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Strategies to Operationalize CACREP Standards in School Counselor Education

Abstract

School counselor preparation programs must train students in counseling skills while addressing the unique factors related to counseling in an educational setting. One way to approach this task is to utilize the general and school counseling standards set forth by CACREP (2009) as a framework for program planning. This article describes one university's course sequencing, program specific courses, and strategies and assignments designed to meet the particular educational needs of future professional school counselors as well as incorporate the CACREP (2009) standards.

Strategies to Operationalize CACREP Standards in School Counselor Education

Holly Branthoover, Kimberly J. Desmond, and Michelle L. Bruno

School counselor preparation programs must train students in counseling skills while addressing the unique factors related to counseling in an educational setting. One way to approach this task is to utilize the general and school counseling standards set forth by CACREP (2009) as a framework for program planning. This article describes one university's course sequencing, program specific courses, and strategies and assignments designed to meet the particular educational needs of future professional school counselors as well as incorporate the CACREP (2009) standards.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) sets forth minimum standards to guide curricula in graduate counseling programs. Since 1981, CACREP has been the dominant accrediting body for the counseling profession (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). The CACREP (2009) standards defined eight core curriculum standards for students in counseling to obtain knowledge and experience: (a) Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice, (b) Social and Cultural Diversity, (c) Human Growth and Development, (d) Career Development, (e) Helping Relationships, (f) Group Work, (g) Assessment, and (h) Research and Program Evaluation. In addition to these core areas, there are specific CACREP standards for school counseling programs that include knowledge with associated skills and practices in the following areas: (a) Foundations, (b) Counseling Prevention and Intervention, (c) Diversity and Advocacy, (d) Assessment, (e) Research and Evaluation, (f) Academic Development, (g) Collaboration and Consultation, and (h) Leadership. Many counselor educators and counseling professionals look to such

standards for guidance in developing and implementing effective counseling programs.

Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan, and Rahill (2002) conducted a survey of school counselors who were members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) regarding their perceptions of the importance and relevance of the CACREP (2001) standards. Their findings indicated support for the knowledge and skill base of accredited school counseling programs. They suggested that the dual influence of K-12 education (e.g., knowledge of the school setting and curriculum) and counseling (e.g., ability to implement individual and group counseling for children and adolescents) is clearly exemplified in the CACREP (2001) school counseling standards. These authors further stated that the importance of being trained in K-12 education and counseling has placed school counselors in a position to advocate for school counseling as a counseling specialty area as well as a K-12 education related discipline, such as special education. Similarly, Olson and Allen (1993) acknowledged both K-12 education and counseling as important forces in school counseling. ASCA (2005) also affirmed

school counselors as specialists within the school environment due to their training in counseling and in K-12 education.

School counseling graduate students are in a unique position to learn about the professional identity of counselors within the school environment. The CACREP (2009) standards serve as a guide for counseling programs to meet the specialized needs of school counselors in both counseling and K-12 education. At Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), the CACREP (2009) standards serve as a foundation for the design of the school counseling program. The purpose of this article is to describe one university's unique school counseling course sequencing, program specific courses, and strategies and assignments designed to meet the particular educational needs of future professional school counselors. The IUP Counseling Department, like many counselor education programs, embraces the notion of the school counselor as an integral part of the preparation process (IUP, 2007b). Therefore, we strive not only to meet the standards set forth by CACREP (2009) but also use those standards in the creation of strategies focusing on the unique role that school counselors fill as education specialists.

University and Department Information

In order to place course offerings in context, it is necessary to provide a brief background of IUP and the Counseling Department. IUP is the largest of the fourteen schools in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). According to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE, 2007), IUP is located in rural western Pennsylvania and enrolls approximately 11,724 undergraduate students in 93 undergraduate programs and 2,294 graduate students in 45 graduate programs. The university employs a unionized faculty of 761 full and part-time members.

The IUP Counseling Department is housed within the College of Education and Educational Technology and offers two

degree programs, a Master of Arts in Community Counseling and a Master of Education in School Counseling. School Counseling majors can choose a focus on either elementary or secondary school counseling. The degree program is 48 credits, with a certification-only track available for students with a master's degree wishing to pursue certification as a school counselor in Pennsylvania (IUP, 2007a).

The Counseling Department enrolls approximately 205 students, 87 in the M.A. program, 100 in the M.Ed. program, and 15 students enrolled as either licensure or certification-only students. There are 12 full time tenure track faculty teaching in the program. Both degrees are offered at the main campus as well as one off-campus location, which is approximately 50 miles southwest of main campus and located in the suburbs of the city of Pittsburgh. The Department is currently accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and CACREP (IUP, 2007a).

School Counseling Program

IUP's school counseling program philosophy is based on a developmental approach to school counseling (IUP, 2007b). The Department is committed to training school counselors within a framework of competencies as outlined by CACREP (2009) and the unified vision of the American School Counselor Association (IUP, 2007b). In order to reach this goal, the Department has infused concepts from the ASCA National Model across the curriculum. First, the Department created a unique two-course sequence for school counseling students. This sequence includes a three credit Introduction to Professional School Counseling course followed by a three credit Management of a Professional School Counseling Program course. In addition to the two-course sequence, school counseling majors take several courses separately from community counseling majors. These courses are tailored specifically for school counselors

and include Educational Appraisal (Assessment), Career Education, and Ethical and Legal Issues in Schools. The intention behind offering school-specific courses is to provide students with opportunities to master content that applies to school counseling. For example, the ethical and legal issues course focuses on state-specific laws regarding confidentiality and privileged communication that may differ from counselors working in community settings. The courses are intended to provide students ample opportunities to learn relevant laws, ethical codes, and decision-making models that will enhance their competence to work with school aged students.

In the age of accountability, counselor education programs strive to enhance the training of future counselors and to demonstrate that trainees are obtaining necessary skills to provide quality care (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 1993). Further, students are taught how to assess the impact of their work using outcomes-based projects and the utilization of data to influence decisions within their school counseling programs. As accountability has become an important indicator in our field, the profession at large has sought to measure competence in various ways. This particular article will focus on one program's efforts to infuse the CACREP and school counseling standards and to provide information on how competence is assessed.

Infusion efforts

The approach of our counseling program is to facilitate students' understanding of the CACREP and school counseling standards through an infusion approach. Generally, we provide a matrix on each course syllabus that outlines how the specific CACREP (2009) and CACREP School Counseling Standards (2009) match each course objective, program objective, and course assignment. In addition, each course contains an assignment intended to be the culminating experience or summative

assignment. This assignment is used to evaluate student competence in course objectives. Other course activities and class work is designed to show students how to apply the standards to real-world school counseling activities. Specific examples of summative assignments and course activities will be detailed below.

Assessment of competence

In each course syllabus, a detailed grading rubric outlines program objectives, course objectives, and CACREP standards. The rubric is included to assist students in understanding how competence will be assessed using the culminating experience or summative assignment. In addition to a traditional grade on the summative assignment, each student receives an evaluation using a Key Assessment Rating (KARS). In 2004, our university created KARS under the guidance of the Dean of the College of Education and Educational Technology. Initial development of KARS was completed to help achieve NCATE accreditation (Jeff Fratangeli, personal communication, June 16, 2008). KARS requires each department to review program objectives as well as course objectives and ensure that assignments, or assessments, align with such objectives. Each department creates a summative assignment that serves as the key assessment. Ideally, key assessments include as many course objectives as possible. At the end of each semester, individual instructors rate student performance on the summative assessment using a three-point key assessment rating (1= unacceptable, 2= acceptable, 3= target). Instructors report these data electronically for each student in each course. These data undergo review alongside other information such as pass rates on Praxis exams and the National Counseling Exam. Taken together, these methods provide avenues for students to meet course objectives while also abiding by professional standards set forth by CACREP and ASCA.

In the next section, we will highlight the specific course objectives and the accompanying strategies and techniques used to teach CACREP (2009) standards in the Introduction to Professional School Counseling, Management of a Professional School Counseling Program, Career Education in the Schools, Educational Appraisal, and Ethics and Legal Issues courses. These examples demonstrate how the standards are infused and how student competence on the standards is assessed.

Introduction to Professional School Counseling

Like most counselor education programs, our training program for school counselors begins with an introduction course. In the program, we begin our infusion approach with the title of the course Introduction to Professional School Counseling, which was changed from Introduction to Guidance Services during our most recent curriculum revision. This title supports the language of CACREP (2009) and ASCA (2005) by using the term professional school counseling.

Again, during curriculum revision, we worked to create catalog descriptions for our courses that would represent our commitment to both CACREP and school counselor competencies as expressed by ASCA. We believe in the importance of a well-written catalog description, as it remains unchanged unless there is a formal

curriculum revision. In addition, many students form their first impression of a program by researching program requirements and course descriptions via the internet. For the introduction course, we crafted the following catalog description,

“This course provides an overview of the history and current trends in professional school counseling, specifically focusing on the role of the professional school counselor within a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program that is based on the ASCA National Model and applicable state models of school counseling” (Author, 2008, p. 92).

In addition to writing catalog descriptions, our curriculum revision included a reworking of all course objectives. Again, we chose to craft objectives that would represent our commitment to the CACREP (2009) standards. Whereas academic freedom allows for modifications of most areas within a course, course objectives are not permitted to be altered, regardless of the professor assigned. Course objectives, then, become a permanent expression of the department’s philosophical stance on teaching a particular course. Objectives may only be changed with input and approval from the entire faculty. Table 1 illustrates two example objectives from the Introduction course and how they are cross-referenced with CACREP.

Table 1: Sample Objectives for Introduction to School Counseling

Sample Objectives	CACREP (2009) Professional Identity standards (Section IIG)	CACREP (2009) School Counseling Standards
Demonstrate regard for identity as a professional school counselor and the importance of professional development and ethical behavior	1b, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1j, 5b, 7f, and 8f	A2, A3
Describe the role of the professional school counselor and defend appropriate activities within the four delivery systems of school counseling including guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual student planning, and system support	1b, 4b, 4c, 4e, 4g, 5b-d	A3, A5, B2, C2

Strategies and Assignments

Unlike other areas of the course that may not be changed, teaching strategies and techniques remain the purview of individual professors. However, one overarching strategy that our department has strived for is to have professors with school counseling experience teach school counseling courses. We understand, however, such teaching assignments are not always possible. In the case that an instructor does not have school counseling experience, we offer mentoring and guidance to that instructor in order to adequately meet course objectives.

In the Introduction to Professional School Counseling course, one simple strategy used to support CACREP (2009) standards is textbook selection. Although professors use a variety of texts, the ASCA National Model (2005) book is always included. In addition, professors choose texts that support and align with standards and competencies (i.e. Erford, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006).

One assignment often used in the introduction class is a classroom guidance lesson, designed and taught by two to three students. For this project, students are assigned a content domain (i.e. academic, career, or personal/social) from the ASCA National Standards (ASCA, 2005). Then, students design a one-half hour classroom guidance lesson and teach it to their class members. Lessons are graded based upon adherence to time limits, developmental appropriateness of content, and applicability of lesson content to the standards, competencies, and indicators within their assigned domain. This assignment meets multiple course objectives.

As previously mentioned, each course in the program has a summative assignment, which is intended to be the culminating experience for the course. This is another part of a course in which academic freedom does not apply. All professors must use the same summative assignment, grade the assignment using the same rubric, and enter these data into

KARS. During curriculum revision, summative assignments were reviewed and updated with the same attention given to course names, descriptions, and objectives. For the introduction course, the summative assignment is the Counselor/Program Profile Experience. For this assignment, students interview a current school counselor. The student gathers information about the counselor's background, the current school counseling program at the school, and rewards and drawbacks of the position. After the interview, the student provides a professional synthesis of information from the interview with what they learned in the class. Students are directed to use the ASCA National Model (2005) as a guide for their synthesis. This summative assignment is designed for students to demonstrate competence in the foundational knowledge section of the CACREP school counseling standards, which we believe provides an appropriate basis for the advanced skills and practices they will learn as they matriculate through the school counseling program.

Management of a Professional School Counseling Program

One aspect of our program that we view as distinctive is that school counseling students take a second required course after the completion of the Introduction to Professional School Counseling course. This course, titled Management of Professional School Counseling Services, serves to prepare our students for organizing and managing a school counseling program. This includes a focus on data and accountability that current research supports as necessary (ASCA 2005; Brown & Trusty, 2005). Like the introduction course, the title of this course was strategically chosen. In addition, the catalog description was formulated with CACREP (2009) standards in mind and reads, "This course helps the school counselor acquire the necessary competencies to organize and manage a professional school counseling program.

Emphasis is on planning, designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing the school counseling program” (IUP, 2008, p. 92).

As with the introduction course, the objectives for the management course

directly support the CACREP (2009) Professional Identity and School Counseling standards. Table 2 provides two sample objectives from the management course.

Table 2: Sample Objectives for Management of a Professional School Counseling Program

Sample Objectives	CACREP (2009) Professional Identity standards (Section IIG)	CACREP (2009) School Counseling Standards
Design a comprehensive developmental school counseling program (via a strategic plan) that ensures equitable access for all students and is compatible with ASCA National Model	1a, 3f, 3h, 8a-f	A1, A3, A5, A6, B2, C2, C4, C5, D3, E1, F2, F4, H5, I1-3, J1-3, K1-3, L1-2, M 1-6, N3, O1, O3-4, P1-2
Prepare a strategy for program evaluation and enhancement, including data-driven accountability methods	8d-e	A5, C2

Strategies and Assignments

An additional strategy commonly used in the management course to support CACREP (2009) standards is the choice of textbooks (i.e. Dollarhide & Saginak, 2007; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006), which includes requiring the ASCA National Model Workbook (2004). Another strategy is inviting current school counselors as guest speakers to the class. Emphasis is placed on finding speakers that are implementing comprehensive programs and are familiar with the ASCA National Model (2005). A final strategy used in the class is that of student consultation groups. Students are allowed to form consultation groups to assist and support each other in preparing their summative assignment projects. Consultation is considered a key skill in the CACREP (2009) standards.

As with the Introduction to Professional School Counseling course, the Management of a Professional School Counseling Program summative assignment was reviewed and updated during our recent curriculum revision. For the assignment, students plan, design, implement, and evaluate a school counseling program using the ASCA National Model (2005) as a guide. They create a comprehensive school counseling program that includes the foundation, management system, delivery system, and accountability system aspects of the model. This assignment is designed to demonstrate competence in the ASCA National Model and CACREP school counseling standards.

Educational Appraisal

Students, typically take the Educational Appraisal, or assessment course, in their first year of graduate study. Sample course objectives are included in Table 3.

Table 3: Sample Objectives for Educational Appraisal

Sample Objectives	CACREP (2009) Professional Identity standards (Section IIG)	CACREP (2009) School Counseling Standards
The identification of a variety of developmentally and multiculturally appropriate assessment strategies	2a, 2b, 2e, 2f	A6, E3, G2-G3, H1-H3
Utilization of data from school-based information (e.g., standardized testing) and other assessment devices (surveys, focus groups, needs assessments, etc.)	li, 7b, 7f, 7g	A6, H1-H3, I1-I5, J1-J3

Strategies and Assignments

One strategy commonly used in the assessment course is to have students work in small groups to prepare a critical analysis of a standardized test commonly used in the schools. During this process, students learn to draw from the literature (e.g. how the ASCA National Model (2005) encourages use of data from assessment tools) and to apply the ethical guidelines to identify assessment strategies that are appropriate choices for their student population. Small groups of counselor trainees work together to facilitate a larger class discussion on the process that they used to identify relevant cultural factors and ethical and its intended purpose. Student competence on the related standards is assessed by reviewing the quality of their analysis as well as their ability to facilitate a discussion to a larger group. This practice reinforces the role of school counselors as leaders. A second strategy is to have students work with needs assessments to inform decision-making. The needs assessment can be approached using the four elements of the ASCA National Model. For instance, in *planning*, counseling students can use the school mission or goals to inform some of the items on the needs assessment. In *designing* the assessment, counseling students can identify key stakeholders to obtain additional ideas/suggestions and identify potential barriers. Subsequently, s/he can then *implement* the needs assessment by

piloting it during class to peers and a faculty member. Finally, counseling students can *evaluate* the needs assessment and elicit ideas on how to use these data to make decisions for school counseling programming. These efforts aim to enhance the knowledge and skills of counselor trainees and to increase efficacy of using data, assessment, and outcomes so that initiatives, improvements, and changes can occur. Student competence on the relevant standards (e.g., using a needs assessment to assess barriers) is assessed at the various points in this assignment, providing indicators of their knowledge and skills of how data can influence individual counseling and programmatic efforts. Thus, these strategies prepare students for their culminating project, or summative assignment.

The comprehensive strategy occurs via the summative assignment, which draws on several course objectives as well as the aforementioned standards. The summative assignment is a case study that requires students to utilize the planning, designing, implementing, and evaluative components of the ASCA National Model (2005). For this assignment, school counseling trainees interact with a “student” and administer several assessment instruments (pending informed consent). Students solicit feedback from the “student” on the experience of testing in order to apply developmental understanding, to consider individual context, and to increase awareness of multicultural factors to gain a better idea of

student results. School counseling trainees learn to identify and recognize limitations of testing. Finally, trainees synthesize the findings of their interviews and assessment results and discuss overall impressions. Student competence on several standards is assessed via this assignment. For example, counselor trainees must demonstrate endorsement of the idea that multiple factors can affect the personal, social, and academic functioning of students. This is assessed by viewing their overall write up of this case. Further, competence must be demonstrated in relation to their ability to administer instruments and to synthesize their findings related to the personal, multicultural, and developmental aspects of the case.

Other strategies used in the assessment course include use of interviews of school professionals (e.g., via

pod casts and using Skype technology), discussing accountability and assessment in schools, and demonstration of how to use measures of central tendency and item analysis. For example, the instructor can demonstrate accountability by using item analysis and descriptive statistics from course quizzes or exams to reinforce concepts of accountability, content validity, and fairness. Many of the skills relevant in the appraisal course also exist in the career education course, where students learn about many types of career exploration and assessment tools.

Career Education in the Schools

Career Education in the Schools is also a course specifically designed for school counseling students. Examples of course objectives are included in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample Objectives for Career Education in the Schools

Sample Objectives	CACREP (2009) Professional Identity standards (Section IIG)	CACREP (2009) School Counseling Standards
Use of Identity Masking in Manuscript Submission career education and academic work standards, and ASCA career standards to develop, implement, and evaluate a career counseling program in a school setting	4a-4g, 6a, 7b-7g	A5, C2, C4, D2
Design and implement individual planning, including appropriate assessment, by integrating career counseling in school settings while attending to the academic and psycho-social impact of career issues.	2a, 2b, 3a,3f, 3h, 4a-g, 5d, 7b-7g	A5, A6, C2, C4, D2, E2, F2, G1, G3, H2, H5, K2, L1-K3, N2-N3

Strategies and Techniques

Examples of additional strategies used in Career Education in the Schools include intentional selection of career textbooks that include the ASCA National Model and chapters that are school-specific. In addition, it is recommended that school counseling trainees receive the opportunity to explore career software that is designed to meet CACREP (2009) Professional

Identity Standard 4g. Further, students are required to explore career concerns of a marginalized student population and deliver their findings to their peers.

A final strategy used in Career Education in the Schools is implemented via the summative assignment and spans several course objectives and standards. School counselor students develop a school counseling career unit for either K-6 or 7-12 students. The unit must include measurable

objectives, a philosophy of why such a unit is important (drawing on relevant professional journal articles), Pennsylvania career education and work academic standards, ASCA career competencies/standards, and a minimum of four lessons of how the competencies will be implemented and evaluated. This culminating assignment allows students to demonstrate their competence in the course content including relevant CACREP standards.

Ethical and Legal Issues in School Counseling

The Ethical and Legal Issues in School Counseling course is offered exclusively to school counseling students so that ample time and energy can be expended on issues unique to those working with minors in a school setting. Examples of course objectives are included in Table 5.

Table 5: Sample Objectives for Ethical and Legal Issues in School Counseling

Sample Objectives	CACREP (2009) Professional Identity standards (Section IIG)	CACREP (2009) School Counseling Standards
Understanding of ethical guidelines and training needs related to multicultural counseling and working with diverse cultural groups	1j, 2a-2f, 3e-3f	A6, B1, C1, C3, D1, D3, E1-E4, F1-F4
Understanding the nature of the school counseling profession in terms of professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities and conflicts	1A-1J, 2A-2G, 7G, 8F	A1-A3, B1, E1

Strategies and Techniques

One strategy used in the ethics course is the inclusion of textbooks and recent supplemental readings that are specific to school counselors. Utilization of such resources provides students with real life examples of ethical and legal situations they are likely to face in their work as practicing school counselors. Further, the selected textbook (Stone, 2005) provides readers with additional resources to consult to obtain state-specific information. A second strategy is to require students to apply ethical decision-making models to specific case vignettes. Such applied practice enables students to increase intentionality in decision-making as well as to learn to interpret the code of ethics. Students completing such practice gain an appreciation for the complexity of decision-making and this can lead to increased utilization of supervision and consultation. Student competence on standards related

to understanding ethical and legal considerations are assessed with homework assignments and exams. These assignments assess competence by reviewing the appropriateness of their ethical and legal considerations regarding specific cases as well as the ability to apply a ethical decision making model. A third strategy is incorporation of professional identity activities such as identifying examples of student advocacy, listening to podcasts specific to school counseling, and participating in values sorts and subsequent discussions of how to maintain professionalism when personal values and beliefs may conflict professional duties. This strategy assesses competence on the standards related to self-awareness and sensitivity to others (e.g., school standard D1) by providing a forum for students to reflect on their values. Ideally, using self-awareness and knowledge will serve as an impetus to further development of cultural sensitivity. A final strategy to help achieve

course objectives is the creation of a professional disclosure statement (identified as the summative assignment). The professional disclosure statement includes multiple course objectives, CACREP General Standards 1c, 1h, and 6g, and CACREP School Specific Standards A3, A6, A11, and C2. Student competence on foundational standards related to professional identity is assessed based on accuracy of information as well as indication of a thorough understanding of professional roles and functions expected in today's school counselors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, strategies for infusing the CACREP (2009) standards into school counseling curriculum have included a two-course school counseling sequence designed to specifically address creation and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program; as well as sample assignments designed to demonstrate application of learning. In addition, counselor educators are encouraged to be mindful of the language used in course titles and course descriptions. The specific words chosen give meaning to the course. In the course examples described above, course titles and descriptions are congruent with ASCA and CACREP (2009) language. This helps to give a clear indication of course content. In addition, the textbooks for each of the courses are chosen with the ASCA National Model and CACREP (2009) standards in mind. Books are chosen that use similar language and philosophy to help support the mission of the school counseling program. Further, emphasizing the use of consistent language across the curriculum (e.g. professional school counselor vs. guidance counselor) encourages the development of a professional school counseling identity. In addition, through the creation of courses specifically designed for school counselors (e.g., Educational Appraisal, Career Education in the Schools, Ethical and Legal Issues in School

Counseling), students are able to infuse and apply knowledge obtained in previous courses. These specifically designed school counseling courses allow faculty to emphasize the dual influence of counseling and education on professional school counselors. In addition, the professional identity of students is strengthened as they begin to understand the specific demands of providing counseling services in the school environment. Consequently, when students are enrolled in the core counseling courses they begin to apply the content specifically to the school environment. The consistency in language and conceptualization across courses lends itself to direct application of the material across content areas. This direct application across content areas is of the utmost importance to school counseling students who are learning to navigate the dual influence of both education and counseling on the demands of a professional school counselor (Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan, & Rahill, 2002; Olson & Allen, 1993).

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