Spring 2010

Criteria of Nonacademic Characteristics Used to Evaluate and Retain Community Counseling Students

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The authors investigated ways in which selected 2001 standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, namely, retention and evaluation criteria relative to nonacademic characteristics, are addressed within Community Counseling master's-degree programs. Results from this survey research study illustrated various retention criteria that are used to evaluate students in various community counseling programs across the country.

Many counselor education programs, namely those accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), are responsible for providing particular criteria for admitting, screening, and retaining counseling students based on particular nonacademic characteristics or qualities unrelated to academics of knowledge and skill acquisition (CACREP, 2001). More specifically, the CACREP *Standards* (*Note.* The research presented in this article was conducted before the current CACREP *Standards* were implemented.) state that program admission criteria, as well as selection and retention procedures, should include the consideration of "each applicant's potential success in forming effective interpersonal relationships in individual and small-group contexts" (Standard V.I.2.) and consideration of "each applicant's openness to self-examination and personal and professional self-development" (Standard V.I.5.). Furthermore, counselor educators also have legal and ethical responsibilities in addressing any nonacademic characteristics or behaviors of counselor trainees that might interfere with their ability to work effectively with clients (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Schwab & Harris, 1981).

Since the inception of literature in the counselor education field, authors have addressed the nonacademically related criteria or personal characteristics expected of counselor trainees. As early as the 1950s, Rogers (1951) noted that three personal characteristics of counselors are essential in establishing therapeutic relationships—empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Not only must counselors possess these particular characteristics, they also must be evident in their interactions with clients and others. For example, responsibility in maintaining congruence might mean that counselors freely accept their feelings and attitudes while also being aware of how negative they might be. Adler (1979) also suggested that similar to their congruence, counselors' social interest is just as important. That is, counselors with developed social interest have a degree of self-awareness that allows them to be imperfect, which consequently moves them to accept their weaknesses and strengths as counselors. This enhances their ability to be genuine (or congruent) with clients.

Other suggestions about the importance of nonacademic characteristics of counselor trainees have been noted in the literature. In 1967, Johnson, Shertzer, Linden, and Stone reported agreement among counselor educators that nonintellective, nonacademic, or personal qualities are basic to effective functioning in the counseling relationship. Personality traits also have been noted as one of the most important contributors to a counselor trainee's interpersonal effectiveness (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1971). Furthermore, Hackney (1978) suggested that a highly empathetic counselor can use personal awareness in selecting appropriate interventions.

The CACREP (2001) *Standards* reinforce the importance of nonacademic or personal traits by making it a requirement within counselor education programs to evaluate such characteristics specifically during admission, screening, and retention processes. This article addresses the following: (a) a brief literature review of common terms related to nonacademic characteristics; (b) past research findings of criteria used by counselor education programs to evaluate nonacademic qualities; and (c) findings from a current survey research study conducted by the authors, which addressed the nonacademic criteria used to evaluate and retain community counseling students in 30 CACREP-accredited programs across the United States.

Counselor Competency and Impairment

Within the literature, terms such as *counselor competence* and *counselor impairment* have been used to de-

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scribe personal behaviors and characteristics (Procidano, Busch-Rossnagel, Reznikoff, & Geisinger, 1988). In fact, as early as the 1950s, these terms were used to describe the "personality predictors of effectiveness in counseling" (Carlozzi, Campbell, & Ward, 1982, p. 233). These predictors, namely behaviors and characteristics, are likely to be used within counselor education programs as benchmarks for evaluating nonacademic criteria. Before reviewing the specific criteria that are actually being used and defined within counselor education programs, it might be helpful first to review the meaning contained in and the definition of *counselor competency* and *counselor impairment.*

Counselor Competency

Counselor competency has been defined as a construct that includes both applied skills and psychological fitness. More specifically, competent counselors have been referred to as having the following personal characteristics: emotional security, sincerity, extroversion, positive self-concept, patience (Bemak, Epp, & Keys, 1999; Chiko, Tolsma, Kahn, & Marks, 1980), interpersonal competence, openness to professional self-development, and understanding (Bradley & Post, 1991). Other qualities of competent counselors may also include goodwill, a recognition and acceptance of one's personal power, a willingness to be open, having self-respect, a growth orientation, approachability, trustworthiness, and a sense of humor (Atkinson & Wampold, 1982; Corey et al., 1998). Finally, Gold and Rogers (1995) stated that "counselors cannot counsel from beyond whom they have become" (p. 79). In other words, the personal growth of counselors can have an impact on how they conduct therapy.

Counselor Impairment

Counselor impairment, on the other hand, has been defined as any emotional, physical, or educational condition that interferes with the quality of one's professional performance. For example, one specific criteria for impairment might be interferences in professional functioning due to substance abuse, sexual overtures, burnout (Wood, Klein, Cross, Lammers, & Elliott, 1985), mental illness, chemical dependency, or personal conflict (Laliotis & Grayson, 1985). In addition, Lamb et al. (1987) reported that other criteria that might interfere with professional functioning could be reflected in several ways, including "an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, or excessive emotional reaction that interferes with the professional's functioning" (p. 598). Finally, Sussman (1992) suggested other characteristics or criteria suggestive of counseling students who are impaired, including prejudicial values and attitudes, narcissistic idealization, the need to be omniscient, a pathological desire to "parent," and interpersonal insensitivity.

Criteria Expected Within Counselor Education Programs: A Historical and Current Summary

Stephenson, Elmore, and Evans (2000) stressed the importance of counselor preparation programs establishing formal levels of expectations or benchmarks that provide a standard for the requisite adeptness and proficiency of students and for the protection of their due process rights. Unfortunately, little is known about how such criteria are established. Furthermore, little is known about how or if counselor education programs actually used formalized criteria in addressing these standards as well as protecting the due process rights of the students (Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003). What does exist in the literature, however, is mention of standardized criteria used in the past, as well as in the present, in a few programs to evaluate the nonacademically related characteristics of students.

As early as 1967, Johnson et al. reported an agreement among counselor educators that nonintellective, nonacademic, or personal qualities are basic to effective functioning in the counseling relationship. Combs et al. (1971) suggested that the personalities of counselor trainees are the most important contributor to their interpersonal effectiveness. In response to such discussions, changes were made in counselor education programs. Such changes included making personal growth one of the goals of graduate training (Banikiotes, 1974).

Particular traits used to describe personal growth (i.e., characteristics, qualities, and behaviors) have included dogmatism, open-mindedness, externality, and self-actualization (Schwab & Harris, 1981). *Dogmatism* has been defined as the relative openness or closedness of a person's cognitive framework for receiving, evaluating, understanding, and acting on stimulus information (Carlozzi et al., 1982). *Open-mindedness* was defined by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (1961) as "the flexibility of outlook toward others that makes it possible to appreciate individuality, to be receptive to new research findings, new ideas, and achievements, and to have respect for a wide range of attitudes and beliefs. He* must have the curiosity to investigate the unusual" (p. 403). (*Use of the masculine pronoun merely reflects the typical noninclusive language of the time.) Carlozzi et al. (1982) summarized that persons with low dogmatism and an ability to be open-minded may have a lesser need to defend against beliefs or thoughts that are incongruent with their own.

Rotter (1954) defined *externality* as an individual's belief that she or he has little or no control over her or his life. Counselor trainees who have an external locus of control might, therefore, "experience difficulty learning and internalizing facilitative skills that call for the acceptance of personal responsibility in communicative exchanges" (Carlozzi et al., 1982, p. 229). Finally, definitions of *self-actualization* have included the ability for persons to accept themselves and others, living life fully, using all of their potential, genuineness, autonomy, and flexibility (Schwab & Harris, 1981).

Within current counselor education programs, students are evaluated on numerous domains of nonacademic qualities, including professional responsibilities, maturity, and integrity (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Additional qualities evaluated include interpersonal sensitivity, freedom from unhealthy interpersonal dynamics, caring, positive regard, psychological-mindedness and the capacity for introspection, ability to express genuine empathy, a commitment to personal growth, and the ability to pursue counseling if needed (Bemak et al., 1999). In other counselor education programs, students are evaluated on having a positive nature; being cooperative and flexible; being willing to use feedback; having the ability to express feelings appropriately, the ability to accept personal responsibility, and the ability to handle conflict effectively (Wiggins Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995).

Although there are some data pertaining to the criteria used to address nonacademic or personal characteristics among counselor education programs within the United States, the study of this aspect of counselor training is not complete. To add to the breadth of literature addressing this topic, the focus of the current study was to determine the criteria used in various counselor education programs to evaluate counselor trainees during the course of their program. For the sake of consistency among counselor education programs, we focused on CACREP-accredited Community Counseling programs.

Methods

Participants

The sample for this study included 30 CACREP-accredited Community Counseling programs across the United States. These programs were randomly selected from the 107 programs that were accredited by CACREP at the time of the study. Because the participant pool was known, random assignment was accomplished by drawing program names from a hat (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). Program chairs and/or coordinators were then identified through the program's website. Letters were mailed to the program coordinators inviting them to take part in the interview survey. Program coordinators were asked to pass the invitation along to another colleague if that particular colleague was best suited, based on his or her experience with the department or program, to answer the interview questions. Telephone calls were made to follow up on the invitation. The researchers continued to randomly select programs from the CACREP Directory until coordinators from at least 30 programs agreed to be surveyed.

Procedure

An introductory letter was sent to all participants outlining the research question that would be asked in a telephone interview. Before participating in the interview, all participants were asked to return a consent form. After the consent form was received, a telephone appointment was made. Before the actual telephone survey interview was conducted, the primary researcher (the first author) attempted to collect relevant documents from the website of the participant's program or through the participant's affiliate program office so that any information relevant to the research questions could be studied. If documents could not be located online or were not sent back to the researchers, the interviews were still conducted. Documents such as course syllabi, course evaluation forms, and program handbooks helped to further support the interviewees' verbal responses during the interviews. For example, some programs post their handbooks, which may include an informed consent document, thereby illustrating the nonacademic evaluation component of the program. Evaluation forms related specifically to nonacademic characteristics also were posted within some program handbooks. Such forms were used in supervision, in clinically based courses (i.e., practicum, internship), and in other classes such as Group Counseling.

According to Babbie (1973), survey interviews are commonly used to gather facts and descriptions, as well as to explain phenomena. Surveys also use self-reports to identify the nature of a particular variable, such as criteria of various personal characteristics (Heppner et al., 1999). The telephone survey interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. Survey interviews were used with each participant. Because all CACREP-accredited programs must adhere to the common standards, the following interview question was used to gain information: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program, what criteria does your program have for evaluating a student's (a) performance in forming effective interpersonal relationships in individual contexts (Standard V.I.2.), (b) performance in forming effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts (Standard V.I.2.), (c) a student's openness to self-examination (Standard V.I.5.), (d) personal self-development (Standard V.I.5.), and (e) professional self-development (Standard V.I.5.)?

Two researchers were present at the time of each interview. The interviews were conducted through the use of a speaker phone. The primary researcher led the surveys and took notes. The secondary researchers (second and third authors) typed responses into a grid that was divided into five sections of criteria, namely criteria that were used during retention to evaluate students on the following: (a) effective interpersonal relationships in individual contexts, (b) effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts, (c) a student's openness to self-examination, (d) personal self-development, and (e) professional self-development. Each of these sections corresponded to the subquestions of the main research question.

Verification of the research interviews was addressed with the following triangulating factors: peer examination of notes (Merriam, 1988), inclusion of more than one data collector (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and collection of affiliated program documents (Heppner et al., 1999). After each interview had been conducted, the primary and secondary researchers met to discuss and compare the notes that were collected during the

interview. Furthermore, the primary researcher reported back to participants for clarification and to increase the validity of responses when data were seemingly unclear. For example, if something was said that was unclear or inaudible on the tape recording, the primary researcher would contact the participant for clarification. In addition, if, after the accumulation of data from each program still left the researchers with questions regarding the program's evaluation process of student nonacademic criteria, participants were called. The collection of related documents, such as program handbooks, also provided content triangulation and stability of the data collected during the interviews. For example, many participants spoke about the procedures they used when there were concerns about a student's personal behaviors. In many cases, those procedures also were located in the program handbook.

Results

The data from the interviews were collected using the notes taken during the telephone interviews, notes aggregated within the five categories on the grid, and from program documents. Data or responses collected for each subquestion were analyzed and consequently put into particular categories. The following categories seemed to identify the mentioned criteria in the most appropriate way: (a) interpersonal interactions in academic/professional settings (i.e., how a student interacts in the classroom, with peers and faculty); (b) personality; and (c) professionalism as it relates to behaviors, skills, and knowledge.

Interpersonal Relationships in Individual Contexts: Criteria

This section of results corresponds to the following research subquestion: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program, what are your program's criteria for evaluating each student's performance in forming effective interpersonal relationships in individual contexts (Standard V.I.2.)? Most criteria mentioned by program affiliates seemed to be best coded under the following two categories: interpersonal interactions and personality (see Table 1). For example, specific criteria within interpersonal interactions included "ability to collaborate with peers and faculty," "nonargumentative," "aware of effect and impact on others," and "is honest and truthful when talking to others." Participants also suggested

TABLE 1

Criteria Used During Retention to Evaluate Students on Effective Interpersonal Relationships in Individual Contexts and Small-Group Contexts

Theme	Description of Related Criteria Used in Participants' Affiliated Programs
	Individual contexts
Interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings	Collaborates and functions with peers and faculty Is assertive, respectful, and ethical among peers and colleagues Willing to engage with others from diverse cultures
Personality	Exhibits flexibility, caring, and an uncritical nature Is open to new ideas and change, and to self-examination Exhibits evidence of balance in personal and professional life Exhibits dispositions noted in NCATE Is aware of personal strengths and weaknesses
Professionalism (behaviors, skill, and knowledge)	Adheres to ethical codes Can accept and receive feedback from supervisors/faculty Can identify personal difficulties affecting counseling ability Establishes rapport and relationships with clients
	Small-group contexts
Interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings	Exhibits assertiveness with others but is cooperative Is aware of personal boundaries with others Accepts and provides respectful feedback to group members Exhibits participation and respect; able to self-disclose Creates safe environment Willing to engage others from diverse cultures
Personality	Able to deal with and manage conflict, one's "high emotions" Committed to learning and is open to criticism and feedback Open to self-examination and personal development Exhibits genuine helpfulness
Professionalism (behaviors, skill, and knowledge)	Is open and respectful toward colleagues Follows ethical guidelines and codes Accepts and uses feedback, improves group skills

Note. NCATE = National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2007).

other specific criteria within the category of interpersonal interactions that have been summarized in the table for the sake of brevity, namely, a student's approachability and his or her "comfort in engaging with others."

Interpersonal Relationships in Small-Group Contexts: Criteria

Results from this section correspond to the following interview sub-question: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program, what criteria does your program have for evaluating each student's performance in forming effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts (Standard V.I.2.)? Information from this question was coded into the three categories listed above. Most criteria mentioned by program affiliates seemed to be best coded under interpersonal interactions and professionalism (see Table 1). That is, criteria used to evaluate students' interpersonal interactions within a group context were typically related to how students related to their peers in formal group settings such as in the group counseling class or other working groups. In addition, students were evaluated on their ability to "demonstrate group leadership skills" and to "apply Basic Listening Skills and group technique/theory concepts."

A finding worth noting is that when participants were asked what criteria were used to evaluate each student's performance in forming effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts, many replied by asking the researchers what *they* meant by "small-group contexts." Participants were reminded that this term was a CACPREP term and not one chosen by the researchers. This phenomenon might suggest that "small-group contexts" are being interpreted by programs in varying ways. That is, a counselor trainee's group interactions might be observed and evaluated within classroom discussions; within assigned small groups that serve the purpose of working toward some goal (e.g., group project) or as a growth group; and within informal groups of two or three students possibly convening in the hallway, for example.

Openness to Self-Examination: Criteria

This section of results corresponds to the following research subquestion: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program, what are your program's criteria for evaluating a student's openness to self-examination (Standard V.I.5.)? Information from this question was coded into the three previously listed categories. Most criteria mentioned by program affiliates seemed to be best coded under interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings, specifically in being open to and applying feedback given from peers and under professionalism (see Table 2 for a summary of criteria reported as being used).

Criteria used to measure a student's openness to self-examination that were applied in the classroom included the following: ability to reflect on issues discussed in class, demonstration of resolution of personal struggles that were revealed during class activities and groups, and ability to discuss personal difficulties associated with working with certain clients with peers. Criteria most fitting under the category professionalism might be summarized into two general behaviors, including but not limited to (a) seeking and being open to supervision and (b) an ability to self-reflect and self-evaluate one's counseling skill and interactions with clients.

Personal Self-Development: Criteria

This section of results corresponds to the following research subquestion: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program, what are your program's criteria for evaluating a student's personal self-development (Standard V.I.5.)? Information from this question was coded

TABLE 2

Criteria Used During Retention to Evaluate Students on Their Openness to Self-Evaluation

Theme	Description of Related Criteria Used in Participants' Affiliated Programs
Interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings	Is receptive, nondefensive, and welcomes feedback Can reflect on, use, and follow feedback Reflects and appropriately reacts to issues discussed in class Can work through personal issues Exhibits awareness of impact on others Exhibits interpersonal skills
Personality	Able to self-reflect and engage in self-reflection activities Is aware of values and personal issues Is not addicted to drugs or alcohol Is aware of and can identify personal strengths and limitations
Professionalism (behaviors, skill, and knowledge)	Accepts a realistic base of client change Seeks help with supervisors Exhibits self-confidence in own ability Understands role of obstacles or ineffectiveness in counseling

into the three previously listed categories. Most criteria mentioned by program affiliates seemed to be best coded under personality and professional behaviors, skills, and knowledge (see Table 3).

Criteria categorized under personality that were used to measure students' personal self-development consisted of, but were not limited to, the following: accepts personal responsibility, able to express feelings effectively, able to take risks (e.g., expressing feelings in the classroom that might be different from the norm), maintains "personal and professional balance in life" and awareness of "personal strengths and weakness." Criteria seeming to fit more appropriately in the category labeled professionalism included, but were not limited to, the following: is on time for and attends all classes, seeks faculty when needing consultation, is involved in professional activities/organizations.

Professional Self-Development: Criteria

This section of results corresponds to the following research subquestion: With regard to the CACREP (2001) *Standards* and the retention process for students in your Community Counseling master's-degree program what are your program's criteria for evaluating a student's professional self-development (Standard V.I.5.)? Answers provided in response to this question all seemed to be categorized best under professionalism (see Table 3). For example, criteria that are used to evaluate students' professional self-development include, but are not limited to, the following: "follows the American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics*," has a "professional attitude," and is active in professional organizations and development activities.

Discussion

The results from this study outline particular criteria that counselor educators use when evaluating the nonacademic characteristics and behaviors of counselor trainees. In addition, this study generated new questions. For example, criteria noted for interpersonal relationships in individual contexts and interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts have prompted the researchers to question whether or not it can be assumed that a person who can effectively form interpersonal relationships in individual contexts can also form effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts (or vice versa). In addition, interpretations regarding the "contexts" of "in small-groups" were different among participants. That is, some participants mentioned that the criteria for forming effective interpersonal relationships in small-group contexts were applied to a student's interactions in more personal group settings, such as with peers.

TABLE 3

Criteria Used During Retention to Evaluate Students on Personal Self-Development and Professional Self-Development

Theme	Description of Related Criteria Used in Participants' Affiliated Programs
	Personal self-development
Interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings	Works well with others Is nondisruptive and respects others
Personality	Is aware of unhealthy relationships in life Takes risks; has developed cognitive, moral, and social skills Is open to self (i.e., personal "struggles," "self-exploration") Able to maintain personal and professional balance in life Exhibits awareness of personal strengths, weaknesses
Professionalism (behaviors, skill, and knowledge)	Is on time and attends all classes; participates Is responsible for completing all assignments on time Exhibits self-assurance and confidence in therapeutic skills Demonstrates professional involvement Seeks faculty when needing consultation
	Professional self-development
Interpersonal interactions in academic and professional settings	Academic performance in all courses, desire to achieve, putting forth effort, motivated Exhibits progress in therapeutic behavior and conceptualization Attends and stays for entire class; participates Follows *ACA Code of Ethics* and program ethical standards Exhibits knowledge of counseling legalities and theories of change, basic microskills, and treatment planning Exhibits a professional attitude and conduct; demonstrates work ethics Demonstrates clinical skills Exudes leadership and professional advocacy Is aware of diversity issues and is willing to engage in professional interactions with diverse populations Demonstrates professional development that goes beyond the classroom

Note. ACA = American Counseling Association.

Other participants also suggested that criteria were applied to a student's interactions in more professional or academic group settings, such as in classroom discussions. We suggest that it might be helpful for counselor educators to carefully consider the context of small groups before expecting particular criteria to be met.

The most agreed upon criteria related to evaluating a student's openness to self-examination (Standard V.I.5.; CACREP, 2001) included the ability for students to "self-reflect" or exhibit awareness of themselves in the classroom as well as within personal situations. For example, students are expected to think about the feedback that they received from a supervisor and perhaps use it or reflect upon how it feels to receive such information (criteria used during retention to evaluate students on their openness to self-evaluation). Another example is whether or not students are self-aware of unhealthy relationships in their lives.

The results of this study also seem to suggest that many counselor educators expect students to be open to self-examination in response to classroom discussions or experiential assignments. Thus, we wonder if the responsibility for one's "openness to self-examination" depends completely on the student. That is, might it be useful for counselor educators to consider themselves to be responsible for encouraging and teaching each student methods and ways of being open to self-examination before the student is evaluated? Finally, this study raised the question of whether the term *openness* is subsumed under self-examination. That is, is the process of "self-examining" expected before one can truly become open to any given situation (or vice versa)? It might be worth exploring the meaning behind "openness to self-examination" as required by CACREP.

Criteria related to personal self-development were most often suggested by participants as being related to a student's ability to maintain a balance in life without resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms or becoming depressed. It was found that in some programs, each student is expected to have some awareness of his or her weaknesses, strengths, and consequences of behaviors. The majority of participants also agreed that criteria related to personal self-development include a student's ability to seek out help if needed, while also being able to talk through some of his or her own personal growth issues within classroom discussions.

Specific to criteria relating to professional self-development, participants in this study tended to define this term rather than provide criteria expected in response to this standard. Interestingly, the term *professional self-development* is not thoroughly addressed or defined in the literature. Perhaps interpretations of this term need to be explored more fully.

Recommendations for Master's-Degree Community Counseling Programs

On the basis of the results of this study, several recommendations for master's-degree community counseling programs seem warranted. First, each community counseling program should have formal, documented criteria related to nonacademic behaviors and characteristics. Although many participants in this study reported that their affiliated programs had formal, written nonacademic expectations of students, many programs did not actually have these procedures in place. Formal documentation of such expectations provides students with due process, as well as providing faculty with an understanding of what nonacademic behaviors and characteristics are expected throughout the program. Furthermore, knowledge of such criteria allows for a smoother transition to carrying out any needed retention procedures.

The results from this study also suggest that specific distinctions are lacking between a student's ability to form effective interpersonal relationships in individual contexts and in small-group contexts. We wonder if programs have made clear distinctions of criteria within these two contexts. Furthermore, how counselor educators actually refer to the context of "small-groups" is in question. Is it small groups of students talking or mingling in the hall, working together in an academic setting, or attending a Chi Sigma Iota function? Finally, the authors question whether it might be helpful to use a term that speaks to both contexts rather than applying "effective interpersonal relationships" to both individual and small-group contexts.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Data collected in this study are reflective of the participants' assumptions about the definitions of particular criteria and beliefs about training counselors. That is, in many cases, during the interviews, individuals' responses were prefaced or concluded with the statement that their interpretations might actually differ from other faculty in their department. Consequently, it might be helpful to interview and gather information in fully attended faculty groups. In addition, 30 Community Counseling programs were represented in this program rather than the 107 programs that were CACREP-accredited at the time; thus, the results of this study do not provide a comprehensive examination of nonacademic evaluative criteria within the profession.

Consideration for cultural diversity and how this may affect the definitions and interpretations of criteria might be another area of further study. More specifically, the researchers question whether criteria and expectations of students should differ if they are counseling from varied cultural perspectives.

We caution counselor educators regarding taking criteria at face value. Individual, as well as full faculty interpretations, should be considered when discussing relevant criteria. Interviews conducted within this study implied that general understandings of terms should be taken for granted. That is, there are vast interpretations and understandings of criteria and terms of such criteria that are implied within each individual program.

This study is a condensed look at criteria of nonacademic characteristics and behaviors. That is, there are many other CACREP-accredited programs, including Marriage and Family Counseling and Mental Health Counseling programs, that have not been included in this study.

Conclusion

Many counselor education programs, namely those accredited by CACREP (2001), are responsible for providing criteria for admitting, screening, and retaining counseling students on the basis of particular nonacademic characteristics, or on qualities that are unrelated to knowledge and skill acquisition (CACREP, 2001). Before our study, there had not been one that specifically addressed the criteria that are actually being used to evaluate counseling students during any of the processes. This study was conducted to specifically address criteria used during the retention process of Community Counseling programs. Within 30 programs, there was a variation of expectations. The results indicate, however, that all programs used some criteria to evaluate each student throughout his or her program. Furthermore, many of the criteria mentioned have been previously supported in counseling-related literature.

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