



SAIGE endorses the policy statement proposed by SAIGE-MD, titled *Equitable Access to Competent Counseling: Mandatory Education on Counseling Transgender and Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals, Families, Groups, and Communities from an Intersectional Perspective* (2020). SAIGE agrees that without mandatory education on the unique experiences of transgender and nonbinary (TNB) individuals from an intersectional perspective and advocacy to depathologize gender diversity, the counseling community will continue to be complicit in perpetuating past injustices and abuses against a population that suffers from disproportionately high suicide rates and other societally-induced symptoms.

The ethical obligation of the counseling profession under the ACA Code to provide equitable access to competent counseling is heightened by the role of the mental health professionals in pathologizing transgender persons and by the intentional failure of counselor educators to provide training on the skill sets needed to provide competent care to them. Beginning with the publication of DSM-III in 1980, there is a 40-year history of stigmatizing transgender persons by mislabeling them as mentally ill in the DSMs. Gender identity continues to be categorized as a mental disorder in DSM-5 (2013). Rather than serving as a beacon of light, medical and mental health professionals legitimized societal prejudice against the LGBT community by first categorizing “homosexuals” as mentally ill in DSM-I (1952) and DSM-II (1968) and then turning this inflammatory spotlight onto the gender diverse. Since transphobia continues to pervade the public discourse, counselors, particularly those who are both cisgender and heterosexual, cannot “escape the grip of genderism in larger societal contexts” (McCullough et al., 2017) without training and guidance.

SAIGE’s goal in producing *Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* (adopted by the ACA in 2009), was to provide counselors the tools to serve TNB clients and their loved ones competently. The *Competencies* recognized that counseling and other helping professions have historically “compounded the discrimination of transgender individuals by being insensitive, inattentive, uninformed, and inadequately trained and supervised to provide culturally proficient services to transgender individuals and their loved ones.” Research conducted throughout the decade following adoption of the *Competencies* demonstrates that these problems persist. It is eminently clear that providing free educational materials to the counseling community was a necessary first step, but wholly insufficient if educators fail to educate counselors-in-training and licensed counselors fail to obtain continuing education. To further redress injustices perpetrated against TNB persons, SAIGE strongly encourages licensed counselors, counselor educators, counselors-in-training, accreditations bodies, and licensing boards to take all affirmative steps within the scope of their authority in providing education specifically tailored to counseling TNB clients, requiring that accredited programs include this education, and advocating for legislation and administrative rules that mandate it.

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Cory J. Viehl

SAIGE President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Meagan McBride, PhD, LCSW".

Meagan McBride

SAIGE Public Policy Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Nadeau".

Elizabeth Nadeau, Esq.

SAIGE-MD