



## Standards for Multicultural Assessment

The Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE) is an organization of counselors, educators, and other professionals that advances the counseling profession by providing leadership, training, and research in the creation, development, production, and use of assessment and diagnostic techniques. The mission and vision of AACE drives the continuing effort to create awareness of the importance of assessment and diagnostic techniques for an increasingly diverse population, to promote better training in the uses and development of assessments and to advocate for social justice concerns in counseling and educational assessment.

In 1992, the Committee on Diversity in Assessment under the direction of the Association for Assessment in Counseling (now AACE) Executive Council created the first set of standards addressing cultural diversity and the impact on assessment in counseling and education. In 2003, the Executive Council of the Association for Assessment in Counseling (AAC) appointed a committee from AAC to expand and update the original set of standards.

During the past decade, recognition of diversity has been acknowledged by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The inclusion of language acknowledging a multicultural society was included throughout every aspect of the 2009 CACREP Standards demonstrating to accredited programs the importance of diversity along with the recognition of how advocacy is mandated as well.

There are several reasons for the newly revised 2012 Multicultural Standards specifically acknowledging the impact and importance of cultural identity. Social justice advocacy in the field of assessment and diagnosis is gaining prominence. These revised Standards also address the importance of effectively selecting, administering, and interpreting assessments and diagnostic techniques by counseling professionals addressing the increasing diversity of our client population. The members of AACE believe that this new set of Multicultural Assessment Standards will raise awareness of the unique concerns and issues involved in assessment particularly with diverse populations. These revised standards also provide a framework for creating awareness of the unique challenges inherent in using Assessments for psychological screening, personnel selection, and placement for diverse populations. In addition these revised 2012 Multicultural Standards will aid counselor educators in training new professionals in the uses and development of culturally acceptable Assessments.

Increased awareness of the challenges surrounding evaluation and measurement will enhance the knowledge of counseling professionals as well as raise public awareness and support. It is also hoped that the 2012 Multicultural Assessment Standards will create dialogue and opportunities for collaboration of professionals involved in the field of measurement and evaluation to enhance sensitivity to diversity in our society. Assessment is an individual and system interventions useful for client/student and community empowerment, advocacy, collaboration, to change systems, and inform public opinion and policy.

## **Definition of Multicultural and Diverse Populations**

In the 2003 Standards for Multicultural Assessment a precise definition of multicultural and diverse populations was determined to be still evolving. The original multicultural competencies were outlined by Sue et al. (1992), and then revised by Arredondo and Toporek in 1996. Those competencies defined the following five major cultural groups in the United States and its territories: African/Black, Asian, Caucasian/European, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American. The latest United States census (2010) reflects these same populations, but also includes Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and includes the self-identification of persons with 2

or more races. The census data confirms that our population includes many cultural groups, continues to evolve and requires our attention with respect to assessment.

A precise definition of diverse populations was included in the 2003 Standards recognizing persons who differ by race, ethnicity, culture, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability. Today the same definition may also be used to recognize the unique challenges for counselors in providing assessment that respects the effects of age, color, culture, ability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic background, socioeconomic status or other personal characteristics. Counselors are also challenged to advocate for people who are culturally diverse and individuals from socially marginalized populations. To this end, the current revision of the Standards for Multicultural Assessment offers a specific section on Advocacy, which is placed at the beginning of the 2012 Standards with the intent that Advocacy is to be infused throughout the Standards, and be an integral factor throughout decision-making in the assessment process.

## The Standards

### ADVOCACY

*Culturally competent professional counselors have a duty to recognize the importance of social justice advocacy in the field of assessment and diagnosis for clients, respecting age, gender, ability, race, ethnic group, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic background, or other personal characteristics in order to effectively provide appropriate assessment and diagnostic techniques.*

Professional counselors should:

- Follow standard instrument development procedures and rely on behavioral science research methods when developing new assessment instruments (AART).
- Support use of assessments with psychometric properties appropriate for individuals and vulnerable groups and alert community or school groups of psychometric evidence that disadvantages individuals and vulnerable groups (ACAAC).
- Provide assessment opportunities to individuals or vulnerable groups that may lack access to needed services (ACAAC).

- Provide culturally competent and effective practices in all areas of counseling and assessment in the contexts of diverse individual, family, school, and community characteristics (NASP).
- Work collaboratively with cultural brokers or community liaisons to understand and address the needs of diverse clients (NASP).
- Address systemic barriers that obstruct the academic success of minority and low income students as evidenced by assessments (CSJ).
- Consider social, political, economic, and cultural factors that may impact how assessment results are interpreted and utilized (ACAAC).
- Recognize when client assessment data reflect responses to systematic or internalized oppression (ACAAC).
- Collaborate with potential allies to help individuals and vulnerable groups access needed resources and confront barriers to their well-being (ACAAC).
- Recognize in themselves and others the subtle racial, class, gender, cultural and other biases they may bring to their work and the way these biases influence decision-making, treatment planning, service delivery, and treatment outcomes for clients (NASP).
- Promote fairness and social justice in the communities they serve (NASP).
- Consider sexual orientation and gender identity among the core characteristics that influence clients' perceptions of themselves and their worlds (ALGBTIC).
- Assess LGBT clients without presuming that sexual orientation or gender identity is directly related to their presenting problems (ALGBTIC).
- Be prepared to face ethical dilemmas with the appraisal of transgender people, especially because many assessment tools will not have been normed on this population group (ALGBTIC).
- Seek out the perspectives and personal narratives of the transgender community as essential components to fully understanding appropriate assessment of these individuals (ALGBTIC).
- Have training and expertise in the use of traditional assessment and testing instruments including technical aspects of the instruments as well as cultural limitations to use test instruments for the welfare of culturally different clients. (AMCD)
- Seek a competent bilingual translator with cultural knowledge and appropriate professional background when needed to assure cultural identity is acknowledged throughout administration of assessments (AMCD).
- Take responsibility for interacting in the language requested by the client and, if not feasible, make appropriate referrals (AMCD).

- Utilize a problem solving framework for addressing the needs of English language learners (NASP).
- Be knowledgeable of potential bias in assessment instruments and use procedures recognizing cultural and linguistic characteristics of the clients. (AMCD).
- Take reasonable measures to ensure the proper use of psychological and assessment techniques by persons under their supervision (CRCC).
- Recognize when administering and scoring assessments how the assessment process may disempower individuals and vulnerable groups (ACAAC).
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that the results of assessments given are not misused by others (AART).
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that all assessment and related data are kept confidential according to the policies and procedures of the professional setting in which assessments are administered (AART).
- Are responsible for the appropriate applications, scoring, interpretations, and use of assessment instruments relevant to the needs of clients, whether they score and interpret such assessments themselves or use technology or other services (CRCC).
- Do not use data or results from assessments that are obsolete or outdated and make every effort to prevent the misuse of obsolete measures and assessment data by others (CRCC).

**SELECTION OF ASSESSMENTS: CONTENT AND PURPOSE, NORMING,  
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

*Culturally competent professional counselors have a duty to select assessments which will address the increasing diversity of our client population in order to effectively provide appropriate assessment and diagnostic techniques.*

Professional Counselors should:

- Be knowledgeable of the technical aspects of assessments, including the importance of reliability, validity, measurement error and scores and norms when selecting assessments (RUST).
- Recognize on cultural identity on test administrations and interpretations, and place test results in proper perspective with other relevant factors (AART, CRCC, and RUST).
- Understand what the selected assessment measures, the recommended assessment users and uses, and the psychometric strengths and limitations of the test (AART, CODE, and RUST).
- Understand the development process per assessment to ascertain its technical quality and content domains to be tested and not tested (CODE & RUST).

- Evaluate representative samples of test questions or practice tests, directions, answer sheets, manuals, and score reports before selecting a test (CODE).
- Understand how to select and utilize appropriate modified forms of tests for test takers with disabilities who need special accommodations (CODE & RUST).
- Understand how to review information on the performance of test takers of diverse subgroups, using appropriate norming information to ensure adequate subgroup analyses (ACAAC & RUST).
- Select assessments that help identify client needs, strengths and resources for client empowerment and self-advocacy (ACAAC, TBPG).
- Understand how language acquisition history impacts selection of assessments (RUST & TBPG).
- Select instruments with which they are trained and are competent to use (ETHICS; AART & RUST).
- Abide by the ethical standards for the use of technology-assisted test interpretations and the use of such assessments regardless of administration, scoring, interpretation, or reporting method and ensure that persons under their supervision are aware of these standards (CRCC).

### **ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING OF ASSESSMENTS**

*Culturally competent professional counselors recognize the challenges inherent in assessment of persons and seek to provide administration and scoring of assessment to clients respecting age, gender, ability, race, ethnic group, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic background, or other personal characteristics.*

Professional Counselors should:

- Utilize only those testing and assessment services for which they have been trained and are competent (CRCC & RUST).
- Obtain, understand and follow all established protocol for administering standardized test instruments (CODE & RUST).
- Obtain, understand and follow all procedures for assessment of persons who need special accommodations or those with diverse linguistic backgrounds and arrange for a qualified interpreter if clients have difficulty understanding the language for informed consent or other procedural directives (AART & CODE).
- Become familiar with test question format and procedures for answering test questions as well as understand additional materials or needed equipment (CODE & RUST).
- Understand the nature and importance of test security, copyright, and ramifications of cheating and maintain confidentiality of scores using adequate security procedures (CODE & RUST).

- Be knowledgeable with procedures, materials and directions for scoring tests and/or monitoring scoring process to ensure accuracy of test scores, promptly reporting any errors and communicating corrected results promptly (CODE & RUST).
- Administer assessments only within the context of a defined professional relationship and to better understand and serve the needs of their clients (AART).
- Be cautious when using tests for purposes other those recommended by test developers (CODE).
- Obtain informed consent from clients regarding the nature and purpose of assessment methods to be used and ensure that the test taker has the opportunity to become familiar with test question format (AART & CODE).

### **INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

*Culturally competent professional counselors acknowledge the importance of social justice advocacy particularly in interpretation and communication of assessment results with diverse populations.*

Professional counselors should:

- Understand the normative groups, technical information, benefits and limitations of assessments when interpreting results (CODE & RUST).
- Understand the impact of modified test or modified test administration when interpreting assessment results (CODE).
- Be knowledgeable about performance standards and passing scores to avoid use of stigmatizing labels (CODE).
- Utilize a wide variety of assessment results and individualized information to provide a holistic appraisal of clients (CODE).
- Provide information to clients about cultural identity and the impact on assessment results and interpretation of the client's evaluation (CODE).
- Communicate appropriate test results clearly and positively to the client or client's legal representative in an easily understandable manner (CODE & CRCC).
- Create a strong foundational evaluation that will be used to develop a treatment plan and construct a report that accurately reflects the uniqueness of the individual client. (RUST & TBPG).
- Convey honest, accurate information with integrity, empathy and respect for confidentiality and use language that all members of the evaluation team understand (RUST & TBPG).
- Understand the influence of culture, background, and individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender or gender identity, cognitive capabilities, social-emotional skills, developmental level, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual and gender orientation, disability,

chronic illness, language, socioeconomic status) when designing and implementing interventions to achieve counseling outcomes (NASP).

- Consider in the differential diagnosis process how the effects of stigma, oppression, and discrimination contribute to psychological symptoms, but do not necessarily indicate pathology for transgender individuals (ALGBTIC).
- Recognize, attend, and work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory contexts in conducting evaluations, interpretations and providing interventions, and should develop sensitivity to issues of oppression, sexism, heterosexism, elitism, ability and racism. (AMCD and ALGBTIC)
- Explain the nature and purpose of assessment and specific use of results in an understandable, developmental level of the client or the client's legally authorized representative and ensure that results are not misused by others (AART, CRCC & RUST).
- Consider personal or cultural context of clients, level of understanding of test results and impact of results on clients (CRCC & RUST).
- Release assessment data in which clients are identified only with the consent of clients or their legal representatives, or court order and only released to professionals recognized as qualified to interpret the data (CRCC).
- Understand the impact of recommendations involving individuals that are based on assessment results, and have a thorough understanding of educational, psychological, and career measurements, including validation criteria, assessment research, and guidelines for assessment development and use (CRCC).
- Consider other factors present in the client's situation (e.g., disability or cultural factors) before making any recommendations, when relevant (CRCC).

### **TRAINING IN THE USES OF ASSESSMENTS**

*Culturally competent professional counselors have a duty to receive training in the uses of assessments addressing the increasing diversity of our clients in order to effectively provide appropriate assessment and diagnostic techniques.*

Professional counselors should:

- Understand the tests characteristics and receive guidance on the levels of skills, knowledge and training required to administer (CODE & RUST).
- Understand individual and group approaches to multicultural assessment (CACREP).
- Receive training in how assessment data can be used to develop client action plans to make systemic changes that benefit disadvantaged individuals and vulnerable groups (ACAAC).

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- Receive training in how to inform the general public related to macro-systemic factors that both benefit and hinder the development of individuals and vulnerable groups (ACAAC).
- Gain knowledge in how to collaborate with allies and policy makers to develop assessment practices that empower clients (ACAAC).
- Engage in continuous education to increase knowledge of assessment and enhance job performance (TBPG).

### **References**

*Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education (CODE)*. (2004). Washington, DC: Joint Committee on Testing Practices. (Mailing Address: Joint Committee on Testing Practices, Science Directorate, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242.

Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests (**RUST**).

Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association (**ETHICS**).

Counselors for Social Justice Competencies (**CSJ**).

Texas Professional Educational Diagnosticians Board of Registry: Best Practice Guidelines (**TBPG**).

National Association of School Psychologists' Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services (2010) (**NASP**).

Lewis, Arnold, House, and Toporek (2003). ACA Advocacy Competencies (**ACAAC**).

ALGBTIC - Competencies for Counseling LGBTQ Clients and Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients (**ALGBTIC**).

Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) - AMCD Multicultural Counseling Competencies (1996). (**AMCD**)

Counselors for Social Justice Position Statement on Academic Achievement Gap and Equity on Educational Services (**CSJ**)

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (**CRCC**)

American Art Therapy Association (**AART**)

National Career Development Association (**NCDA**)

National Board for Certified Counselors (**NBCC**)

National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (**NAADC**)

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