplaincy, these feelings should be particularly discussed.