

# REPORT

## OF THE ACPE PRESIDENTIAL TASK GROUP ON TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION AUGUST, 2006

**Background:** When the Pilot Certification Project was being formulated for implementation, a number of leaders in ACPE voiced their support for the project while suggesting to the President and the Board that the scope of the challenges to the organization in “raising up its future supervisors” was broader than that being addressed by the pilot, and that additional reflection and creativity was indicated. In response, President Art Schmidt appointed a task group for the purpose of studying the challenges and opportunities, and to make a report at the end of two years offering recommendations for positive change. The goal was to make recommendations that would improve certification outcomes and supervisory competency while streamlining the training (referred to as “supervisory education” in this report) and certification processes.

**Process Review Summary:** The task group appointed includes Mildred Best, Jim Gibbons, Mary Beth Hayes, Peter Keese, Michelle Oberwise-Lacock, Kelli Shepard, and Tim Thorstenson, Chair. The group prioritized broad reflective conversations with ACPE leaders, supervisors, students and stakeholders. It conferenced monthly to attempt to assess current needs and challenges, to share insight and information, and to attempt to discern best practices in supervisory education and certification. The group recognized early on that advancement would come only following careful and thoughtful consensus building, first with one another and then with supervisors working directly with training and certifying our future practitioners. Training curricula was gathered and collated, certification data was studied, processes of other cognate groups was carefully considered. Input was sought from ACPE leaders and commission members and dialogues occurred at the regional and sub-regional level. Members of the task group learned from and with each other, and came to understand that the following conclusions and recommendations will, in turn, require further reflection and more dialogue. We see this work to be a beginning phase in a longer process of organizational improvement that will prompt still further study and adaptation.

**Conclusions:** We have come to recognize that the ACPE is an organization rich in resources. We are gifted with thoughtful, insightful and visionary leaders. We recognize that we have made great strides in our relatively short history at generating professionalism and effectiveness in clinical ministry, filling our institutions with highly skilled practitioners and vital leaders in all aspects of ministry. We have excelled at passing on the accrued wisdom of our foremothers and fathers, while also being adept at “reading the landscape” and seeking ways to continue as a vital and collaborative social science while evolving and growing in our practice of education. We have rich heritage and a strong vision.

We are also aware of two significant challenges to the future of our organization. The first significant challenge is the changing landscape of American religion and its evolving role in culture and society. We note that religious expression has become more diverse and that health care institutions, in particular, have given rise to new – and some would say competing - forms of spiritual care, leading to experiences of marginalization and decline in authority. This has given rise to new and differing expressions in curricula, theories, and supervisory approaches. We recognize the complexity of these issues, and note the need for ongoing reflection, dialogue and strategic planning, being grateful for the current efforts to broaden and deepen this work.

The second significant challenge is that our organization is made up of volunteers who are often consumed by their daily work and responsibilities in complex and changing institutions. It has been difficult to be innovative and adaptive to the evolution of religious expression as an organization when individual work demands have been high. And the continuing shifting in the organization of health care itself adds to the sense of vulnerability. Much of the professional growth and development that happens in our practitioners happens in “silos,” that is, within the culture of the individual workplace and without the cross-fertilization and collaboration with other practitioners that allows our organization to grow in common practices. While some supervisors benefit from being in large training centers with multiple colleagues, we note that many supervisors operate in relative geographic isolation. We also note that many CPE programs operate under budgetary stress, with varying and evolving degrees of institutional commitment. While our organization excels at developing thoughtful standards to guide supervisory practice, it remains a challenge to embed the standards into actual practice, given how practices evolve differently from center to center and supervisor to supervisor, and how processes for peer review and continuing education reflect wide variance. And while our regional structure and use of the role of Regional Director is experienced as helpful and supportive of training centers and supervisors, it has only limited effect on the decision-making of institutional administrators during this time of rapid change in health care. Educational programs in other non-health care institutions are also facing significant budget pressures. All of this contributes significantly to the difficulty in the ACPE of defining *best practices* in supervision and in supervisory education, and to the challenge of moving the organization toward their adoption and use.

These dynamics appear to have particular effect on our processes for educating and certifying supervisors. We have learned that because our educational methods are often developed autonomously, and because they often reflect diverse practices across the organization, there are often differing expectations between those who provide supervisory education and those who certify. We note that the language, concepts and methodologies valued by the volunteers who work in certification is often different from the expectations (and understanding of the standards) of both supervisory educators and candidates. This has unfortunately led to too many painful and conflicted experiences. One systemic result may be that our methods of evaluation of supervisory candidates and associate supervisors tend to focus more on subjective assessments of personal integration than on professional competency. Both are essential, but the feedback from those who have experienced the certification process as students and as educating supervisors suggests we have erred on the side of subjectivity, with an “oral tradition” that is difficult to comprehend. Our learning is

that as an organization we have not yet brought *personal and professional integration* and *supervisory competencies* together in a balanced, definable process of education and certification that can be easily grasped, measured, and validated.

A significant summary theme is our learning that we are currently unable as an organization to ensure that an integrated ministry professional will be certified following a prescribed supervisory education process. We take pride in the fact that we are an organization that finds its very identity in an experience-reflection model of on-the-job *process* education. We value our uniqueness and the quality of experience we provide to our students. The supervisors who provide supervisory education and those who devote time and energy to the certification process do so with integrity, skill and dedication. However, we recognize that our commitment to our stakeholders, to our academic partners, to the judicatories, organizations and institutions we serve – and perhaps most of all to our future supervisors-in-training - requires that we make our desired outcomes achievable in a defined time period with reasonable processes for their attainment that are clear and definable and to which we hold ourselves accountable.

In particular, we have drawn the following conclusions:

***Regarding supervisory education and curricula:***

- as an organization, we reflect rich diversity in the spirituality, theologies, and supervisory theories and practices of our supervisors
- our supervisors who offer supervisory education, our theory paper readers, and our certifiers consistently demonstrate high quality in their efforts and an ethic of dedicated service; the challenges are cultural and systemic, and do not negatively reflect on our supervisors and volunteers
- we reflect a broad range of practices in our educational theories, methods, and curricula
- our educating supervisors and programs function with a high level of autonomy without clear avenues for cross-fertilization and collaboration
- continuing education and professional development processes for educating supervisors are limited
- our training centers reflect varying degrees of effectiveness in preparing students for certification, and a wide variety of organizational commitment and financial support
- the measurements of “quality” supervisory education remain elusive
- we have not yet developed effective processes and standards for identifying and supporting supervisors who provide supervisory education
- we have no consensus on what constitutes “readiness” for supervisory education
- we do not have a standardized core training curriculum
- we benefit from the standards; we are burdened by not having competency measures
- as an organization, we are currently unable to articulate a supervisory education process that will lead to professional certification as an ACPE supervisor
- we tend to reflect a paternalistic, integration-based certification model rather than a collaborative, competency-based model

- we are unable to ensure that an integrated ministry professional will be certified following a prescribed process of supervisory education
- the “peer group” or “seminar on supervision” structures utilized sub-regionally for supervisors-in-training vary widely in both procedures and effectiveness

***Regarding theory papers:***

- there is broad acknowledgement of the value of theory paper requirement *and* there is clear evidence that theory papers required of supervisory candidates are a significant stumbling block for a large percentage of students in supervisory education
- our methods for evaluating theory papers do not provide for consistency, and the subjectivity in the assessment criteria can be problematic as well as valuable.
- the volunteer reader system results in rich input and guidance for the student; however, problems of timeliness, consistency, and confusion persist

***Regarding certification:***

- while our certifiers provide high quality and dedicated assessment, our standards for certification are open to subjective interpretation and often reflect differing understandings
- dominant and emerging concepts in supervisory education lack articulation and uniform understanding
- the certification experience is sometimes surprising and painful and is occasionally perceived by candidates as failing to reflect the core values of our organization
- the *presenter’s report*, while typically reflecting a high level of insight and skill on the part of the writer, remains a tool of arguable value that demands a great deal of work from one person. At its best, the report clarifies and focuses the competencies being assessed, and yet it often tends to unintentionally create bias and can contribute to future misconceptions
- we do not have a process in place to assess the qualifications of supervisors to serve on the Certification Commission, many of whom have no experience providing supervisory education
- the certification process is often experienced as subjective and adversarial, without definable processes for advocacy and mentoring of candidates
- current certification processes are not transparent and afford little opportunity for self-learning and process improvement
- the relationship between the Certification Commission, the Ethics Commission, and the Accreditation Commission regarding appeals, complaints, and competency issues is undefined and problematic
- no avenue exists for the certification subcommittee to coordinate further training with the training supervisor
- the “peer review” process in the ACPE is not structured to support the growth and development of our educating supervisors and no other processes have been formally identified

We understand that the above conclusions have their greatest value when they serve as a springboard for further thoughtfulness and careful planning and action. We also understand

that they are not exclusive, and that other conclusions may be drawn by persons with different roles or experiences in ACPE. Further conclusions may be developed and the above conclusions may be changed as we move toward final recommendations which, in turn, we anticipate will evolve and change over time. We see ourselves as a learning organization, and understand that we best serve one another through thoughtful, intentional and reflective planning.

**Recommendations:** It is evident from the above analysis that the goals of streamlining the supervisory education process and ensuring attainable and measurable outcomes will only be met with significant structural process improvement efforts. We believe a cultural shift in the supervisory education and certification components of our organization is necessary, toward objective and quantifiable competency assessments and definable measurements of personal and professional integration. We believe that the education and development of our future supervisors needs to be organized around a universal core curriculum, definable best practice standards for supervisors who provide supervisory education, and clear competency standards for candidates. We believe that the ACPE needs to assure consistency, standardization and expertise in its certification processes *or* move toward professional certification processes used in other parallel professions. And we believe the supervisory education experience itself needs to move toward a collaborative, mentoring model that supports both personal integration and professional competency development. At the same time, we recognize that the subjectivity that is inherent in our education and certification processes is of high value and contributes both richness and depth to our unique organizational culture. Indeed, we find ourselves wanting to protect the subjectivity of our individual educators and certifiers while still promoting consistency in our interactions, assessments and evaluations. In specific, we make the following recommendations:

***Regarding Supervisory Education and Curricula, we recommend that ACPE:***

- strengthen admission criteria to supervisory education by defining and clarifying pastoral competency standards and measurements. While it may be ideal to have persons applying for admission to supervisory education be board certified by the Association of Professional Chaplains, we recognize how that requirement could complicate and unnecessarily delay the supervisory certification process. At the same time, we recommend crafting a collaborative partnership with APC to develop uniform competency measurements for admission to supervisory education
- direct the Certification and Standards Commissions to collaboratively formalize and standardize the “consultation to assess readiness” in terms of membership, expectations (both standards and written materials) and outcomes (to include a specific plan for training) and require that it be convened *prior to* acceptance of any student into supervisory education, with documentation going forward to the regional certification committee
- develop a core training curriculum, to be utilized by every training center, to include identified readings from a standardized bibliography, explication of dominant theories

of psychology, human development, learning and supervision, and explication of leading supervisory methodologies. We recommend this outcome be achieved by:

- appointing a representative task group, drawing from supervisors in successful supervisory education programs, to draft a core curriculum
  - instituting a process of study and dialogue at regional and national levels to identify best resources and practices for such a curriculum
  - printing and circulating a draft document for study, feedback and input, and
  - developing appropriate corresponding standards and expectations
- strengthen competencies and accountabilities of supervisors who provide supervisory education by
    - holding a colloquium to identify competencies and methodologies for successful supervisory education and publishing key articles and presentations
    - tracking successful outcomes and gathering data over a five-year period to identify and establish best practices in supervisory education
    - requiring that all supervisors providing supervisory education have previously supervised both Level I and Level II CPE
    - requiring a consultation for all supervisors who want to *begin* to offer supervisory education. We recommend that the consultation be convened by the chair of the regional certification committee, and that it include at least two supervisors who are providing or have provided supervisory education, one of whom is a member of the certification committee. We recommend that the Certification Commission work collaboratively with the Standards Commission to define materials to be submitted by the supervisor to the members of the consultation committee
    - requiring that supervisors who have not previously had a supervisor-in-training attain certification (whether new to supervisory education or having previously provided it without success) enter into a mentoring/coaching process with another training supervisor for a period of two years of active supervisory education, the details to be developed by the Certification Commission
    - invigorating the peer review process, in both substance and frequency, with a focus on supervisory education for all supervisors providing supervisory education
    - requiring that centers with multiple supervisors designate a supervisor to be accountable for supervisory training
    - requiring an annual self-assessment of supervisory education, including articulation of the learning issues and goals and an assessment of the development and progress of all students in supervisory education, by the supervisor in charge of supervisory education, as a component of the annual report to the regional accreditation committee
    - having the national and regional organizations of ACPE regularly offer dedicated continuing education for training supervisors at annual meetings
  - standardize formats and develop greater consistency for evaluations at all levels of CPE

***Regarding Theory Papers, we recommend that ACPE:***

- identify and distribute examples of best practices in theory paper writing to all supervisors providing supervisory education. (We appreciate the model in use by the Pacific Region of posting exemplary papers on the regional website)
- change the standards for the theology paper to better reflect spiritual integration amidst theological and cultural diversity, to include core spiritual concepts and desired outcomes in CPE students
- change the standards for the personality paper to better reflect concepts of human development identified in the core supervisory curriculum, including theories of shame and anxiety, psycho-dynamic theory, narrative theory, cognitive-behavioral and dialectical-behavioral theories, etc.
- change the education paper to focus on a theory for teaching and enhancing human learning and on personal and professional integration and development as professionals in ministry
- require that the theology paper be included in papers required for Supervisory Candidacy, to be read and evaluated by the regional certification review team (CRT)
- require that the personality and education theory papers be submitted along with other required papers to the members of the Certification Commission CRT who will assess the candidate's competency in the appearance requesting certification as ACPE Supervisor (see below regarding Associate Supervisor status)
- require that all written material, including the two theory papers, be submitted five months prior to the scheduled Certification Commission appearance date; that one month be given to the committee to assess the materials according to a scoring grid (adapted from CAPPE); that the results of the scoring grid be provided to the candidate, including specific recommendations for satisfying the standards; that, if necessary, the candidate be given sixty days for a re-write and re-submission of papers; that the committee again have one month to assess the materials, and that, if the papers do not meet standards upon second submission, the appearance before the Certification Commission be canceled
- create standards and identify best practices and uniform methodologies for theory paper readers, including a standard scoring and feedback form. Have the Certification Commission conduct an annual review of theory paper feedback forms to assess consistency and professionalism

***Regarding Certification, we recommend that ACPE:***

- change the standards for the Supervisory Candidacy committee to reflect an emphasis on personal and professional integration, putting the emphasis on pastoral functioning at the committee to assess readiness.
- eliminate the Associate Supervisor level, effectively reducing the certification process by one step
- require a defined peer review for all new supervisors two years following certification, details and accountabilities to be developed by the Certification Commission
- embrace the model of the Certification Pilot Project to provide consistency of membership and a component of feedback and mentoring to the certification process. This would mean that the Supervisory Candidate committee appearance would become a function of the national Certification Commission rather than the regional committee. It would also mean that the membership of the Certification CRT would remain stable for both the Candidate and the ACPE Supervisor appearances
- have all materials submitted to a “verifier” in the national office as a first step in the committee process. Require verification of prerequisites and required materials prior to convening a CRT
- utilize a grid scoring system (yet to be developed) for all written materials submitted to the Certification Commission, have the members of the certification CRTs read all materials, and eliminate the presenter’s report. Materials would be “scored” individually, then scores would be collated and consensus developed among all three readers via a telephone conference
- downsize the Certification Commission CRTs to three members, one of whom would represent the regional certification committee. Seek to have the majority of members of the Certification Commission be persons who have provided or are providing supervisory education. And seek to maintain rich diversity and cultural and ethnic representation on the Commission and on the CRTs
- have the *consultation to assess readiness* and all candidacy extension committees become a function of the regional certification committee, with details to be developed by the Certification Commission. Have regional CRTs downsized to three members
- provide thorough continuing education to all persons serving in a certification role, with the education structured to promote a certification culture that is transparent, competency-based, learning-driven and collaborative.
- direct that each new certifier sit in on at least two CRTs as an observer prior to actually serving in a certification role

- direct that the Certification Commission work towards greater transparency and consistency by developing methods for process improvement, self-learning and accountability to standards, e.g. video taping and objective observers
- provide the option of having students meet the Certification Commission CRT for Candidacy at their home institution or worksite; have the institution pay the first \$1250 of the CRT's expenses

We see certification as a critical and integrative role in our organization, and think it would be wise to work toward developing a consistent group of highly trained individuals to provide a consistent and clearly definable certification experience. While a case can be made for employing outside certifiers, we believe that instituting the changes proposed here will allow us to responsibly continue our historic practice of certification by professional peers. This practice has yielded great growth and learning for ACPE, and is a foundational and symbolic aspect of ACPE's culture and community life.

**Summary:** We feel privileged to be a part of a learning organization that values reflective and interactive processes, that seeks to draw from personal experiences and diverse perspectives, and that desires to speak both pastorally and prophetically to the suffering and struggle inherent in the human condition. We also recognize that there are significant threats to our future, both as individual practitioners and as an organization. We therefore believe it essential to change and grow as our supporting institutions respond to economic and societal pressures and as the cultures in which we work shift and evolve. We recognize that our future depends in large part on the adaptability, integration and professionalism of our practitioners and on our ability to educate and support our next generation of supervisors. Essential to this goal, in our minds, is the process of moving toward a competency-based model that elevates measurable outcomes and best practices while preserving creativity and individual uniqueness. As we do so, we believe our potential to be vital partners in theological education and spiritual care well into the future will remain strong. We believe the above reflections and recommendations will well serve ACPE by both streamlining our supervisory education and certification processes and by equipping our future supervisors to be effective teachers and leaders.