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## Letter From the Special Issue Editor

Megan Speciale  
*Palo Alto University*

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# Letter From the Special Issue Editor

Megan Speciale  
Palo Alto University

In the midst of the final drafting of the 2024 CACREP standards, this special issue is designed to call attention to the important role of sexuality across the CACREP specialty areas. Voices from across the counseling community have come together to create this special issue. Their contributions and perspective are shared here.

*Keywords:* counseling sexology, counseling, clinical mental health, future directions, commentary

In developing the first special issue of the *Journal of Counseling Sexology and Sexual Wellness*, our goal was to publish a set of commentaries supporting the clinical, research, and training priorities related to sexual wellness and intimacy across each of the entry-level specialized practice areas outlined by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The timing of this special issue coincides with the final drafting of the 2024 CACREP standards—which to date still fail to include competency standards related to sexuality, despite growing field-wide support for the inclusion of sexuality in counselor training programs.

Since the release of the 2016 Standards (CACREP, 2015), numerous scholars in counseling and related mental health fields have documented the myriad benefits of infusing sexuality-focused coursework and supervision opportunities into counseling training programs (Burnes, Singh, & Witherpoon, 2017). The deleterious effects of low or absent sexuality training opportunities have also been well-documented, including decreased competence and self-efficacy treating sexual issues, decreased awareness of the clinical impacts of sexual issues, and decreased training in necessary clinical broaching and bracketing skills related to sexual issues (Abbott, Vargas, & Santiago, 2022; Blount, Booth, Webb, & Liles, 2017; Dupkoski, Kelchner, & Haley, 2021; McCray, Whittaker, Wolfgang, Webb, & Ethridge, 2022). Put simply, graduate-level sexuality training enhances counselors' abilities to assess clients' sexual wellbeing comfortably and com-

petently, positioning counselors to approach the counseling process with a holistic focus integrative of issues related to sex, gender, intimacy, and relationships.

Currently, forty-eight states do not require sexuality training for counseling licensure and, as such, the exclusion of sexuality in counseling professional standards has significant implications for students' access and exposure to sexuality learning opportunities. If sexual health knowledge is not required for graduation and not required for licensure, it is likely that many counselors will not pursue this learning elsewhere. These training inconsistencies yield vast discrepancies across counselors' readiness and ability to conduct holistic, affirming, and evidence-based assessment and treatment of sexual issues—and our clients deserve better.

We recognize that many of our readers are students, educators, and practitioners housed in universities and within states that do not support and/or provide resources for the inclusion of sexuality training, and thus, the aim of this special issue is twofold: 1) To support educators with aspirations to include sexuality topics across existing coursework in the CACREP specialization areas of Addictions Counseling; Career Counseling; Clinical Mental Health Counseling; Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling; Rehabilitation Counseling; School Counseling; and Student Affairs and College Counseling and 2) To spark ideas for continued learning across the many intersections of the counseling profession and sexual wellness.

I offer my sincerest appreciation to the Editor of JCSSW, Dr. Robert Zeglin, and each of our contributing authors for their invaluable work on this much needed collection of commentaries.

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## Corresponding Author

Megan Speciale  
1791 Arastradero Rd  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
E: mspeciale@paloaltou.edu  
P: (800)818-6136

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