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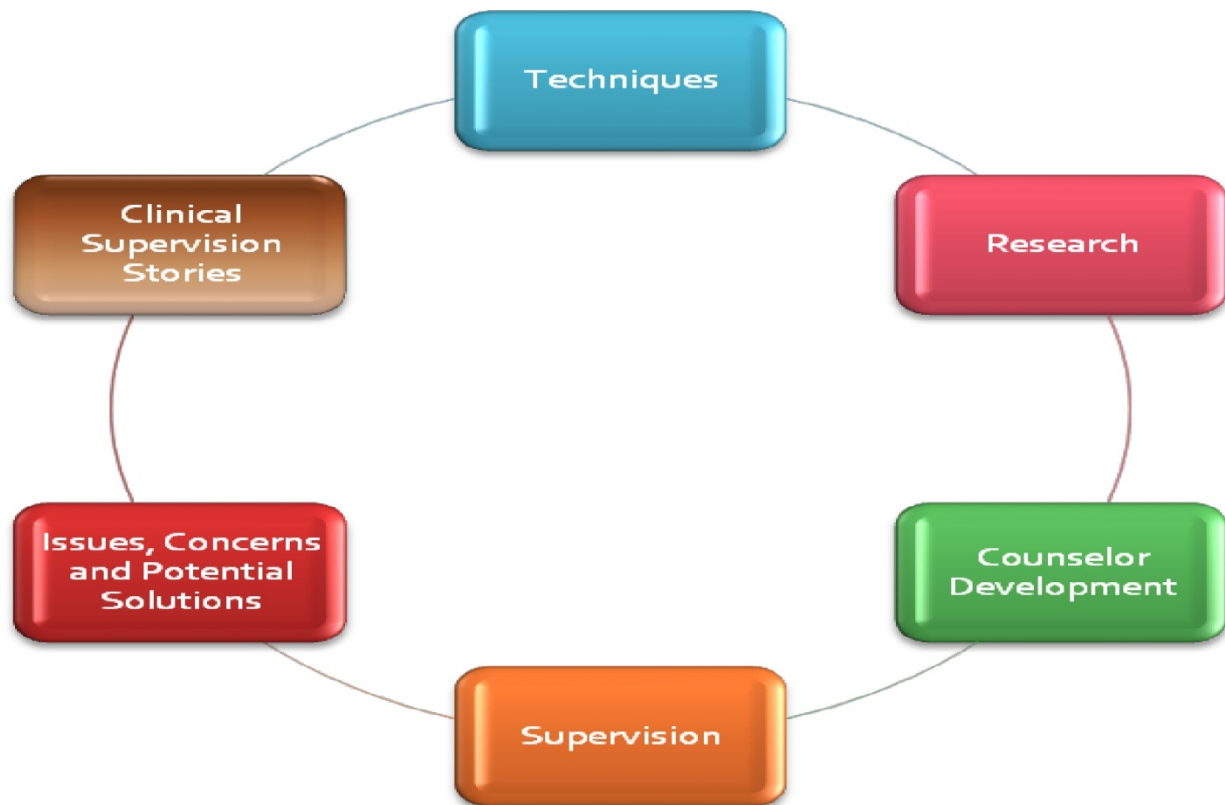
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# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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The mission of the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision* is to provide a high quality platform for research, theory and practices of counselor educators, counselor supervisors and professional counselors. We believe the journal chronicles current issues, concerns and potential solutions that enable counselors to continue to grow and develop as practitioners, educators and human beings. The journal publishes high-quality articles that have undergone a thorough and extensive blind peer-review.

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There are six general categories that help focus the content of the journal.

**Research.** These articles focus on research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) in counselor preparation, professional development, supervision, and professional practice.

**Techniques.** These articles focus on professional models for teaching empirically grounded techniques used by professional counselors, as well as teaching and supervision techniques used in professional preparation programs.

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**Issues, Concerns and Potential Solutions.** These articles identify and discuss significant issues facing the field of professional counseling with particular focus on issues in counselor preparation, professional development, and supervision. Exploration of these topics should include elaboration of the concerns as well as an examination of potential remedies or effective responses to the issues.

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# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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## Editorial

Edina Renfro-Michel

## Featured Articles

### Research

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*Returning Counselor Education Doctoral Students: Issues of Retention, Attrition, and Perceived Experiences*

David Burkholder

*Increasing Academic Achievement and College-Going Rates for Latina/o English Language Learners: A Survey of School Counselor Interventions*

Amy Cook, Rachele Pérusse, & Eliana D. Rojas

### Counselor Education Practice

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*The Application of Ethical Decision-Making and Self-Awareness in the Counselor Education Classroom*

Amanda M. Evans, Dana Heller Levitt, & Stacy Henning

*Turning Counseling Students into Researchers: Enhancing Quantitative Research Courses with an Experiential Learning Activity*

Mark C. Rehfuss & Dixie D. Meyer

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# Editorial

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In this edition of JCPS we included articles focusing on research and practice in counselor education, counseling and supervision. As per the mission of the journal, we welcome all submissions in the following categories: research, techniques, counselor development, supervision issues, informed practice, clinical supervisor's stories and book reviews related to counselor education and supervision.

We have two articles that focus on empirical research. Burkholder's article focuses on counselor education, while Cook, Pérusse and Rojas provide research for school counselor training. Burkholder used a qualitative, phenomenological research design to examine the experiences of voluntarily departed counselor education doctoral students. While investigating the shared themes of this population, it is apparent that faculty interactions significantly affect students and may have the effect of increasing retention rates in doctoral programs. Cook, Pérusse and Rojas investigated school counselor interventions targeted at increasing high school graduation rate for Latina/o students. Many interventions currently used can increase graduation rates, and the authors highlight specific interventions for the training of school counselors. Both of these articles add significant contributions to fields with a paucity of research.

Our practice articles provide counselor educators with specific examples of activities to increase students learning. Evans, Levitt and Henning provide counselor educators with an overview of ethical decision-making models, and a discussion on the integration of self-awareness into these models. The authors continue with specific examples for supervisors and counselor educators to utilize with counselors-in-training. Rehfuss and Meyer detail the integration of a semester-long group experiential research activity. Within the article are instructions on how to introduce the group activity, provide feedback, and implement week-by-week lesson plans.

As editor, I want to thank all of the dedicated reviewers who responded quickly to everything asked of them, and helped to produce high quality manuscripts for JCPS. I also thank my wonderful Editorial Assistants: Jonathan Mazza, Jennifer Midura, and Jessica Spera. They spend endless hours organizing the process, working with reviewers and authors, editing articles, and putting everything together. Additionally, I thank the NARACES Board for giving me the opportunity to continue to share practical research and knowledge with our members by appointing me as editor of the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*. I want to especially thank Dr. Larry Burlew for his mentoring, enabling me to produce this issue as sole editor.

Edina Renfro-Michel, Editor

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# Returning Counselor Education Doctoral Students: Issues of Retention, Attrition, and Perceived Experiences

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David Burkholder

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A phenomenological research design was utilized to illuminate the experiences of counselor education doctoral students who had voluntarily departed from study and successfully returned. No studies exist in the counselor education literature examining this phenomenon. Themes derived from the data suggest a common experience across participants, including the salient nature of leaving and returning to study, the importance of faculty-student interactions, and that departure is informed by personal factors and academic culture. The findings have implications for student retention and attrition, as well as counseling departments, counseling faculty, and counselor education doctoral students.

*Keywords:* retention, attrition, doctoral students, student departure, academic culture

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Colleges and universities around the United States invest millions of dollars each year attracting and recruiting potential students at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Stover, 2005). Many doctoral programs in the United States offer their students monthly stipends and tuition remission. Despite this financial support, high rates of doctoral student attrition have persisted for the past 40 years (Lovitts, 2001). Although a precise figure has proven elusive, estimates across disciplines (education, engineering, humanities, sciences, mathematics, and social sciences) have been placed between 40 and 70% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006). In addition to the large financial losses, low retention rates reflect poorly on the quality and credibility of the academic institution. Retaining students has increasingly become the duty of the academic institution (Stover, 2005), and high student attrition is no longer a mark of

academic rigor but “a sign of doing something wrong” (Richmond, 1986, p. 92).

The financial, professional, and personal costs of attrition to the doctoral student are immense. Many doctoral students who depart from study have significant debt from student loans, accept less esteemed jobs as a result of diminished self-esteem, and experience emotional consequences such as depression, anxiety, and hopelessness (Lovitts, 2001). Faculty members are negatively affected as they invest time and energy in their doctoral students through teaching, academic advising, and mentoring (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Although student retention has been placed at the forefront of higher education issues, no consensus for improving retention is present in the literature, the doctoral student attrition rate remains high, and most research has focused on undergraduate, rather than doctoral, student retention (Berger & Lyons, 2005).



Current doctoral student retention and attrition research examining the disciplines of geology (Golde, 2005), biology (Golde, 2005), history (Golde, 2005), English (Golde, 2005), and counselor education (Cusworth, 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009) has been qualitative and focused on the experiences of doctoral students attempting to persist to degree completion (Golde, 2005; de Valero, 2001). Golde (2005) conducted a study interviewing doctoral students who had withdrawn from study at the same university. Reasons for departure included poor fit between advisor and student, isolation of the student from the department, and a mismatch of expectations between the student and the department. Similar reasons for departure were articulated by Nerad and Miller (1996), who interviewed doctoral students who had left study and cited reasons of poor faculty advisor-student relationships, lack of financial support, and “a chilly departmental climate” (p. 71). De Valero (2001) conducted a study asking doctoral students and faculty what factors had a positive effect on degree completion. De Valero (2001) reported financial support, doctoral student-faculty advisor relationship, doctoral student participation in department activities, and peer support as factors positively impacting degree completion.

The studies by Cusworth (2001), Protivnak and Foss (2009), Hoskins and Goldberg (2005), and Hughes and Kleist (2005) were the only counselor education studies encountered in an exhaustive online database search relating to student retention and attrition. Cusworth (2001) conducted a study interviewing first-year counseling doctoral students after acceptance and orientation into their doctoral program. Cusworth (2001) found doctoral students were distressed about lack of funding and departmental disorganization, interpersonal

difficulties with faculty and staff, and the quality of their relationship with their mentor. Protivnak and Foss (2009) explored the themes that influence the counselor education doctoral student experience. Protivnak and Foss (2009) surveyed 141 counselor education doctoral students from programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and non-CACREP programs ranging in age from 24 to 67 years. Using an open-ended survey and a qualitative analysis, Protivnak and Foss (2009) reported that departmental culture, mentoring, academics, support systems, and personal issues were variables that could both positively and negatively affect the doctoral student experience. Departmental culture included faculty being responsive to doctoral students (positive impact on doctoral student experience) and departmental politics (negative impact on doctoral student experience). Protivnak and Foss (2009) reported that doctoral students were positively impacted by mentoring from faculty, and academic factors influencing the experience of doctoral students included orientation programs, clear course requirements, and information regarding funding (all positive influences). Finally, the personal issues cited by doctoral students impacting their experiences included maintaining motivation to complete the Ph.D., lack of money, time management, and transitioning to the role of doctoral student (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) interviewed 33 counselor education doctoral students from CACREP accredited programs. The preponderance of participants were Caucasian females ( $n = 28$ ) enrolled in study full-time. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) examined what helps students persist to degree completion and reported a student-program match, including experiencing quality relationships with faculty members

and feeling a sense of community, was a factor in a doctoral student's decision to persist. Hughes and Kleist (2005) examined the first semester experiences of four counselor education doctoral students in CACREP accredited counselor education programs (three female students, one male student). Hughes and Kleist (2005) described the emotional turbulence students experienced when beginning study and suggested that counselor educators could affirm and empower doctoral students by giving them responsibilities that engender beliefs in their capabilities to be in doctoral study, such as teaching and presenting at conferences. Hughes and Kleist (2005) also suggested that doctoral students might benefit from better knowing what to expect from doctoral study, including the initial emotionality that comes with beginning a doctoral program.

No specific data exists regarding attrition rates in counselor education programs. However, the longstanding high doctoral student attrition rate across academic disciplines (Lovitts, 2001) indicates that it is unlikely counselor education programs are exempt from this problem, and more likely that counselor education programs experience undesirable levels of attrition. In addition, recent (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Golde, 2005; Nettles & Millett, 2006) and past (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nerad & Miller, 1997; Zwick, 1991) research has shown that the highest rates of attrition exist in the humanities and social sciences, the latter being the area most aligned with the curriculum of a Ph.D. in counselor education. Most doctoral programs in counselor education are housed within education departments, and doctoral student attrition rates in education are also problematically high (Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Considering this research, it would be ill

advised to dismiss inquiries investigating retention and attrition or to conclude that counselor education programs experience doctoral student attrition at uniquely low levels. Rather, it behooves counselor education programs to conduct research that examines this phenomenon.

Doctoral student attrition raises clear implications for programs in counselor education. The previously mentioned financial costs to the institution and the professional costs to the student are well documented (Gardner, 2008; Lovitts, 2001), as are the personal costs for faculty who invest in counselor education doctoral students (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Research aimed at reducing attrition can mitigate these consequences. The growing counselor education research pointing toward academic factors as powerful influences on the doctoral student experience (Cusworth, 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009) has demonstrated that counselor education doctoral programs can negatively impact doctoral students in a variety of ways, including departmental politics, being unresponsive to doctoral students, and not being clear about what doctoral study involves and what will be expected of them as doctoral students. Counselor education doctoral students are being trained to be future leaders of the counseling profession and advanced practitioners, pointing to the possibility of negative implications for the counseling profession as a whole and further reinforcing the value of this research.

Recent student retention and attrition research has targeted doctoral study, but counselor education research is sparse and focused on the experiences of doctoral students enrolled in doctoral study or permanently departed. The literature review revealed no studies focused on doctoral students who had departed from study and

successfully returned. Therefore, the guiding research question for this study was: What are the experiences of doctoral students who have voluntarily departed from programs in counselor education and successfully returned to the same programs? The purpose of this singular research is to provide a first glimpse into this phenomenon and capture the shared experiences and central themes of counselor education students who have departed and returned. It is hoped this research will inclusively examine student attrition, student retention, and student experiences in counselor education doctoral programs to provide new information to assist these programs in retaining and graduating their students.

### **Method**

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was chosen to illuminate the experiences of doctoral students who have voluntarily departed from programs in counselor education and successfully returned. The phenomenological approach analyzes all sides of a phenomenon and emphasizes descriptions of experiences and core meanings, not explanations, analyses, or generalizations (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this research is to capture the shared experiences and central themes of counselor education students who have departed from and returned to study. This purpose mirrors Kline's (2008, p. 212) assertion regarding the choice of phenomenology: "a study that has the purpose of describing the central theme that emerges from the lived experiences of persons who share an experience...would use phenomenological assumptions." Moustakas' description and Kline's rationale confirm the appropriateness of the phenomenological approach as the best match for the purpose of this study.

### **Sampling Procedure, Setting, and Sample**

After securing the institutional review board's approval, purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2005) identified participants for this study. Participants were chosen based on having experienced the phenomenon under investigation to supply information that could not have been obtained from other individuals. Participants were recruited for this research through an email sent to the counselor education and supervision electronic mailing list (CESNET-L). Participant criteria were stated within the email, namely that each participant needed to have experienced voluntarily departing from a doctoral program in counselor education and then to have successfully returned to that same program. Departing was defined as having formally withdrawn from study for at least one semester (Berger & Lyons, 2005). The retention literature does not address what constitutes a successful return to study; therefore, the researcher defined successfully returning as resuming study for at least one year with no additional departures. The researcher concluded that one year demonstrated serious intentions to finish and provided adequate time for reimmersion into doctoral study and to experience being a doctoral student again. Individuals who were interested in participating contacted this researcher by email, resulting in a sample of six women between the ages of 30 and 50, with a mean age of 36 years. The sample size of six was determined through saturation (Creswell, 2007). Saturation occurred when there was redundancy in participant responses during the interviews, and no additional insights into the phenomenon emerged. Participant six did not provide new insights beyond the previous five participants; therefore no more participants for this research were solicited. Participants will be referred to in the results

section as Anne, Gem, Daphne, Jackie, Alexis, and Diane (all names are fictitious). One participant was located in the southeastern United States (Gem), one participant was located in the south (Jackie), and four were located in the Midwest (Anne, Daphne, Alexis, and Diane). All six participants were enrolled in public universities with high research activity. Three participants estimated their doctoral programs consisted of between 20 and 30 students with eight faculty members (Anne, Gem, and Daphne), two participants estimated their doctoral programs consisted of between 15 and 25 students with eight faculty members (Jackie and Alexis), and one participant estimated their doctoral program consisted of 30 students with ten faculty members (Diane). Five described themselves as Caucasian; one described herself as “racially mixed” (Gem). One participant had recently completed her doctorate (Jackie) and the remaining five participants had passed comprehensive exams and were in various stages of working on their dissertations. Protivnak and Foss (2009) recommended that future research on doctoral student completion include a small qualitative sample with multiple interviews. Since the goal of phenomenology is to understand the essence of participants’ experiences and not to generalize results (Moustakas, 1994), this small sample size was appropriate.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Process**

Two rounds of individual interviews (conducted in person and via phone calls) and a follow-up email were utilized to (a) produce enough data to generate a comprehensive description, and (b) demonstrate adequate interaction with participants to establish credibility (Kline & Farrell, 2005). Both rounds of interviews with each participant lasted between 60 and

90 minutes. All participant interviews were audio recorded and immediately transcribed and checked for accuracy by this author. A follow-up email containing the final themes was sent to each participant after both rounds of individual interviews (typically one week after the last interview) to provide participants with an opportunity to review the final themes and provide feedback. Initial interview questions were guided by Moustakas’ (1994) recommendation that, “The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114). The preliminary questions were designed to prompt participants to provide a complete picture by discussing their experiences in their personal and academic lives while departing and returning, as well as the experiences of departing and returning. Specific questions were: (a) How would you describe the experience of departing? (b) How would you describe your program prior to your departure? (c) How would you describe your personal life prior to your departure? (d) How would you describe the faculty in your program relevant to your decision to depart? (e) How would you describe the experience of returning? (f) How would you describe the faculty in your program relevant to your decision to return?

Data analysis began with the researcher examining the transcribed interviews of each participant and following the steps of a phenomenological analysis described by Moustakas (1994). These steps are described more fully in the following paragraphs and included: (a) treating every participant statement relevant to the research question as equal in value, and isolating significant statements; (b) comparing significant statements across participants and removing repetitive significant statements to eliminate redundancies; (c) formulating meanings from the significant

statements and grouping them into meaning units for each participant; and (d) isolating commonalities among the meaning units across participants and clustering these commonalities into themes. For example, one participant stated, "My world fell apart when my brother got sick; the Ph. D. was no longer as significant." This was selected as a significant statement. That significant statement was given a formulated meaning of "A family tragedy diminished the importance of school," which was clustered within the theme "Departure is Informed by Personal Factors."

Participant quotes were significant statements if (a) they were a direct response to an interview question, and (b) if they illuminated the experience of departing from or returning to doctoral study. These significant statements were circled in the transcription document and then entered into a table in Microsoft Word. Horizontal mapping (Creswell, 2007) was used by the researcher to create a non-hierarchical list of distinct significant statements. This was achieved by comparing significant statements with one another to eliminate any statement that overlapped or repeated another significant statement. Formulated meanings were generated which represented the underlying implication of each participant's significant statements. The creation of formulated meanings is the duty of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994) and is finding meanings through imagination, taking different perspectives, considering alternative reference points, and considering the opposite. Based on similarities, formulated meanings across participants were grouped into meaning units.

To promote accuracy and conduct member checks, formulated meanings and meaning units generated from the first interview were emailed to each participant prior to the second interview. Each participant was asked how the formulated

meanings and meaning units matched their experiences, and participants emailed this author their responses to this question prior to the second interview. New and/or germane information gathered from participant responses was utilized to generate specific questions for specific participants for the second interview to provide clarity and a thicker description of the participants' experiences. The second interview was conducted with each participant and transcribed and analyzed utilizing the same procedures described for the first interview. Participants were emailed the data analysis from the second interview prior to the final follow-up email to provide an additional opportunity to confirm that the analysis demonstrated fidelity to their experiences of departing from and returning to study.

When the researcher had completed the two in-depth interviews with each participant, the researcher identified commonalities among the meaning units across participants and clustered these commonalities into themes. These themes represented the participants' shared experience of departing from and returning to doctoral study. The final follow-up email was sent to each participant after both rounds of individual interviews to provide participants with an opportunity to review the final themes and provide feedback.

### **Researcher and Researcher Bias**

The researcher is a Caucasian male who was a doctoral candidate in counselor education and supervision when the research was conducted. The researcher voluntarily departed from his program of doctoral study after the fall semester during his first year and then successfully returned the subsequent fall semester. The researcher recognized that his experience of departing and returning generated assumptions that

would be present during data collection and analysis. Several assumptions held by the researcher were: (a) doctoral students having difficulty persisting with study should experience faculty expressing values consistent with the counseling profession (e. g. being equitable, caring, respectful, warm, flexible, honest), (b) departing from study is intensely difficult and has negative psychosocial effects for the doctoral student, and (c) returning to doctoral study presents doctoral students with a set of challenges unique to each student. The researcher applied principles discussed by Moustakas (1994), who reported that phenomenology demands that a researcher suspend prior knowledge to recognize a phenomenon at a purer and deeper level. The researcher applied these principles throughout the study by documenting prior knowledge and assumptions about the experience of departing and returning to study and maintaining a constant awareness of these assumptions throughout data collection and analysis. This permitted the researcher to bracket out assumptions and protect against researcher bias.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the notion of trustworthiness and its mechanisms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as a more suitable structure for assessing qualitative research than the quantitative properties of reliability and validity (Kline, 2008). Credibility was established through member checks, prolonged engagement, literature triangulation, and peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba identified member checks as the most essential method for ascertaining credibility. Member checks occurred after the first interview, after the second interview, and the follow-up email, as participants were presented with formulated

meanings, meaning units, and themes, and asked if the data analysis was congruent with their experiences. Participants confirmed that the analysis of the data resulted in accurate descriptions of their experiences. Prolonged engagement with participants involved communication with each participant prior to and during the study, and intensive interaction with each participant in two comprehensive individual interviews. Literature triangulation consisted of comparing and distinguishing the emergent themes with the current relevant literature. Peer debriefing involved soliciting a peer's feedback regarding the data analysis. The researcher met with the peer debriefer, a female counselor education doctoral student with experience in qualitative research, after the completion of the second individual interview. The peer debriefer was not involved in this research prior to the meeting, and reviewed the data collection and analysis process while probing the researcher's biases and interpretations of the data. The peer debriefer was consulted after both rounds of interviews to allow for a complete review of the data collection and analysis process.

Transferability of the research findings was achieved by providing a substantial amount of participant data. This resulted in a comprehensive description of the experience of departing from and returning to study, which is presented in the results section. Readers must evaluate the results and make their own judgments of the transferability of this research to their own setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, the use of an outside auditor "can be used to determine dependability and confirmability simultaneously" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). The outside auditor for this research was a counselor education faculty member who was not on the researcher's dissertation committee and not involved in any discussions regarding the development of

this current study. The auditor reviewed the researcher's transcripts, significant statements, formulated meanings, meaning units, and themes. The auditor also reviewed the literature used to support the research question, the choice of methodology, research design, documents articulating the researcher's assumptions, the sampling procedures and the selection of participants, data collection and analysis processes, and the methods employed to assure trustworthiness and credibility. The auditor verified the dependability and confirmability of this study.

### **Results**

The four themes describing the participants' experiences of departing from and returning to study were: (a) departing and returning are salient personal events, (b) faculty-student interactions are noticed and important, (c) departure is informed by personal factors, and (d) departure is informed by academic culture. Supplementary data from participants will also be presented to provide counselor educators and counseling departments with explicit suggestions for dealing with doctoral students struggling to persist with study.

#### **Departing and Returning are Salient Personal Events**

Departing from doctoral study evoked intense reactions from all participants. Anne began describing her reaction to departing from study with "I think I became a little despondent, you know, maybe a little depressed." Anne reported feelings of failure, stating "I link if I don't finish something to failure, or not working hard enough." In addition to feeling depressed and a failure, Anne described several other negative reactions to departing

from study, including "A level of anxiety I've never experienced in my entire life," and "I really went into myself and became isolated." Similar to Anne, Gem experienced feeling failure for the first time in her life: "The departure felt like I quit, and that wasn't something that I ever knew before." Gem also echoed Anne's feelings of depression and anxiety, stating, "There was lots of sadness, depression, and anxiety...all that stuff." Another participant, Daphne, departed from study amidst "acute anxiety" brought on by a "traumatic event" in her life. For Daphne, the overriding feelings associated with departing were shame, failure, and insecurity:

Here I was, just yanking myself out of the program, having to tell faculty that I wasn't well, and some students too. When I finally made the call to my advisor, telling her I was leaving, I remember hanging up the phone after that conversation and lying on my bed and just sobbing...feeling ashamed and like I was a loser...I definitely felt worse about myself.

Jackie departed from study "because more and more things in my life were unfolding, I fell further and further behind." After making the decision to depart, Jackie recalled feelings of sadness, loss, and diminished hope, remarking, "I think sadness, for me. It was a loss, because I started to lose hope about completing it." Alexis departed from study after experiencing poor physical and mental health and like Jackie described departing as "a sad time, for that span of time that I was out." Similar to Anne and Gem, Alexis identified a feeling of failure when she departed, commenting, "I felt a sense of failure that I didn't complete something, and that I couldn't somehow figure out a way to manage and survive an experience." Diane,

like many of the other participants, experienced a sense of failure and disappointment in herself after departing from doctoral study, remarking, "Complete disappointment in myself, for sure...and I felt like a failure, definitely a sense of complete self failure."

Participants also articulated intense reactions to returning to study. Anne experienced feeling hurt when she returned to doctoral study, commenting "Life totally went on without me...beyond what I ever could have imagined...I was a little bit hurt that there wasn't more concern." Gem described returning to doctoral study as emotionally difficult, reporting "it just took everything, every fiber of my being to walk back on campus, to walk back to my college, to walk to my floor, to walk back to my department, to look at people again." Additional feelings Gem reported when she returned were fear, anxiety, and overwhelming pressure:

I felt very nervous returning, I felt anxious, I felt fear, then I did feel fear, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to make it...I felt pressure, I mean I took a full load in the summer and I had all these incompletes...that was a lot of pressure.

Like Gem, Daphne experienced fear and anxiety when returning to doctoral study:

I had my first meeting with the department chair after I had emailed him I was returning. I was so on edge that morning I threw up. I was so nervous and afraid about funding, what he would say to me, you know, the questions he might ask, all of it.

Jackie and Diane, like Gem and Daphne, both experienced anxiety when returning to

doctoral study. Jackie stated, "It was anxiety-provoking, I was not sure what the reaction was going to be." Diane commented, "I was anxious about the prospect of proposing and defending and all the hoops."

Two participants experienced positive reactions to returning to study. Alexis remarked, "The second time around there were different professors there and there was a different cohort there...not just different, they were better, more professional, in my opinion." Alexis observed that "the different professors and cohort made such a positive impact on my ability and ease of returning to school...it was a very happy time for me." Diane stated, "I was proud, that I went back and completed comps. It was a sense of I told you so, a sense of vindication. They believe me when I say I'm going to finish. I'm excited."

### **Faculty-Student Interactions are Noticed and Important**

All participants noted the importance of how counseling faculty members responded to their departures from and returns to doctoral study. Anne recalled that she was struggling with personal and health issues prior to her departure and that "some of the faculty, when they discovered I was struggling and considering leaving, really reacted in a, what should I say, a non-counselor manner." Anne observed:

If you can't model empathy, or unconditional positive regard, then stop teaching it in your classes. Because I don't see it coming from you in terms of modeling...so, that really helped me to make my decision, because I was angry. I felt invalidated.



Alexis also experienced uncaring faculty when she departed from study, reporting, “This has been my impression of the faculty, of the program, all along, is, people are busy, they’re just surviving, they don’t have time or energy to give really to their students...it just felt very noncaring.” Jackie did not recall how faculty responded when she departed, but recalled feeling “unsettled” by the faculty when she returned to doctoral study, observing, “They walked past me and said hi as if I had been there last week...it was just bizarre.” Gem described a portion of her faculty “making comments about my departure behind my back” such as “she better not come back” and “if she comes back we’ll make sure she doesn’t finish.” Gem reported that “those comments were a motivator for me, but obviously not helpful.” Diane described the faculty as “grumpy” relevant to her decision to depart from study and “they were incredibly disappointed with me and felt I was making excuses.” Diane discussed that her faculty advisors were also unhelpful when she made the decision to return to study: “When I made the decision to return, they said, no you’re not. They were skeptical of me being able to do it, and that made me angry. That was really unhelpful.”

Some participants experienced responses from faculty that were helpful. When considering her departure, Anne reported one professor said, “I don’t want this to happen.” Anne commented, “What struck me...that day was how genuinely concerned she was about my success.” Gem pointed to her program coordinator as being pivotal in her return to doctoral study: “He was working with me in terms of my financial needs, and he’s been just amazing, like, navigating my course load so I can finish up and all that other stuff.” Alexis also experienced helpful responses from some faculty members upon her return to study, stating “Before I left, you could pass

a professor in the hall and they wouldn’t acknowledge you. When I returned at least they would say hello, how are you doing?” Daphne was the only participant who experienced exclusively helpful responses from faculty. Daphne observed:

The faculty and department were awesome. When I first told them I was leaving they listened and expressed caring for me, telling me that I needed to take care of myself. When I contacted them to tell them I was coming back, they welcomed me with open arms. And I got full tuition remission and a fellowship again.

Daphne remarked how important the helpful responses from faculty were: “If they hadn’t been so positive, leaving and coming back, I really don’t know how I would have gotten to where I am today.”

### **Informed by Personal Factors**

All participants encountered events in their personal lives that negatively impacted their ability to persist with doctoral study. Anne discussed dealing with “very, very serious female problems at the time...they thought I had cervical cancer.” Anne reported that she had been experiencing health problems prior to her departure, suffered significant physical pain, and underwent an emergency hysterectomy and experienced surgical menopause. Also, Anne observed that although she had never identified with being a mother, “when I had the surgery that was it, not even an option anymore, so I was grieving that as well.” Gem stated that she went through an “existential” period of confusion and inner conflict prior to departing from study, commenting “I was just inexplicably

confused. I needed to take a leave to figure out what was going on.”

Daphne discussed her life prior to departure as “traumatized.” Daphne iterated experiencing a personal trauma “that made all the wheels fall off.” Daphne recalled that “the psychological and emotional pain became so huge for me. There was no way to stay in school.” Daphne described her personal trauma as “overwhelming” and “it consumed me...things were so intense that school became a distant thought.” Similar to Daphne, Jackie experienced trauma in her personal life. Jackie stated that a combination of personal tragedies brought her to a point of “just not being able to do school anymore.”

Alexis, like Anne, experienced significant health challenges prior to departing from study. Alexis stated, “I was having physical difficulties, which was confusing at the time and didn’t get straightened out until later on.” Alexis reported she was not eating and not sleeping and “I went into what I thought was a depressive funk.” Alexis stated that her annual physical found what was wrong, “and after the physical side got straightened out everything became much easier.” Like Alexis, Diane also experienced physical health problems. She stated, “Right before the end of the semester...I had a really bad relapse...it was messing with my mood and emotions.” Diane reported at the time, she was not aware of how much of an impact her poor physical health had on her departure, “but looking back, that was the biggest factor.”

### **Informed by Academic Culture**

The fourth and final theme revealed that academic culture also played a role in influencing some participant’s departures from study. Many of the participants discussed their perceptions of the counseling

departments they were associated with. Anne recalled that prior to her departure:

There was actually a lot of departure of faculty at the time. And, I had really become close with my dissertation advisor, and then she left, in her words, for a better opportunity. And I really struggled with that.

Anne reported the counseling department also experienced the death of one of the faculty, commenting “I saw him on a Friday and he died that Saturday...that was a shock to say the least. And then from there, in terms of advisor, I was in limbo...and I didn’t like it, to be very honest.” Anne concluded by remarking “it was a very tumultuous time for the department.”

Gem remembered, “the department was short staffed...we’ve hired since then three or four new faculty members...and like I said earlier, I was experiencing some faculty members being nasty about my leaving.” Gem reported that not having enough professors and lack of support from some faculty members “was not great in keeping me to stay.” Alexis described her academic struggles in terms of an “out-of-control cohort,” a “nonresponsive faculty,” an “unhelpful advisor,” and an “unprofessional department chair.” Alexis described an overall lack of professional behavior on the part of her cohort, her faculty advisor, and the chair of the department. Alexis stated that she went to members of the faculty for help, but was told, “Oh, it’s just your religious convictions, and I said, no it’s not, I see there is a professional behavior standard that needs to be upheld.”

Diane also experienced discomfort with her counseling department prior to departing from study:

I felt unappreciated and disrespected. I was active in the honors society, and faculty came to me for everything...so then there was another student who won't do anything like that, and just chooses to not be involved in anything...but when the time comes for students to be recognized, that student is recognized...that was a slap in the face.

### Supplementary Data

Additional data were gleaned from participant interviews that were of importance. Because these data were not directly related to the research question of this study, they were not categorized as a theme. However, the data are useful to present as all participants voiced their importance and because of the implications the data have for counselor educators and counseling departments.

Anne spoke of “not seeing anything in my department programmatically” to assist students struggling to persist with doctoral study. Anne reported that many students she had spoken with, including participants from her own dissertation, told her “they just wanted someone to check in with them.” Anne explained, “Students want something intentional, like an ABD support group meeting, with a faculty member...some mechanism...but the bottom line? They wanted faculty to be involved.” Anne also reported that “I really think...it's an issue that faculty, department chairs, need to discuss because it could be something so simple.”

Gem spoke in generalities regarding what counseling faculty may do to assist struggling students, but suggested that faculty involvement is important. She stated, “I think just being supportive...be available to your students.” Gem further

reinforced the importance of faculty availability:

Be available. Faculty members are so busy doing a plethora of things, and I remember I tried to speak with one of my professors for two weeks before leaving. I just could not get in touch with him. I could not connect...to me, that was ludicrous.

Daphne observed that her faculty members “did all the right things, at least for me.” Daphne reported that if she were to give suggestions for faculty, “it would be for them to do what my faculty members did: be supportive, be understanding, and of course non-judgmental.” Daphne reported that “every faculty member I encountered during that time was helpful and understanding...from when I first told them I was leaving to when I came back.” Jackie also suggested that faculty should be supportive, stating “it's nice to feel like you're being supported and people understand...so I think it's important to respect a student's situation and decision.” Jackie also spoke about the need to feel connected, reporting, “Working on your dissertation is an isolating experience, so just being around people who understand what I am trying to do would be great. Somehow linking folks together, create a way for students to be connected.” Jackie concluded by saying that “faculty should encourage balance...doctoral study isn't set up that way...there should be some sense of balance, and I think that programs should do that more and encourage students to do that.”

Alexis spoke pointedly regarding how faculty should approach students struggling to persist, encouraging faculty members to take time with their students:

Treat students like human beings, be cordial to them, and say hi, how are you doing...as a professor now, I take the time to say something. If I sense things are not going well, I pick up on that and I'll ask if there is any way I can help. Maybe I can't, but the response I've got back is, thank you for at least asking.

Diane discussed that counseling faculty may want to consider other ways of looking at their treatment of students:

Recognize that there are some students where doctoral study is the number one priority in their life, but there's another group of students that have other stuff that is fulfilling, and they have other responsibilities. There is another group of students that has health issues and all that has to be considered when you think about what kind of student that person is. You can't measure by one measuring stick. I think that faculty thinks they are doing that, and maybe they are, but they aren't doing it well enough. When faculty focuses the most on those first types of students, other students become disillusioned. I know this from both sides of the coin, because I was both of those students.

Diane reported that "I was the preferential student, yeah, and it feels good to be that student, but if you fall off the pedestal it's a long way down." Diane commented that counseling faculty may also want to consider "checking in" with students who are struggling or have departed. As Diane discussed this point, she admitted that her advice to counseling faculty may not be realistic: "And maybe it's unrealistic to have those expectations, you know, maybe

faculty would say, you're a doctoral student, find your own way to motivate yourself, we're going to focus on our new students. Call me when you want to meet." Finally, Diane discussed the importance of keeping doctoral students engaged:

Find a way to keep students engaged once they finish coursework. I don't know how you do that...if they can just find a way to keep you engaged, even if they make it, you have to present once a semester, or give us a syllabus. It would keep me involved and I'd have to see them and it's going to make me want to be doing something...if you want high completion, higher retention, you may want to consider this.

### **Discussion**

This study's findings are reflective of the findings of previous research on doctoral student retention, attrition, and student experiences. Personal and academic factors were the primary reasons participants cited for departing from study. This confirms what has been previously reported in the counselor education literature (Cusworth, 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009) about attrition, retention, and student experiences. Participants reacted to departing from study with anxiety, depression, feelings of failure, shame, and insecurity, reinforcing what has been previously reported in the literature about departing from doctoral study (Lovitts, 2001). Data from the current study describing the participants' successful returns to doctoral study is singular among the existing literature and provided a first look at this phenomenon. Similar to departing, returning to study was an experience that incited strong emotions. Participants were significantly affected by

their interactions with their faculty when departing and returning, experiencing both helpful and unhelpful responses from faculty, which is consistent with the research literature identifying the importance of student-faculty interactions (Cusworth, 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Counselor educators bear particular responsibility to demonstrate the humanistic values that are the bedrock of the counseling profession (Hansen, 2003) with their students, and counselor education doctoral students who are struggling to persist with study or returning to study should directly experience these values on both the departmental level and the level of individual faculty. Calls for counselor educators to heed the importance of interactions with students and to embody the values they teach are not new (e.g., Hazler & Carney, 1993; Kottler, 1992), and this current research reveals that faculty who fall short in this area have significant negative impacts on their students. The impact faculty responses had on the participants' departures and returns, positive or negative, demonstrates that faculty members are uniquely positioned to mediate the experience and ability of a student to persist and return to study. While counselor educators cannot always prevent the departure of a doctoral student, the ways in which they interact with students who are struggling will have a significant impact on the experience of that student and the student's perception of the faculty member and the department as a whole. The same holds true for doctoral students who return to study after departure.

Counselor educators can begin to address this issue by interacting with doctoral students in a way that communicates genuine interest in a student's progress and welfare, academically and personally. Counselor educators can

consider the recommendations from the participants of this research, who wanted faculty to be supportive and available, to respect students' decisions, to encourage students to be balanced, and not show any students preferential treatment. Alexis, now a professor, captured some of this when she stated:

I take the time to say something. If I sense things are not going well, I pick up on that and I'll ask if there is any way I can help. Maybe I can't, but the response I've got back is, thank you for at least asking.

Counselor educators should also not minimize the impact personal issues have on the ability of students to persist, and encourage students to properly address personal issues. Doctoral students may sometimes perceive that departing from study will be counted against them, and counselor educators need to communicate that personal issues significant enough to interfere with study are a priority and okay to attend to. Counselor educators also should be aware of the ramifications students may experience when departing from study so they may appropriately respond to students struggling to persist. This research suggests that counselor educators should be particularly aware of the culture and climate of their department and how students may be impacted. Counselor education departments that intentionally addressed issues related to department climate would decrease the chances of doctoral students being negatively impacted by academic factors.

Lastly, counselor educators should consider some of the suggestions from the participants of this research aimed at decreasing student departure. These included programmatic interventions in place to address students struggling to

persist, having a formal mechanism for consistently checking in with doctoral students, and having a program requirement that would keep students connected and engaged after comprehensive exams. Adopting some or all of these recommendations would communicate to doctoral students that their department was interested and invested in them completing doctoral study, and likely increase the completion rates within their doctoral program.

This research had several limitations. Despite the assurance of confidentiality, three of the six participants expressed cautious attitudes and nervous feelings about sharing negative descriptions of their counseling faculty and counseling departments. Although all of these participants eventually relaxed and became more forthcoming, it is possible that some or all of these participants failed to provide complete transparency regarding their faculty members and counseling departments, possibly omitting essential information during the interviews. Another limitation to this study stems from the researcher's assumption that many individuals depart from and return to study and have positive experiences with their department and faculty, yet these individuals were less likely to participate in this research. This is perhaps evidenced by the fact that only one participant (Daphne) shared a completely positive experience associated with her department and faculty.

The participants in this research did not have any insight into the actions of their faculty members and were left to speculate. Future research could explore the attitudes and perceptions of counselor educators regarding doctoral student departure and

return. Such studies could begin to reveal how counseling faculty perceive and address doctoral students who struggle to persist and depart from study, and also assist doctoral students in better understanding the dynamics that exist between faculty and students. Another direction for future research echoes Protivnak and Foss' (2009) recommendation for a national quantitative study of student retention and attrition in counselor education programs. Identifying programs with low attrition rates could provide an opportunity to gather information about the qualities of such programs and the faculty who teach in them.

The results of this study illustrate the difficulty of departing and returning and highlight the positive and negative impact counselor educators have on students facing these issues. Counselor educators who model the values of the counseling profession with their students may diminish the painful aspects of departing and facilitate returning. It is hoped that this research will promote the development of helpful strategies for dealing with student departure and return and encourage additional studies on this topic.

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# Increasing Academic Achievement and College-Going Rates for Latina/o English Language Learners: A Survey of School Counselor Interventions

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Amy Cook, Rachele Pérusse, & Eliana D. Rojas

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This study was conducted to identify the extent to which school counselors use various intervention strategies to promote college attendance for Latina/o English Language Learners (ELLs). Specifically, school counselors across the Northeast ( $n = 198$ ) were asked to identify activities they implement on behalf of Latina/o ELLs to increase college-going rates. The results suggested the importance of the following: collaborating with multiple school and community stakeholders, addressing the inadequacy of resources through advocacy and leadership, and keeping track of dropout, graduation, and college-acceptance data for Latina/o ELLs to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities.

*Keywords:* school counselors, Latina/o English language learners, academic achievement, college access

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The National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) published by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) helped to clarify the role of the school counselor through emphasizing the importance of developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. The National Standards became a driving force in developing the *ASCA National Model* (Pérusse, Goodnough, & Noël, 2001), which provided a framework through which school counselors could develop effective and comprehensive school counseling programs focusing on foundation, service delivery, management, and accountability (ASCA, 2005). An integral component of the service delivery model includes taking on a leadership role through facilitating collaboration with parents and families as well as school personnel, including teachers

and school administrators. Through collaboration efforts, school counselors can identify and address achievement gaps and college opportunity gaps to promote equitable education for all students (ASCA, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In this study, components of the National Standards and the National Model formed the basis of a survey aimed at finding out how school counselors utilize collaboration and other interventions to help Latina/o English Language Learners (ELLs) achieve academically and increase college access.

Achievement and opportunity gaps are prevalent among urban school populations, particularly Latina/o ELLs as they are likely to reside in urban and impoverished areas. Limited resources commonly include having inexperienced teachers and/or “out-of-field” teachers (educators who do not have a degree in the

subject area they teach). Moreover, there are often few academic resources, including computers and applications (Flores, 2007). Latino/a Spanish-speaking adults, including teachers and counselors, are also underrepresented in public schools (MacDonald, 2004). In addition, Latina/o students often have limited educational experience and capital since students and their families may not be familiar with school policies in the United States (Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007). The same can be said of Latina/o ELLs given their recent arrival to the United States.

In addition to limited resources and funding, Latina/o ELLs encounter other barriers to academic achievement. These include acculturation stressors and English-language challenges. Acculturation stressors include racism and discrimination (Escobar, Nervi, & Gara, 2000; Villalba et al., 2007). Often Latina/o ELLs experience additional stress at home due to differences in the level of acculturation between the parent(s) and student. When the parent(s) or caretaker(s) has greater difficulty assimilating to American mainstream culture in comparison to his or her child, tension within the family can arise. Villalba et al. (2007) identified the negative impact on academic achievement as a result of acculturation stress, discrimination, and racism. In terms of English language difficulties, Latino/a ELLs are often recommended for remedial-level classes and special education classrooms despite presence of a learning disability (MacDonald, 2004; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006, as cited in Arellano & Padilla 1996). Additionally, placement in remedial courses often occurs across all subjects instead of just in those identified content areas of need.

Communication can also be challenging for Latina/o ELLs' parents and families. Given both language and cultural

differences, parents can experience difficulties talking to teachers and school personnel, including the school counselor. They may not be aware of the different cultural norms within United States public schools and, as such, do not seek involvement with educators (Ramirez, 2003). As a result, a parent may not exert his or her influence in advocating for appropriate academic placement that suits the student's educational goals and career aspirations. Furthermore, some Latina/o ELLs' parents may be afraid to communicate their concerns with school personnel because of their undocumented immigration status (Ramirez, 2003). This study purports to identify ways that school counselors can best support the academic, career, and social/emotion needs of Latina/o ELLs and their parents.

### **Need for the Study**

Latina/o students drop out of high school at a much higher rate compared to their white non-Latina/o peers (Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Olivos & Quintana de Valladolid, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In addition, the Latina/o student population currently comprises the fastest-growing student population within U.S. schools (Fry, 2008), with an estimated Latina/o school-aged population (ages 5-19) likely to reach approximately 20.1 million by the year 2025 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Evidence-based research examining school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o ELLs is needed to help close achievement gaps and college opportunity gaps. However, little research has been conducted that focuses on issues regarding ELLs. More specifically, Albers, Hoffman and Lundahl (2009) through their review of journal coverage of student-service professions, including school counselors, found a dearth of research addressing the

needs of ELLs. The authors specifically found that during a 10-year period (between the years 1995 and 2005) only 4.8% of the published articles in peer-reviewed counseling journals addressed ELL student needs in K-12 settings. Albers et al. (2009) emphasized the need for additional research in this area.

Although many studies are helpful in suggesting possible school counselor interventions with Latina/o ELLs, very few specifically examine the school counselor's role in working with this specific population and/or do not provide concrete data to support recommended interventions. For example, Militello, Carey, Dimmit, Lee, and Schweid (2009), examined 18 culturally and socio-economically diverse high schools that achieved a College Board honorable mention award for obtaining high achievement. In doing so, they described school counselors' interventions with low-income students, including Latina/o students, but did not specifically address the needs of Latina/o ELLs. Focusing solely on Latina/o students may fail to capture a myriad of barriers that Latina/o ELLs encounter, such as English language challenges, immigration status, and acculturation issues (MacDonald, 2004; Villalba et al., 2007). Therefore, it is important to address the academic needs of Latina/o ELLs, and not just Latinos/as or ELLs, due to the different challenges and needs that may manifest. In another study, Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, and Allen (2008) interviewed 16 Latina students from a large urban high school in Southern California where 31% of students were ELLs. The authors described Latina students' thoughts regarding their experiences with their teachers and counselors; however, the study did not directly identify Latina/o ELLs' academic needs and did not specifically examine school counselors' interventions. Another

study conducted by Thorn and Contreras (2005) examined school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o immigrant students at a California school whose population of Spanish-speaking students increased 380% from 1995 to 2004. Although this study provided potential school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o ELLs, the research was conducted in only one school, making it difficult to generalize the results to other schools with similar student populations.

Given the consequences of high dropout rates and barriers to academic success for Latina/o ELLs combined with the burgeoning Latina/o youth population (Fry, 2008), it behooves educators to act immediately to address these inequities. School counselors are in a position to support schools as they encounter an influx of Latina/o ELLs and can meet these students' needs. Promoting academic achievement among Latina/o ELLs cannot be achieved by school counselors alone; rather, it requires a collaborative effort among all school personnel as well as reaching out to community members and involving multiple stakeholders. Villalba et al. (2007) identified the integral role that school counselors can and should endeavor to hold in facilitating Latina/o students' academic achievement. The *ASCA National Model* also emphasizes the need for school counselors to facilitate a collaboration effort among various school and community stakeholders to close the achievement gap (ASCA, 2005). The present study aims to identify ways school counselors can access school and community-based resources to assist Latina/o ELL student needs. Results from this study include recommendations for practicing school counselors and counselor educators.

## **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to identify school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o ELLs that help to promote academic achievement and college access. It is well-documented that academic achievement and college opportunity gaps are ubiquitous between Latina/o students and their white counterparts (Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Olivos & Quintana de Valladolid, 2005). English language difficulties that Latina/o ELLs encounter negatively impact academic success (Olivos & Valladolid, 2005). The focus of this study was to learn more about the types of activities school counselors engage in with Latina/o ELLs and to identify activities associated with raising academic achievement and college access among Latina/o ELLs. In doing so, the following three research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What type of interventions are school counselors implementing with and on behalf of Latina/o ELLs? (b) What school counselor characteristics are associated with types of interventions that school counselors implement? (c) How do resources within schools affect academic achievement and college access among Latina/o ELLs?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The population for this study consisted of school counselors across the Northeast, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New York. The schools sampled represented urban high schools with Hispanic/Latina/o students making up at least 10% of the school population. Data Market Retrieval (an independent company) provided mailing addresses of 1,000 school

counselors. The total population of school counselors was obtained for all states with the exception of New York since selection criteria was set to include school counselors working in schools with at least a 10% Hispanic/Latina/o student population. Due to the large number of New York school counselors working in schools that met the selection criteria, a randomly selected list of those school counselors was obtained.

The survey was mailed to 1,000 high school level school counselors. A total of 87 surveys were not deliverable and 243 were returned, resulting in a 26.6% return rate. Twelve of the returned surveys were not completed and contained notes indicating that the school counselor either did not work with ELLs or worked as a social worker. Those returned that indicated location ( $n = 198$ ) represented the five different geographic locations as follows: 22.2% of the surveys were received from Connecticut ( $n = 44$ ); 5.6% from Rhode Island ( $n = 11$ ); 24.2% from Massachusetts ( $n = 48$ ); 2.5% from New Hampshire ( $n = 5$ ); and 45.5% from New York ( $n = 90$ ). These numbers reflected the percentage distribution of mailed surveys: 141 (14.1%) were mailed to Connecticut school counselors; 56 (5.6%) were mailed to Rhode Island school counselors; 203 (20.3%) were mailed to Massachusetts school counselors; 27 (2.7%) were mailed to New Hampshire school counselors; and 573 (57.3%) were mailed to New York school counselors.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument developed for this study was purported to measure self-perceptions of school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o ELLs. Because there were no available questionnaires that examined self-perceptions of school counselor interventions, an instrument was developed

and piloted. The instrument used in this study included 12 demographic items and 27 Likert-type questions to assess frequency of interventions on a 5-point scale: Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, and Always. School counselor and teacher education literature was reviewed to generate items to be used in the survey, while following the *ASCA National Model* to ensure items represented the importance of collaborating with relevant stakeholders. More specifically, the College Board's (2009) *College Counseling Sourcebook* and school counselor recommendations from the literature, such as Villalba et al. (2007), were used as sources to generate survey items. Six school counseling professionals reviewed the survey items for content validity before the survey was piloted.

Appendix A includes means and standard deviations for participant response. High scores on the scales indicated that school counselors reported engaging more frequently in activities with and on behalf of students, while low scores on the scales indicated lower reported engagement. In running reliability and factor analyses, two scales were obtained: College Planning with Students (CPS), which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .892, and Consultation with School and Community Stakeholders (CSCS), which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .853.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The Total Design Method was used as a reference in collecting the data (Dillman, 1978). Each school counselor was mailed a paper survey with an investigator-addressed, stamped envelope to participate in the study. In addition, they were provided information about the purpose of the study and contact information for the investigator. Furthermore, they were provided the opportunity to participate in an anonymous

raffle drawing to win one of four \$50 American Express gift cards as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. A second mailing was sent to school counselors who did not respond to the first mailing to increase response rate. In addition, between the first mailing and second mailing (approximately two weeks after sending the first mailing) a post card reminder was sent to school counselors.

### **Results**

Average high school size was 1,376.7 ( $SD = 1,063.9$ ), with 60 students as the smallest school population reported and 4,900 students as the largest school population. Over half of the school counselors ( $M = 54.6\%$ ) reported that they had greater than 151 Latina/o ELLs in their school ( $n = 59$ ); 17.6% of school counselors reported that they had between 51 to 150 Latina/o ELLs in their school ( $n = 19$ ); and 38.0% of school counselors reported that they had 50 or fewer Latina/o ELLs ( $n = 41$ ). In terms of the school counselor's perception of adequate school resources to address Latina/o ELLs' academic needs, 58.4% responded in the affirmative ( $n = 90$ ), while 41.6% reported insufficient resources ( $n = 64$ ).

Regarding school counselor demographics (see Appendix B), 24.7% of the school counselors reported speaking Spanish fluently ( $n = 40$ ), while 75.3% reported not speaking Spanish fluently ( $n = 122$ ). Most of the school counselors self-reported their race as Caucasian/white ( $n = 85$ ; 63.4%), followed by Hispanic/Latina/o ( $n = 34$ , 25.4%), African American/black ( $n = 9$ ; 6.7%), Asian ( $n = 3$ ; 2.2%), and biracial/multiracial ( $n = 3$ ; 2.2%). In terms of work experience as a school counselor, the majority reported having five years or less of experience ( $n = 78$ ; 38.2%), followed by 6 to 10 years of experience ( $n = 47$ ;

23.0%), 11 to 20 years of experience ( $n = 53$ ; 26.0%), and greater than 20 years of experience ( $n = 23$ ; 11.3%). The majority of school counselors reported being a member of at least one professional organization ( $n = 172$ ; 72.3%), while 27.7% indicated no professional membership ( $n = 66$ ).

The following data included information that school counselors self-reported regarding dropout rates, high school graduation rates, and plans to attend college. The reported mean percentage of Latina/o ELLs who received a high school diploma was 79.1% ( $n = 129$ ;  $SD = 25.4\%$ ), and the mean reported percentage of students who dropped out was 11.7% ( $n = 65$ ;  $SD = 12.5\%$ ). The mean reported percentage of Latina/o ELLs who go on to attend a 4-year college was 39.3% ( $n = 108$ ;  $SD = 28.5\%$ ); the mean reported percentage of Latina/o ELLs who go on to attend a 2-year college was 35.9% ( $n = 109$ ;  $SD = 21.3\%$ ); and the mean reported percentage of Latina/o ELLs who go on to attend a vocational or technical school was 9.5% ( $n = 88$ ;  $SD = 11.3\%$ ).

Means and standard deviations were used to answer research question one: What type of interventions are school counselors implementing with and on behalf of Latina/o ELLs? The mean for the CPS scale was 4.08 with a standard deviation of 0.866. The mean for the CSCS scale was 2.70 with a standard deviation of 0.964. The correlation between the two Likert-type scales was .585. In conducting a paired-samples t-test, the mean difference of 1.34 between the two scales was statistically significant, with respondents reporting greater engagement with Latina/o ELL students compared to involvement with teachers, parents, and community members on promoting academic achievement ( $t(220) = 23.632$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Average reported frequency of engaging with and on behalf of Latina/o

ELLs ranged from a mean of 1.83 ( $n = 198$ ) (visit Latina/o ELL students' homes to facilitate parent/guardian involvement in their child's education) to a mean of 4.36 ( $n = 196$ ) (assist Latina/o ELL students with the college application process). The three most frequently reported activities beyond assisting students with the college application process included: (1) providing Latina/o ELL students the opportunity to participate in SAT preparation programs ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $n = 197$ ); (2) providing Latina/o ELL students access to college/career planning computer applications ( $M = 4.18$ ;  $n = 196$ ); and (3) encouraging Latina/o ELL students to take honors/advanced placement level courses ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $n = 194$ ). Appendix A includes reported mean frequency data for the remaining survey items.

In an effort to identify specific school counselor interventions that were associated with raising academic achievement among Latina/o ELL students, a correlation matrix of the individual survey items on the two scales and achievement data was produced. In doing so, the following statistically significant correlations were obtained. (Only moderate correlations,  $r > .40$ , are presented.) Item 9 (*Collaborate with teachers to highlight Latina/o ELL student achievements through school-wide newsletters, bulletin boards, announcements, etc.*) was positively correlated with receiving a high school diploma ( $r = .472$ ;  $p = .009$ ). There was a positive correlation between item 12 (*Encourage Latina/o ELL students interested in going to college to take a college course while attending high school*) and receiving a high school diploma ( $r = .403$ ;  $p = .027$ ). Item 18 (*Organize workshops for Latina/o ELL parents/guardians to discuss future career and educational opportunities for students*) was positively correlated plans to attend a 4-year college ( $r = .482$ ;  $p = .007$ ). There was

also a positive correlation between item 20 (*Encourage Latina/o parents/guardians representative of various professions to come speak to Latina/o students*) and plans to attend a 2-year college ( $r = .425; p = .021$ ).

T-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to answer research question two: What school counselor characteristics are associated with types of interventions that school counselors implement? There was a significant mean difference of 0.461 on the CSCS scale between school counselors who reported speaking Spanish ( $M = 2.88$ ) and those who did not ( $M = 2.42$ ) ( $t(155) = 2.675; p = .008$ ). Similarly, in examining the frequency of school counselor interventions by school counselor self-report of race/ethnicity, there were significant mean differences for the CSCS scale ( $F(2,120) = 5.757; p = .004$ ). Caucasian/white, African American/black, and Hispanic/Latina/o were the only three groups for comparison since other racial/ethnic groups reported were too few to be included in the analyses. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that the respondents who self-reported their race/ethnicity as Hispanic/Latina/o ( $M = 2.96$ , 95% CI [2.65, 3.28]) scored higher on the CSCS scale compared to those who self-reported as Caucasian/white ( $M = 2.33$ , 95% CI [2.13, 2.52];  $p = .003$ ).

Correlations and paired t-tests were used to answer research question three: How do resources within schools affect academic achievement and college access among Latina/o ELLs? There was a significant mean difference of 0.34 on the CCPS scale between those schools in which school counselors reported having adequate resources for Latina/o ELLs ( $M = 4.15$ ) and those in which school counselors reported having inadequate resources ( $M = 3.81$ ) ( $t(139) = 2.163; p = .032$ ). In examining the

percentage of Latina/o ELLs receiving a high school diploma, there was a significant mean difference of 0.149 between schools that reported to have adequate resources and those that did not ( $t(78) = 2.584; p = .012$ ). Mean percentages for Latina/o ELL students receiving a high school diploma were higher among those schools in which school counselors reported having adequate resources ( $M = 0.831$ ) compared to those with inadequate resources ( $M = 0.682$ ). Likewise, the mean percentage dropout rate for Latina/o ELLs was lower in those schools that school counselors indicated as having adequate resources ( $M = 0.084$ ) compared to those schools with inadequate resources ( $M = 0.169$ ). The mean difference of 0.085 between these groups was significant ( $t(61) = 2.721; p = .008$ ).

In terms of resources for Latina/o ELLs, school counselors reported the following resources being frequently offered in their schools: ESL classes; Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) classes; bilingual counselors and teachers; materials printed and distributed in Spanish; financial aid workshops in Spanish; ELL department; tutoring and after school programs; mentoring programs; orientation programs; Latina/o club and activities; and community partnerships.

## Discussion

The results of this research add to the school counseling literature, as it is one of the first studies to provide data-driven information about school counselor interventions on behalf of Latina/o ELLs. While many researchers have made qualitative suggestions on how to promote academic achievement among Latina/o students, the present study represents the first attempt to quantify these suggestions. Several school counselor-reported activities were found to be moderately correlated with



Latina/o ELLs' academic achievement. For example, "*Encouraging Latina/o ELLs to take a college course while attending high school*" and "*Collaborating with teachers to highlight Latina/o ELL student achievements through school-wide newsletters, bulletin boards, announcements, etc.*" were positively correlated to receiving a high school diploma. In addition, "*Encouraging parents of various professions to come to speak to Latina/o ELLs*" was positively correlated with going on to attend a 2-year college. Lastly, "*Organizing workshops for Latina/o ELL parents/guardians to discuss future career and educational opportunities for students*" was positively correlated with receiving a high school diploma and going on to attend a 4-year college.

Although correlations of survey items to reported academic achievement data were moderate, the results potentially indicate which types of interventions could help to promote academic success among some Latina/o ELLs. Furthermore, it is important to take into consideration that a variety of factors affect academic achievement, such as peer group, parental involvement, and role models (Villalba et al. 2007). The findings of the present study suggest that there may be specific activities that are particularly helpful for school counselors to implement with Latina/o ELLs' in promoting academic success. The results further reinforce the need for school counselors to take on a leadership role within the school to ensure they have sufficient time to engage in interventions that promote academic achievement among Latina/o ELLs rather than become hindered by non-essential administrative activities (Reiner, Colbert, & Pérusse, 2009).

The present study also lends support to the importance of adequate resources in promoting academic achievement. School counselors reported a variety of bilingual resources being frequently offered in their

schools, such as bilingual counselors and teachers, materials printed and distributed in Spanish, tutoring and after school programs, mentoring programs, and Latina/o club and activities, to name a few. School counselors who indicated working in schools with sufficient resources implemented activities with Latina/o ELLs more frequently compared to the school counselors who reported working in schools with insufficient resources. In addition, reported mean percentages for Latina/o ELLs receiving a high school diploma were higher among those schools in which school counselors reported having adequate resources compared to those with inadequate resources. Similarly, the dropout rate for Latina/o ELLs was reported to be lower in those schools that school counselors indicated as having adequate resources compared to those schools with inadequate resources.

This study identified some potential resources that could be beneficial in supporting Latina/o ELLs' academic success. Results emphasize the importance of school counselors collaborating with multiple school and community stakeholders in advocating for Latina/o ELL academic success. Militello et al. (2009) emphasized the need to advocate on behalf of students and collaborate with teachers to place students in AP courses. Reaching out to parents and involving them in students' academic planning are integral activities to Latina/o students achieving academically (Lopez, 2011). Engaging in various college-going activities and maintaining relevant data regarding Latina/o student academic progress are also important school counselor interventions (Villalba et al., 2007).

The findings in the study suggest that school counselor activities involving key school and community stakeholders help to promote college access among Latina/o ELLs. There is a specific need for Latina/o

role models and bilingualism in serving Latina/o ELLs as MacDonald (2004) emphasized. Latina/o and/or Spanish-speaking school counselors stated that they collaborated more often with parents, teachers, and key community members compared to their white and/or non-Spanish-speaking counterparts. Although one might expect Spanish-speaking school counselors to readily engage with parents, bilingual school counselors reported frequently engaging with community partners and teachers as well. This finding suggests the need for strong cultural awareness and advocacy skills, both of which are emphasized in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). Olivos and Quintana de Valladolid (2005) emphasized the need to address the pervasive opportunity gaps that preclude Latina/o students and Latina/o ELLs from accessing equitable educational options. School counselors could assist Latina/o ELLs through identifying and connecting students and their families to appropriate community-based resources if they are not readily available within the school.

### **Implications for School Counselors and Counselor Educators**

The results can be used to identify specific interventions that school counselors can implement with and on behalf of Latina/o ELLs to increase college access. For example, *Collaborating with teachers to highlight Latina/o ELL student achievements through school-wide newsletters, bulletin boards, announcements, etc.* was found to be positively correlated with receiving a high school diploma. In a review of 18 high-achieving high schools, defined as culturally and socio-economically diverse high schools that achieved a College Board honorable mention award for obtaining high achievement, Militello et al. (2009) found

that the schools publicly honored and celebrated student successes, which was one of several activities that helped to close achievement gaps for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Results from the present study support this finding, while also identifying specific interventions that are beneficial for Latina/o ELLs in promoting academic achievement.

Bryan (2005) emphasized the importance of promoting partnerships between parents and schools in promoting academic achievement among minority and low-income students. In this study, a moderate correlation was found between *Organizing workshops for Latina/o ELL parents/guardians to discuss future career and educational opportunities for students and going on to attend a four-year college*, and *Encouraging parents of various professions to come to speak to Latina/o ELLs* was moderately correlated with going on to attend a two-year college. Furthermore, Villalba et al. (2007) suggested inviting Latina/o professionals to speak with students about post-secondary options so they could serve as positive role models and reinforce academic achievement. The present study provides support for these recommendations.

Additionally, school counselors can support Latina/o ELLs' needs through accessing relevant resources for students. There are a variety of interventions that school counselors can initiate within the school community to assist Latina/o ELLs. Collaborating with parents and families through holding family meetings, informational sessions, relevant workshops, and community-based meetings would help to build connections between the school and home. In doing so, school counselors need to ensure they provide culturally relevant information and recognize systemic barriers that Latina/o ELLs' encounter to achieving academic success.

The findings of the present study are also relevant for counselor educators. In preparing students to enter the school counseling profession, counselor educators can include information on ways students can address Latina/o ELLs' academic needs. Introductory course work to the field of school counseling could include building awareness regarding contributing factors toward the achievement gap and ways to promote academic success for this population. According to Wilczenski, Cook, and Hayden (2011), building multicultural competency and social justice awareness needs to be addressed throughout all aspects of a school counseling curriculum. In doing so, particular attention to serving the specific needs of Latina/o ELLs and their families must to be emphasized. For example, during internship seminar, discussion can focus on identifying culturally sensitive ways to collaborate with and connect Latina/o ELLs' parents and families to the school. Teaching and practicing consultation skills that highlight ways to communicate with Latina/o parents would also be beneficial. Additional discussions could focus on identifying ways to close the achievement gap and address systemic barriers that Latina/o ELLs' encounter. For example, students could be assigned the task to engage in an action research project with goals of identifying a systemic problem occurring in a school and developing an action plan to address the problem. Part of the action plan could include identifying relevant community-based resources to support Latina/o ELLs. Students could then present their findings to the school where they are completing their field placement.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to this study, with the first and foremost being the low

response rate (26.6%). However, despite the low number of participants, there were several significant findings that were obtained and could be further researched. Another limitation might include variation in interpretation among the Likert-scale and demographic items. For example, some participants may have reported the percentage of dropout and graduation rates for their twelfth grade students while others may have reported percentages based on cohort data, examining dropout and attrition data from grades nine through twelve. The frequencies collected by the survey were not measured directly but rather through respondent self-reported perception, which limits the ability to assess student outcomes. Lastly, the respondents may have wanted to appear as though their actions were beneficial in promoting academic achievement among Latina/o ELLs.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Despite these limitations, this study is the first to quantify and examine data-based outcomes vis-à-vis Latina/o ELLs and school counselor interventions. The results emphasize the importance of delivering a comprehensive school counseling program, one that is inclusive of working with students and collaborating with parents, teachers, and other key stakeholders in order to close achievement and opportunity gaps for Latina/o ELLs.

More data-based research needs to be conducted to fully understand the impact of varying interventions on the academic achievement and college-going rates of Latina/o ELLs. Further research could be targeted at a smaller number of schools in order to better gather outcome data such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and college-going/post-secondary attendance rates. A more focused sample would allow researchers to understand the impact of a

fully implemented school counseling program aimed at helping Latina/o ELL students within these areas of achievement.

Further research might include using the conceptual framework within the current research instrument to survey other key stakeholders, including students and parents, in the school in order to make comparisons about the views and practices of school counselors, school administrators, and teachers. Given the finding that Latina/o and Spanish-speaking school counselors reported engaging in activities with parents, teachers, and community members more frequently compared to Caucasian/white and non-Spanish-speaking school counselors, it would also be beneficial to conduct further research to learn more about Latina/o school counselors' work on behalf of Latina/o ELLs. In doing so, one could focus on identifying ways all stakeholders might promote academic success for these students. Finally, because it has been argued that college preparation needs to begin in elementary school (Nevarez & Rico, 2007),

further research on behalf of Latina/o ELLs could be conducted at the elementary and middle school levels.

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## Appendix A

### Means and Standard Deviations for Participant Responses

Survey Item CCPS Scale	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
4. Encourage Latina/o ELL students to take honors/advanced placement level courses.	194	4.02	1.005
5. Provide Latina/o ELL students the opportunity to participate in SAT preparation programs.	196	4.18	1.110
6. Encourage Latina/o ELL students interested in going to college to enroll in college experience summer programs.	195	3.83	1.175
12. Encourage Latina/o ELL students interested in going to college to take a college course while attending high school.	197	3.89	1.169
17. Offer financial aid/scholarship workshops for Latina/o ELL students interested in going to college.	196	3.90	1.250
22. Provide Latina/o ELL students access to computer applications containing college/career planning.	197	4.13	1.145
26. Assist Latina/o ELL students with the college application process.	196	4.36	1.053

Survey Item CSCS Scale	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
9. Collaborate with teachers to highlight Latina/o ELL student achievements through school-wide newsletters, bulletins boards, announcements, etc...	196	3.02	1.373
10. Visit Latina/o ELL students' homes to facilitate parent/guardian involvement in their child's education.	198	1.83	1.159
14. Collaborate with teachers to run classroom guidance lessons for Latina/o ELL students that focus on academic achievement.	198	3.16	1.412
15. Collaborate with middle school personnel to create college awareness programs targeting Latina/o ELL students.	193	2.12	1.303
18. Organize workshops for Latina/o ELL parents/guardians to discuss future career and educational opportunities for students.	194	3.06	1.365
20. Encourage Latina/o parents/guardians representative of various professions to come speak to Latina/o students.	189	2.59	1.282
27. Collaborate with teachers to support Latina/o ELL students' development of bilingual literacy.	192	3.23	1.375



## Appendix B

### Demographic Data

Variable		<i>n</i>	Mean%
School counselor fluent in Spanish	Yes	40	24.7%
	No	122	75.3%
Race/ethnicity	White/Caucasian	85	63.4%
	Hispanic/Latina/o	34	25.4%
	African American/Black	9	6.7%
	Asian	3	2.2%
	Biracial	3	2.2%
Years of experience	Five years or less	78	38.2%
	6 to 10	47	23.0%
	11 to 20	53	26.0%
	20+	23	11.3%
Reported number of ELLs who received high school diploma	129	79.1%	25.4%
Reported number of ELLs who dropped out of high school	65	11.7%	12.5%
4-year reported ELLs' college-acceptance	108	39.3%	28.5%
2-year reported ELLs' college-acceptance	109	35.9%	21.3%
Vocational/technical school acceptance	88	9.5%	11.3%

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# The Application of Ethical Decision-Making and Self-Awareness in the Counselor Education Classroom

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Amanda M. Evans, Dana Heller Levitt, & Stacy Henning

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The authors provide an overview of ethical decision-making models and address the role of counselor self-awareness in the process. The manuscript examines the importance of self-awareness in ethical decision-making and provides considerations for infusing this approach in counselor education and supervision. Practical recommendations for counselor educators to incorporate self-awareness and ethical decision making into the classroom are included.

*Keywords:* self-awareness, ethical decision-making models

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“Beyond the ‘scientific’ phase, a comprehensive approach to ethical decision making must embrace consideration of the decision maker” (Mattison, 2000, p. 207). The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005) serves as the counseling profession’s foundation for professional practice and ethical responsibility (Ponton & Duba, 2009). However, just knowing legal and ethical standards is not enough; counselors must also apply these standards in practice, which can be challenging (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2005). The Code of Ethics advises counselors who encounter an ethical dilemma to “engage in a carefully considered ethical decision-making process” (ACA, 2005, p.3). At the core of ethical decision-making lie the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994; Kitchener, 1984). These principles, foundational to ethical practice and indeed to the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), are cited as critical when exploring the context of individual decision-making preferences and values. The purpose of this

article is to explore the individual nature of ethical decision-making and how this is applied in counselor preparation. It is the premise of the authors that knowledge of the decision-making models and professional ethical guidelines is the application of the foundation of self-awareness.

Ethical decision-making models (EDMM) were developed to assist counselors who are experiencing difficulties applying the ethical standards in their professional practice (Dufrene & Glossoff, 2004). EDMMs provide an analytical and strategic approach to making decisions when navigating through differing and competing variables (i.e., client needs, societal needs and informed consent practices). Ultimately, the primary objective of EDMMs is to provide “intellectual moral resources,” for practitioners to use when confronted with an ethical dilemma to ensure that the decision is grounded in reason (Mattison, 2000, p. 205). EDMMs can be theoretical/philosophical, practice-based, and/or related to special populations and issues (Cottone, 2001) and are useful to graduate counseling students, practitioners,

supervisors, and counselor educators in understanding the principles of ethics (Bradley & Hendricks, 2008; CACREP, 2009).

Specifically within the classroom, EDMMs in counseling curricula assist counselor educators in introducing and reinforcing the ACA Code of Ethics and Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs CACREP 2009 Standards (CACREP, 2009; Lambie, Hagerdorn & Ieva, 2010). EDMM review and application alone, however, may not be sufficient for the transition from counselor-in-training to practitioner when faced with ethical dilemmas (Crowley & Gottlieb, 2012; Lambie, et al, 2010; Verges, 2010) due to the complexity of ethical decision-making. In spite of comprehensive EDMMs, counselors often respond to ethical challenges from a personal and instinctual perspective and on a case-by-case basis (Jennings, Sovereign, Mussell, & Vye, 2005; Mattison, 2000). Including these factors in the decision making process may assist counselors-in-training and practitioners in making appropriate decisions and in practicing more ethically. Sound ethical decision-making involves use of an EDMM and awareness of one's values as a counselor.

The synthesis of knowledge (development of applicable principles) and self-awareness has been identified as critical in counselor development (Remley & Herlihy, 2010). In counselor education programs, one suggestion in navigating ethical decision-making is to promote counselor-in-training self-exploration, individual responses to conflict, making decisions, and individual moral responses (Mattison, 2000). After all, decisions are made in the context of the individual's perspective and despite the analytical resources of EDMMs an individual interprets and assesses the dilemma using

his or her worldview (Abramson, 1996; Crowley & Gottlieb, 2012; Verges, 2010). This manuscript explores the concept of self-awareness in ethical decision-making and application of the concept in counselor-in-training learning environments. Practical recommendations to incorporate self-awareness and ethical decision-making within the confines of a counseling classroom are included. The authors use the term self-awareness to refer to the capacity for awareness of feelings, thoughts and behaviors in the immediate experience of the counseling relationship (Williams, 2008).

### **Ethical Decision-Making Models**

Ethical decision making models (EDMM) include various components depending on the model. Common concepts and practices repeated in EDMMs are discussed throughout the literature. Consultation, culture and/or context, professional and personal judgment, and code and law are cited as common factors in deliberation of ethical decision-making (Cottone & Claus, 2000; Garcia, Cartwright, Winston, & Borzuchowsk, 2003; Garcia, Winston, Borzuchowska, & McGuire-Kuletz, 2004).

It follows that self-awareness during the ethical decision making process would be a common factor—direct or indirect/subtle—of any decision-making and therefore model. Self-awareness is key to competent counseling so it logically ensues that it is key to ethical decision making in counseling. However, current models do not delineate self-awareness as an obvious component; it may be considered inherent, but is not brought out.

Two key literature reviews exist on EDMMs: Cottone and Claus (2000) and Garcia et al. (2004). The review by Cottone and Claus (2000) provided a detailed examination of ethical decision-making

models within the seminal philosophies and/or theories of Hare (1991), Kitchner (1984), Beauchamp and Childress (1994); and Beauchamp and Walters (1994). These authors organized the current ethical decision-making models into three categories: a) theoretical or philosophical-based; b) practice-based; and c) specialty practice. The theoretical category emphasized Hare's (1991) model based in absolute and utilitarian thinking and included two levels of moral reasoning (intuitive and critical) that was later espoused by Kitchener (1984). The second category (practice-based) included models that are traditionally emphasized in graduate counseling ethics textbooks. The third category housed more than eight ethical decision-making models for special populations and issues. This category included working with families, children with special needs, and clients with AIDS; it involved integrative approaches and avoiding dual relationships. Readers are referred to Cottone and Claus' (2000) comprehensive review for further information about the categories and models.

In their literature review of ethical decision-making models, Garcia et al. (2004) provided a brief summary as a background to their study examining the efficacy of ethical decision-making models for rehabilitation counselors. They provided a summary of 14 models in the following five categories: rational (Corey et al. , 2005; Tymchuck, 1981; Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985; Beauchamp & Childress, 1994; Kitchener, 1984; Forrester-Miller, & Davis, 1995; & Welfel, 2002); moral (Rest, 1983; Kohlberg, 1971; Van Hoose & Paradise, 1979); virtue-based (Jordan & Meara, 1995); social constructivist (Cottone, 2001); collaborative (Davis, 1997); and integrative (Tarvydas, 1998). Many of these models inherently require self-awareness on the part

of the decision maker, yet, do not directly label self-awareness as a construct.

Overall, in the context of personal and professional factors, EDMMs enforce the consideration of multiple factors that impact decision-making, including, but not limited to, social-political influences and multicultural considerations (Cottone, 2001; Garcia, et al, 2003). Ethical decision-making is heavily influenced by the counselor's choices and the aforementioned models. Although counselors may not always agree on the appropriate course of action related to ethical decision-making, there is an assumption that counselors will be aware of and apply ethical decision-making models that can withstand community inquiry (ACA, 2005, p.3).

### **Self-Awareness in Ethical Decision-Making**

Factors to consider when conceptualizing self-awareness are the individual's experiences, development as a professional, the system in which the person exists (i.e., academic environment, agency setting), work responsibilities (Holland & Kilpatrick, 1991); and culture, beliefs and value systems (Mattison, 2000). Irrespective of ethical practice, personal counseling and self-growth experiences developed to increase self-awareness are often recommended in counselor training programs (Burwell-Pender & Halinski, 2008; Gladding, 2008; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). A counselor's sense of self is important in determining how personal values are enacted with clients and their issues. In the absence of an ethical dilemma, counselors make decisions about how to interact with and what to recommend to clients. Self-awareness can facilitate ethical decision-making and could contribute to the tenets of beneficence and

nonmaleficence in services rendered through counseling. Encouraging counselors-in-training to consider questions such as, “Where do my decisions come from?” “What is it about myself that influences the decisions I make?” and “What do I need to understand or change about myself in order to make better decisions?” can provide a starting point for meaningful growth and change (Baum & King, 2006, p. 218).

### **Transformational Learning: Application of Self-Awareness and EDM in the Classroom**

From a pedagogical perspective, it seems viable to introduce EDMs to counselors-in-training in an effort to provide problem-solving strategies in a concrete format (Choate & Granello, 2006). After all, “thinking regarding ethical issues should be proactive and not reactive” (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004, p. 71). Considering this format, training could include educating counselors-in-training about common professional mistakes, personal concerns related to ethical slip-ups (i.e., regret, remorse), and assessing possible rehabilitative measures (Reynolds-Welfel, 2005). In addition, EDMs assist counselors-in-training by providing professionally supported courses of action. These practices can assist counselors-in-training as they develop more autonomy in their professional counselor identities. The development of autonomy requires attention to cognitive development in much the same way that ethical decision-making abilities will grow with cognitive complexity (Granello, 2010).

In complicated ethical dilemmas with multiple variables (i.e., client safety concerns, financial constraints, opposing client requests), a counselor may not be able to successfully balance the situational demands (Rokeach, 1973). Some variables

in the ethical dilemma may be attended to more equitably than others and often counselors must consider which variables receive more attention. Some philosophies promote that decision-making is deemed successful based on the consequences of the resolution and determining whether the end justified the means (teleological), while others question the morality of the situation and whether the decision maker considered what is right or just (deontological) (Mattison, 2000). These broad philosophies highlight the opposing differences in ethical decision-making and multiple perspectives of solving ethical dilemmas. As noted, ethical dilemmas must be attended to on a case-by-case basis; however, this leads to great subjectivity in decision-making (Mattison, 2000). When counselors rely on their individual judgment to resolve an ethical dilemma, they are less likely to adhere to ethical guidelines and agency procedures (Jennings et al., 2005). To combat the subjectivity and individual judgment in decision-making, the counseling profession recommends conferring with ethical guidelines and agency standard operating procedure; however, these standards and recommendations can be interpreted differently and are ambiguously defined, thus a clear solution may not be available (Jennings et al., 2005). Thus, the consideration of self-awareness as a tool to manage ethical dilemmas is recommended to blend EDMs with individual subjectivity.

### **The Role of the Counselor Educator**

Self-awareness may best be learned through transformational processes; such learning relies heavily on the relationship between the educator and the counselor-in-training (Cranton, 2006). The most fundamental of these is the traditional use of case-based learning in ethics. Counselor

educators and supervisors may introduce case scenarios (Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Pettifor, Estay & Paquet, 2002; Storm & Haug, 1997) to imitate ethical dilemmas in a regulated environment or include other experiential learning opportunities to prepare counselors-in-training to utilize critical thinking skills and apply simulated situations to real-life occurrences (Choate & Granello, 2006). The efficacy of ethics instruction through vignettes and application of decision-making processes has long been established (e.g., Corey et al., 2005; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Application through case-based learning around ethics requires critical reflection and personal involvement (Jones, Rivas, & Mancillas, 2009) and can serve as a tool to assist educators in introducing more complex ethical decision-making methodologies.

Counselor educators should be invested in their students' education and development (Baum & King, 2006). Providing emotional safety and encouraging free thought are both examples of educator encouragement of self-awareness (Baum & King, 2006). Counselor educators' intentional infusion of self-reflective questions and practices may assist counselors-in-training to explore their personal values and beliefs to determine their positions regarding ethical challenges they may face in practice. If counselor educators encourage counselors-in-training to remain authentic in the classroom and engage in discussions that promote critical thinking, future counselors will be challenged to engage in self-exploration and recognize that dilemmas may be solved in multiple ways. In 2006, Cranton published an article entitled "Transformative Learning" for educators and provided practical suggestions to incorporate self-awareness in the classroom. Considering Cranton's suggestions in the context of

counselor education, instructors could: a) chat with counselors-in-training prior to or after class about the individual's family, work, hobbies, and personal worlds; b) ask counselors-in-training to list and submit for review their reasons for enrolling in a class; c) ask about students' individualized learning needs; and d) ask counselor' (p. 9). Counselor educators are influential in developing the self-awareness of a counseling student and can accept this charge purposefully and intentionally.

### **Supervision Considerations**

Self-awareness may be introduced in the classroom, but the practice must be reinforced through clinical training experiences and professional work throughout the career. Supervision continues to be a critical component in the discussion and processing of ethical issues. "Waiting for ethical issues to emerge in supervision seems to set up the conditions for crisis training, not ethics training" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004, p.71). Tracey, Ellickson and Sherry (1989) found that counselors continue to prefer supervision opportunities that are in a controlled format regardless of developmental level. Thus, a supervision approach in which the supervisor introduces EDMMs and considerations prior to an offense seems ideal and requires the supervisee to remain active in self-reflective practices. "Through a chosen ethical decision-making process and evaluation of the context of the situation, counselors are empowered to make decisions that help expand the capacity of people to grow and develop" (ACA, 2005, p. 3). Reviewing ethical responsibility and decision-making can be conducted in a variety of formats, including supervisor modeling approaches (Tarvydas, 1995), professional development opportunities, and group supervision.

Ultimately the goal is to incorporate realistic ethical decision-making to increase the supervisee's awareness of his or her accountability as a practitioner (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). As supervision is predominately sought by new and entry-level counselors to fulfill licensure requirements, it may be advantageous for supervisors to introduce self-reflection skills to further develop the practitioner's skills in appropriate self-supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

### **The Role of the Counselor-in-Training**

“Students learn best when they self-regulate—set their own academic goals, develop strategies to meet them, and reflect on their academic performance” (Murray, 2000). Although counselors-in-training learn best with these strategies, many counselor-in-training do not possess the skill set to initiate this approach (Murray, 2000). In the counseling classroom, counselor educators can clearly articulate the objectives of EDMMs by explaining the history of decision-making models and by modeling the application of these approaches. Teaching objectives for ethical decision-making could include assisting the counselor-in-training in transitioning from memorization of codes and steps to cognitive processes when considering ethical dilemmas (Neukrug, Lovell, & Parker, 1996). Through discussing ethical decision-making and presenting relevant models prior to an ethical dilemma, counselors-in-training can practice proactive behaviors in an effort to demonstrate ethical compliance.

Additionally, through self-reflective activities in the classroom, counselors-in-training can evaluate their performance and knowledge prior to experiencing an ethical dilemma in a supportive and safe learning environment (Baum & King, 2006, p. 218).

Counselors-in-training should be permitted to engage in self-discovery activities that challenge their cognitions and perceptions of clients and themselves. Developed for social workers, Mattison (2000) proposed a series of questions for personal reflection that focuses on values preferences. Of the eight questions provided in the text, salient examples for counselor preparation include: 1) to what extent did my personal values or philosophies influence the preferred choice of action; 2) to what extent did the legal obligation influence my decision in the case; and 3) was I willing to act outside of legal obligations if doing so meant serving the client's best interests? (p. 209).

### **Application: Ethical Decision-Making and Self-Awareness in the Classroom**

Despite the prevalence of EDMMs, ethical decision-making appears heavily influenced by individual interpretation, values, instincts, worldview and counselor knowledge (Jennings et al, 2005; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Thus counseling programs should introduce classroom activities that challenge individual self-awareness in addition to rote ACA Code of Ethics and EDMM memorization (Mattison, 2000; Neukrug et al., 1996). Just as counselors-in-training will develop unique approaches to dilemmas given their personal worldviews and perspectives, so too do counselor educators develop unique activities and approaches to helping students self-reflect and apply ethical decision-making principles.

The authors feel that the key to successful application of ethical decision-making rests in counselor in training self-reflection and awareness. There are several approaches to encouraging awareness in the classroom. For example, following an introduction to ethical concepts, the ACA Code of Ethics, and ethical decision-making



models, the counselor educator can present a vignette with an ethical dilemma to the class with the following instructions:

“After reading the dilemma, take a minute to reflect before you come up with a solution for the counselor. What do you notice about how you are responding to the dilemma? What are your visceral reactions to the case? What seems to be most important to you if you were involved as the counselor, client, or another invested party? Write down your initial reactions so that you can share them with your peers.”

Students can be moved into small groups to discuss their initial reactions to the case. This practice encourages students to continue their self-reflection while incorporating perspectives of others. Such infusion encourages students to consider different worldviews and expand their appreciation for mitigating factors both for the onset and solution of the dilemma (Mattison, 2000). Following a period of discussing personal reactions to the dilemma and the differing worldviews with one another, the instructor can direct the small groups to apply an identified ethical decision-making model to address the dilemma. EDMM application requires students to comb through the ACA Code of Ethics to apply professional guidelines. The students now enter this decision-making process more personally aware and informed. They can challenge themselves to consider the meaning and interpretation of their professional ethical guidelines and how they interact with their personal perspectives on the presenting issue.

This activity combines authenticity and self-reflection with knowledge of the ACA Code of Ethics and ethical decision-making models (Cranton, 2006). The reader

is reminded that there are many activities that may be drawn from the literature, counseling ethics casebooks, and creativity through the counselor educator’s own personal reflection. It is the authors’ contention that self-reflection is fundamental to the application of ethical principles. From this perspective, the instructor works collaboratively with students to merge knowledge with the personal perspectives from which students view the dilemma (Neukrug et al., 1996). Ethical issues in particular lend themselves to such learning and application. This classroom activity promotes individual responsibility and understanding to promote critical thinking and decision-making.

### **Conclusion**

Cognitively, counselors-in-training are at a developmental point of seeking concrete answers (Granello, 2002). It can be challenging for academically prepared counselors-in-training to rely on themselves as moral compasses in professional decisions (Levitt & Jacques, 2005). It is important to respect counseling students’ and counselors’ cognitive development in the presentation and reflection of ethical dilemmas (Granello, 2002; Lambie, et al., 2010). Ethics education may begin with more conceptual issues and gradually move to principles-based perspectives, with experiential learning as the backdrop (Corey et al., 2005).

Providing counselors with a tangible alternative to individual opinion through the use of EDMs promotes support within the profession while allowing counselors the opportunity to consider the individual needs of each client. This approach normalizes ethical dilemmas and allows practitioners to focus on the counseling process. Ultimately, a holistic decision-making approach that incorporates EDM consultation and

counselor self-awareness is recommended when confronted with a challenging ethical dilemma. Understanding the self as a decision maker through self-reflection in classroom and training activities as well as more personal practices is ideal. Reflecting on one's pattern of resolving dilemmas promotes an outcome-based resolution approach that incorporates an application of the self and ethical decision-making (Mattison, 2000). Thus, the application of self-awareness and ethical decision-making enable counselors to consider creative solutions to ethical dilemmas.

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# Turning Counseling Students into Researchers: Enhancing Quantitative Research Courses with an Experiential Learning Activity

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Mark C. Rehfuss & Dixie D. Meyer

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Research methods and application are crucial aspects of most counseling practitioners and scholars' lives, yet practical experience with development and implementation of research projects is usually limited to doctoral level dissertations. This article describes an experiential research project that has been integrated into counseling research methods courses at both the master's level and the doctoral level. In this mentored research activity, students move through the entire research process in one semester. They begin with a notion and finish with a submission for publication. Based on student responses, implementing this process in a research methodology course is recommended.

*Keywords:* pedagogy, research methods, experiential methods, counseling competencies

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Sound research plays a foundational role in the practice of counseling and in the scholarship and pedagogy of counselor educators (CACREP, 2009; Huber & Savage, 2009). The 2009 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Standards (CACREP) Standards clearly delineate that counseling students' outcomes must demonstrate knowledge and application of research methods (CACREP) even if it is one of the more difficult areas for them (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). Yet practical experience with development and implementation of research studies is usually limited to doctoral level dissertations. If confidence in evaluating and producing research is crucial to the development of our profession as indicated by CACREP (2009), then research methods courses must do more to engage students in higher order thinking about research in a manner consistent with

Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hiss, & Krathwohl, 1956). Counselor educators continually have encouraged engagement with research and some educators have even suggested integration of research throughout the curriculum of master's level counseling programs (Huber & Savage, 2009).

Though knowledge of research methods is crucial to counselor training, little literature has examined or addressed how this training is most effectively accomplished. Recent research has explored challenges in doctoral research training of current counselor educators, concluding that better quality training in quantitative methods, more exposure to qualitative methods, and more direct mentoring by faculty would be helpful (Astramovich, Atiento Okech, & Hoskins, 2004; Atiento Okech et al., 2006). Huber and Savage (2009) recently discussed how to promote

research as a core value in master's level counselor training and provided an example of an action research project used to facilitate student discussion and reflection in an ethics course. Such action research projects have been encouraged as a means of integrating research and practice within counseling for many years (Huber & Savage, 2009; Nelson & Paisley, 2001; Whiston, 1996), but it still appears few research methods courses are using them. It may be helpful if counseling research methods courses at both master's and doctoral levels would do more to assist students in applying their learning by designing, conducting, and publishing research projects other than theses and dissertations. This fuller application of learning is the goal of the described experiential research activity.

Once students possess a researcher's skill set and have experienced a successful research project with close faculty mentoring (Atiento Okech, Astramovich, Johnson, Hoskins, & Rubel, 2006), integration of research projects into other counseling courses and into counseling practice could naturally follow. The foci of counseling research courses should seek to develop students beyond basic knowledge, understanding, and evaluation of research and towards an integrative application, analysis, and creation of research (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). This article, therefore, describes a core experiential learning activity that has been used for two years in both master's level and doctoral level research methods courses at a small Mid-Atlantic university. The goal of this activity is to produce counselors who possess a firm understanding and ability to evaluate research and who also demonstrate the ability to synthesize and create new research (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

A crucial assumption of this activity is Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal

development. Vygotsky's concept posits that information presented to students for their comprehension should be geared towards something the students would be unable to achieve without the guidance of a teacher. Thus, the information and application of information should be such that it is too advanced for the students to understand on their own, but something that, with assistance, they will be able to comprehend. This approach to education then challenges the students to learn more than what they could master on their own. With the hard work and guidance of the instructor, the students eventually will develop the skills necessary to gain the cognitive ability to complete the assigned tasks without future assistance. With this concept in mind, students completed a group research activity under the continual guidance and support of the faculty. While a large portion of the course grade was given for this group activity, the course still included individual grades for in-class activities, homework, quizzes, exams and handling of presentation questions.

### **Experiential Learning Activity to Enhance Research Skills**

#### **Framework for the Activity**

The main vehicle for completing the components of the research activity is working in a group. During the very first class, therefore, it is crucial to inform students that the research project will be a group effort requiring equal contributions by each member. All group work involves challenges as groups move through the phases of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Tuckman, 1956). As they begin their work, it is helpful to remind students of these phases and to communicate that they will be expected to work through



these challenges together. Research teams of four to six students are formed around counseling interest areas provided by the instructor.

To create clear lines of communication with the instructor and to facilitate effective group work, each group is instructed to choose a leader, co-leader, secretary and schedule/time keeper (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). The leader serves as the main point of communication between the group and the instructor, the co-leader takes over if the leader is not present, the secretary takes notes on meeting times to make sure objectives are achieved and the scheduler/time keeper makes sure group meetings are scheduled and are productive within the time limits given. The group leader is crucial to the success of the group and to the learning experience (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). To ensure effective group work in which each student puts forth an equal effort the group work is graded and peer evaluations are used in evaluating each individual's effort within the group.

### **Peer Evaluation**

Peer critique and evaluation are a constant part of professional life and integrating this perspective into the project helps to develop students' communication abilities and ensures the integrity of the group project. Therefore, there are three peer evaluations built into the course, one taking place every five weeks. Each evaluation is reported to the instructor. It is expected that each student will take this responsibility seriously and view it as an opportunity to learn and grow as a professional. The evaluation allows students to provide and receive feedback on each group member's strengths and weaknesses related to her/his research group work. A peer evaluation worksheet is provided as a guide, but in general students are to identify

strengths and weaknesses of each group member as related to the group tasks.

The first two evaluations are processed in an open discussion format with each member verbally sharing their perspectives of their peers openly. These first two evaluative discussions are designed to help address and resolve issues related to the group task before they create barriers to group success. After each feedback discussion, the leader or secretary of each group creates a one-page summary of the feedback given to each student and sends this to the instructor. Then, if needed, the instructor can intervene with the group and specific individuals. However, while it is expected that initially the groups will work in a professional manner to resolve issues on their own, faculty involvement may be necessary at the end of the first group meeting.

The final evaluation takes place in the fifteenth week of the semester when the project is almost complete. The final evaluation is not shared with the group, but confidentially sent directly to the instructor and serves as a motivator for group members to process and resolve issues effectively throughout the semester (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). The students' final peer evaluation can affect their final course grade in one of two ways: if it is positive they receive a positive 5% for their group work, but if it is negative they can receive up to a negative 15% for their group work. It is clearly communicated from the first day of the course that being an effective group member is crucial for the success of this project and that equal effort is expected from every student. For the two semesters in which this activity has been integrated into the course, the first evaluations have been found to provide the needed incentive for students to change behaviors and become productive group members by the end of the semester.

## **Experiential Research Activity Procedures**

Crucial to the success of this research activity is the instructor's commitment to working with the students in both research and writing. These dual foci must always be in the instructor's mind as the activity requires verbal and written feedback throughout the semester. Having the students work in teams allows the instructor to make a heavier time investment in verbal and written discussion, critique and correction. The goal of this labor is to develop students' understanding of research and to enhance their ability to reflectively evaluate and produce research. As the principle investigator for each study, the instructor must work diligently to ensure the success of each project while also allowing the students to learn by trial and error.

### **Course Activity**

#### **General Overview**

During the semester, didactic lectures were used to educate the students on types of research design, fundamentals of research, how to conduct studies, how to analyze data, and how to write reports. Throughout the process, students were expected to demonstrate what they were learning. For example, when learning about hypotheses and appropriate research questions, the groups were asked to write their research questions and hypotheses for their study. Following lectures, the instructor helped the students decide on appropriate constructs to measure, potential inventories that measure the identified constructs, target populations, how to reach the designated population, technology for acquiring and storing data, assigning tasks to group members, or other elements of research design. Faculty engagement is

crucial throughout the entire research project from facilitating the discussion on research interests to the completion of the final research report.

What follows is the experiential activity organized by weeks. The focus of this delineation is not upon lecture content but upon the activities necessary for an exploratory research project to be successfully initiated and completed within the confines of a single semester.

#### **Week 1**

In the first class of the semester, the students were informed that a major part of the course included conducting a group research study. This made the course challenging as the students would need to complete usual course activities like keeping up with the readings and assignments as well as learning new information, but in addition they were expected to apply that learning to their group research projects.

Therefore class time during week one was utilized to identify and discuss student research interests, access to samples, and possible collaboration with other faculty. Students were expected to divide into groups of four to six individuals by research interest. Through discussion and interaction with the instructor, each group tentatively decided upon a research topic that fell within the expertise or interest of the instructor who served as the principle investigator for each study. At the master's level, the groups used the initial meeting to decide if they wanted to use a qualitative or quantitative approach to their study. At the doctoral level, the activity was part of a quantitative research course, so that methodology was required.

### **Weeks 2 to 3**

The second week of class focused on research ethics and multicultural considerations in research design and application. As a part of the process, students constructed a rough draft of a consent form to use in their research project. Students also completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) online research ethics training course and reviewed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) personal record privacy requirements. Students were required during week three to turn in their NIH certificate of completion and indicate they had read and would abide by NIH and HIPAA standards in conducting their studies. In addition, during week three, each group handed in a worksheet identifying their research topic and main variables as well as the final informed consent form.

When students met in their groups during week two, they were asked to identify potential populations they could access for their exploratory studies, such as individuals in their work or community settings. Unless the students were choosing to research a particular population, students needed to consider how they could collect data from a diverse sample of individuals. Students were asked to consider potential locations to conduct their research study. For example, if they wanted to research counseling interventions, students were asked if they had access to a counseling center, potential counselors willing to include the counseling intervention in practice, and enough clients at the counseling center willing to participate in research. Students also worked to secure permission to conduct a research study at the desired site. By contemplating this information early on, potential sites with barriers could be ruled out and appropriate sites identified and secured. If sites could not be identified

other databases were made available to the students to use. In the master's level course, students were informed they could investigate a topic relevant to masters counseling students and were given the option of conducting their exploratory research with participants in the research course.

The focus for week three was learning how to complete a literature review. The assignment for the following week was for each group to identify and submit a written summary of 8-10 research articles related to their study. The summary of each article included identifying the research design, variables studied, instruments utilized, population sampled, and significant findings discovered. Upon reviewing the literature, students also worked with their groups to identify appropriate measures or assessments for collecting their data and possible journals that would be interested in their research reports. The requirement for journal submission was only for the doctoral students, though master's students could submit their reports if appropriate. The final assignment due during this week was a one-page summary proposal for their research study. The required information included a title, selection of a quantitative or qualitative design (master's course only), identified variables to investigate including instruments or another manner to measure the variables, their independent and dependent variables if applicable, the target population, and the location where they planned to conduct the study.

### **Week 4**

Research design and methodology was the focus of week four. The students decided the type of design their group wanted to implement (e.g., ethnography, survey, experimental), the questions they wanted to answer, and the means of

collecting their data (e.g., paper and pencil, online, interview). It is crucial that the instructor work closely with the students to achieve a successful design that takes into consideration the limited time frame of the semester and one that does not require a full review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The doctoral students must complete their first written outline or very rough draft of their research article this week as well. This typically includes only a brief introduction section, a short literature review and an outline of the rest of the article. To assist with this process, each group was required to identify and provide two research articles with a similar research design from a journal that would be interested in their topic. This allowed the students to see how such a study should be presented and facilitated the effective organization of their reports.

During this week, each student group secured and submitted a site permission letter that indicated the researchers were allowed to use the site to conduct their research study. This is one point where students' plans can significantly go astray. Though site access may have been assured, students may find it difficult to secure site authorization and be forced to modify or change their study. The instructor must be ready and willing to deal with such challenges and work with the students to identify another site or create another study option with the students such as using a convenience sample or an existing data set.

### **Weeks 5 to 6**

Week five focused on developing research hypotheses and the IRB process. The groups were expected to develop clear and concise research questions and hypotheses. Students were also taught about the importance of the IRB, the requirements for submission, and how to complete the

forms for the IRB process. Each group completed the IRB forms for their study and submitted them to the instructor. The instructor served as the principle investigator for the study and needed to review, critique, and return the forms to the students by the end of the week. Each group quickly made the suggested changes and resubmitted the forms to the instructor for a quick approval before the group leader submitted the completed forms to the IRB during the next week. All submissions were copied to the instructor as well. Submission of the IRB forms may need to happen much earlier in the semester depending on the turnaround time of the university's IRB. The university where this course was conducted typically takes one week for exempt reviews.

During week six, the students submitted a second, more detailed rough draft of their article. This draft included a refined introduction, literature review, and methods sections as well as a partial completion of the rest of the segments of an article including participants, results, discussion, limitations and summary. Since the data had not yet been collected, the students could only begin to work on the proposal with the assistance of the instructor. The idea is that students begin to write each section so that the data, once collected and analyzed, can be inserted and the article refined more quickly. This makes the most use of the students' time and shortens the time needed for writing the final article. Some class time during this week was reserved for each group to present and defend their proposed research study. During the presentations the instructor is allowed to call on any of the students to have them describe any part of the research study and they are graded accordingly.

### **Weeks 7 to 9**

The seventh week of class or the week after IRB approval, the data collection commenced. Dependent upon the form of the research collection, students entered the field via face-to-face assessments, mailings, or electronic means. Though site approval has been obtained, challenges can still confront students as they begin data collection. Working in teams often meant coordinating schedules and getting all data to a central data enterer. Various sites mean effort must be made to ensure consistent collection methods. In addition, if an online format is used, students may need to allow time for multiple online appeals to gather enough participants to allow for higher level data analysis. It is important to note that depending upon the research study, groups may need to begin data collection prior to week seven. If this is the case, the instructor must work with the group to determine earlier deadlines for IRB submission and the start of data collection.

By the end of week nine all data should be collected and ready for analysis. It is crucial to have all data collected by this time to allow enough time for completion of the article by the end of the semester. During weeks seven through nine, one or two more revisions of each group's article were submitted to the instructor and returned with critique and edits

### **Weeks 10 to 14**

Weeks 10 through 12 were spent analyzing the data and translating the results for written and oral presentation. At the master's level, the course also includes statistics. However, if the proper analysis is beyond the students' current learning, the instructor can assist the students with analysis or conduct the analysis for the students. Benefits and challenges exist with

both options. It would be best to have the students run the simple descriptive statistics and any analyses in which they have been trained (i.e., T tests, Correlations). At the doctoral level, the final analysis should be more advanced and slightly out of the range of the students current learning (i.e., Regressions, MANOVAs, Factor Analysis). Depending on the course progression, many doctoral students may not have had an advanced statistics course, so forming a collaborative partnership with the advanced statistics teacher could prove beneficial for both classes.

In the setting of this course, the first-year research methods doctoral students only had an elementary exposure to statistics, so the second year doctoral students in advanced statistics served as statistics consultants. The second-year students were grouped into teams and each was assigned to assist one group project. This collaboration provides the second-year students with the opportunity to work together to identify, run, explain, and report a proper statistical analysis for each study. This active collaboration exposes and prepares both groups of students for their dissertations. Weeks 12-14, depending on the timing of data collection, were spent understanding and writing up the results, discussion, and summary of the article. This was then submitted to the instructor for review and critique.

### **Week 15 to 16**

During week 15, each group presented the results of their study to their peers consistent with the formatting of a dissertation defense for the school or department. This presentation began with an overview of the study, but focused primarily upon the results, limitations and implications for counseling theory, research, and practice. Again, similar to the proposal,

during the presentations the instructor was allowed to call on any one of the students and have them describe any part of the research study. This presentation also provided a final opportunity for feedback on the study and discussion with faculty and peers, thus, impacting the final article. Peer questions and suggestions focused upon strengthening the discussion section were encouraged. In the final portion of the presentation, each student was required to share their reflections upon the process of learning research methods in this manner. They were to focus upon their experiences in the course and how it impacted them personally and as a team. As a team, they were asked to explore what they learned from the process and what they would do differently when conducting a future research study. The final version of each research article was due to the instructor at the end of week 15 which allowed the instructor one last review before submission to the journal during week 16. Though submission is the goal of the project, not all of the studies produce results that are publishable, and therefore, not all of the reports are submitted for journal review.

### **Challenges**

Several barriers could arise in implementing this activity and faculty and students should be aware of these before integrating and conducting a similar exercise. First, in order for this type of core experiential activity to be successful, deadlines must be set and enforced throughout the semester (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). This helps the students maintain momentum so that execution, completion, and summarization of the study can be completed by the end of the semester. At midterm, for example, the students were expected to have designed their research methodology, begun data collection, and to

have written the introduction, literature review, and methodology of their research report. Second, time for research project application and general discussion happened before, during, and after class, but additional course-specific faculty office hours were also offered to the students. Normal office hours were still maintained, but during the course-specific office hours, there was an open door policy whereby all students from the course were welcome to share their concerns and receive more guidance. Because students often struggle with the same issues, all students were encouraged to come and listen to others' concerns and express their concerns. This resulted in multiple questions being answered simultaneously and made the most of the instructor's and students' time. Some of these course-specific office hours were conducted online and a live audio archive of the session was made available so students unable to get to campus could listen and learn from the discussion. The success of this research project activity depends upon the faculty and upon the functioning of the research group.

Group work is the third challenge to this activity as students often have reservations about working in groups, especially when their grades are dependent upon others' work. Some students may think that they can put in less effort and rely on others' strengths to carry the load in a group. It is crucial, therefore, that accountability for performance is a mainstay of this exercise. This has been addressed by the peer evaluations, the weighting of such evaluations upon final grades and by expecting each group member to be able to demonstrate their learning during class presentations (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). However, students must be encouraged to be honest and work through the stages of group work in order to achieve a productive environment that will lead to

group success (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). If students can be honest with one another and with the instructor, the process should move along smoothly. Such group work often highlights a student's needs and weaknesses that individual work does not. The instructor and peers must, therefore, see this feedback forum as an opportunity for both personal and professional growth and development.

In addition to personal challenges, most challenges with the activity lie in the areas of sampling, meeting deadlines, and analysis. Of primary concern is the need to secure a sample of the population the students want to study before moving too far along in the process of the research design. Given the short time frame to design and to conduct the study, it is imperative that the instructor or the students have access to a sample of individuals consistent with the study. Using existing government data sets or existing data sets of faculty limits the research questions but can facilitate the research process. Furthermore, it is important to make sure students adhere to the deadlines and that all groups remain on target to reach each of the goals for the project. If any of the groups get behind, it may be difficult for the group to complete the project during the semester. Therefore, the instructor will need to check in with each group regularly to make sure all goals and deadlines are met. A final problem to address is if data analysis results in no significant findings. When this happens, which it will, it is best to help the students to process the data and write it up "as if" for publication. In their write-up, they should address why they think their hypothesis was wrong and describe how future studies could be strengthened to more fully explore their constructs.

Students often come into research courses concerned about their ability to

perform well, therefore, learning on the first day that they will be executing their own research study may increase their level of trepidation. It is crucial then that the instructor articulates that his or her primary role is to actively guide the students through the entire research project. The instructor will work hard to facilitate their learning about the research process by helping and guiding them to immediately apply their leaning. Instructors must openly acknowledge that to complete a research project and write the research report in the same semester is a tremendous challenge. It requires both the instructor and the students to be consistently engaged with the projects. Therefore, it is important to use class time for application, to clearly articulate the expectations of the students early in the semester, and to check in with each group weekly to make sure they understand and are completing each expected task. In addition, each step of the research project (e.g. writing research questions, number of participants, analysis of data) is given as a graded homework assignment to ensure timely completion.

### **Student Evaluations**

When presenting any type of learning activity as an example, some form of evaluation of the effectiveness of the technique should be included. Although this evaluation is not exhaustive and is only descriptive in manner, it represents an attempt to highlight the effect of the activity from the students' perspectives. Two classes of doctoral level counseling students and two classes of master's level students participated in this experiential training in research. Three sources formed the textual basis for the students' feedback about the experiential learning activity including their final class evaluations, peer evaluations, and final presentations.

From the evaluation methods described, students at both levels consistently said that if they could keep one element of the course they would want to keep the research project. Students expressed that, “going through the process of the research project was invaluable,” “completing an actual study and writing for publication was very beneficial,” and “working as a group on the project needs to be kept.” Statements about the most significant learning experience in the course revolved around the project as well: “I felt a sense of accomplishment as we submitted the final manuscript because we had put in a lot of effort as a research group and we were able to put into practice what we had learned in theory;” “My most significant learning experience was the research project. I had never conducted one before and so the whole class was a great learning experience;” and, “What the process of research to publication is like was my most significant learning experience.” Students reported finding support in the group work as well with statements such as: “The most significant learning experience was with the group work on the research project;” and, “We have learned to rely on one another for strength, guidance, and support in the areas of researching, writing, and analyzing data, and have grown to appreciate one another on a personal level as well.”

The doctoral level students (N = 20) before the start of their course were asked to describe their interest in research methods few described it as high (n=3; 15%), most as medium (n=10; 50%) and many as low (n=7; 35%). , while after the course most described it as high (n=13; 65%), many as medium (n=7; 35%) and none (0%) described it as low. A majority of the students (n= 14; 70%) indicated that they learned more in this course than most or any other course, while only a few (n= 6; 30%) felt that their learning was the same as in

most other courses. None felt that it was less than other courses. Overall, it appears that the group research projects helped the students to grow and to develop as researchers and as individuals.

### **Conclusion**

Though this activity appears helpful for these students, several recommendations can be made to improve its effectiveness. When using this exercise or a similar activity, it might be helpful to expand experiential learning by further integrating it with other courses the students are taking or will take in the future. The first time the activity was used in the doctoral level course the students had not completed advanced quantitative statistics and this hampered their ability to conduct appropriate analysis and limited their research designs. The second time the course was taught the instructor partnered with the advanced statistics course instructor and recruited students in that course to serve as statistical consultants for the projects. This benefited both classes as the students in the advanced statistics course also had to immediately apply what they were learning to help their research teams. Such creative thinking and collaboration has the potential to continue to enhance student learning regarding research.

Due to the doctoral level course being a quantitative methods course, only the master’s level students were able to use the experience to explore and learn qualitative research. Expanding this type of research activity to a qualitative research course at the doctoral level is strongly suggested. This is consistent with a study of counselor educators in which they indicated they would have liked more training in qualitative research (Atieno Okech et al., 2006). It may prove beneficial to use a similar experiential group activity in a qualitative research course to facilitate the



training of counselor educators (Reisetter et al., 2004). Working in teams to develop and conduct a qualitative study across the semester would facilitate application and immersion into various qualitative approaches and help to develop the confidence of counselor educators in training.

Modifications to this activity could easily be integrated into other courses for master's students or students with limited exposure to research. A simple modification would be to make the class a research laboratory where the students execute a research project designed by the instructor. If the instructor wanted to investigate multiple constructs and enough variables could be included, the student groups could select variables for their own specific projects within the overarching course research framework. This would allow for easier identification of populations, measures, and create a shared literature for each project. The students would still have the responsibility of conducting a research study, but the research design could be predetermined. In addition, master's students could present results as case reports not fully developed research reports for publication.

Although experiential learning activities can create challenges for instructors and students, such methods are worth the effort. Considering the goal of most research methods courses is to develop competence in research evaluation and application, generating research would seem to be a natural part of the process. More specific research is needed, but engaging

students in immediate and consistent application of their learning related to research appears to make it much more tangible, manageable, and invaluable in understanding the research process. By actively engaging students in research methods and research production, it is hoped that students will increase their confidence and engagement in research and begin to view it as a part of a counselor's identity.

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