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## School Counselors-in-Training Career Counseling Preparation Assignment

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## School Counselors-in-Training Career Counseling Preparation Assignment

### Abstract

Career counseling is an important skill to attain in training to become a school counselor; however, research has shown that school counselors-in-training need more preparation in terms of career counseling. The author describes an optional career counseling assignment added to a 300-hour school-counseling practicum course provided to 14 students in a southern region university school counseling program. Ten students chose to participate in the assignment and provided pre and post feedback of their experience. Student feedback and practical implications are discussed.

### Keywords

Career-counseling, assignment, practicum, school counselors-in-training

## School Counselors-in-Training Career Counseling Preparation Assignment

Research indicates that the more time high school counselors effectively spend on college and career counseling (up to 50% of hours of their professional time) the more significant “the college-going culture of a school” (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014, p. 237); however, only one-third of public school counselors indicate they are comfortable with conducting college and career counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Not only do students benefit from the time high school counselors spend in guidance in college and career counseling, but counselors are also expected to provide such services. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2015) standards requires counselor educators to address school counseling interventions and assessments related to a comprehensive career development model. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) addresses career development and encourages school counselors to have programs that assist their students in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to transition from school to career. However, research indicated that professional school counselors continue to seek more training to enhance their skills in college and career counseling after graduation (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Morgan, Greenwaldt & Gosselin, 2014). Such research implies that not only do school counselors want to do more for students in the area of career counseling, but current school counseling programs are not doing enough to prepare school counselors for career counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Morgan et al., 2014; Osborn & Baggerly, 2004).

There is a paucity of research specifically addressing how to enhance school counselors-in-training preparation for career counseling. In 2000, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) and National Career Development Association

(NCDA) developed a position paper to highlight the lack of attention counselors-in-training programs were given to career counseling and recommended research for strategies and best practices in teaching career counseling (Hansen, 2000). In 2011, Lara, Kline, and Paulson completed research revealing “students did not perceive that they were competent or confident conducting career counseling” (p. 428). Their research concluded that career development training should go beyond merely addressing career counseling concepts and content in a single course. These implications are supported in the literature, as other researchers have found similar conclusions (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Hanson, 2000; Morgan et al., 2014; Osborn & Baggerly, 2004). Researchers have agreed that one way to enhance career counseling student development is for students to perform, or practice, career counseling under supervision (Alger & Luke, 2015; Knight, 2014; Louis, 2002; O’Brien, Heppner, Flores, & Bikos, 1996; Warnke, 1993; Warnke et al., 1996). However, there has not been a clear description in the literature regarding such a practice for school counselors-in-training.

The purpose of this article is to explain a teaching assignment that addresses the need for effective career counseling preparation for school counselors-in-training. The assignment was implemented with students in the school counseling practicum course in collaboration with students from a freshmen-level psychology course. Preliminary data via school counselors-in-training’ pre and post-feedback responses show promise in effectively training students in providing career counseling.

### **Context for the Career-Counseling Practicum Assignment**

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is the primary higher-level educational establishment in the region, and an important aim of the university is to serve its community (UTEP, n.d.; Smith, 2008). The university mirrors the community in its ethnic make-up in that

the university enrollment is mainly Hispanic students (over 75%), from the regional county (over 80%), and first-generation scholars from low-income families (UTEP, n.d; The University Center for Institutional, Research and Planning, 2013). According to the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), only 21.7% of the regional population, age 25 years or older, from 2012-2016 have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The information aligns with previous national data that first-generation students are "8.5 times more likely" not to successfully complete college in comparison to students who have college-educated parents (Ishitani, 2006, p. 873). Providing support and assistance to the community of K-12 students as well as the university freshmen in career planning and development and postsecondary transition is critical for the regional population (Smith, 2008; Valodya, 2013).

There are two courses offered to students interested in receiving and providing career guidance offered through the university's academic counseling program: Introduction to Educational Psychology and Lifestyle and Career Development. Although offered through the academic counseling program, the Introduction to Educational Psychology course is an optional freshmen-level course that focuses on freshmen receiving career planning, development, and employment readiness; this class is not required and is not taken by master-level counseling students. However, the Lifestyle and Career Development course is a required master-level counseling class that trains both aspiring mental health counselors and future school counselors in career counseling content. The Lifestyle and Career Development course is one of the pre-requisites for master-level school counseling students before they enroll in the School Counseling Practicum course. Students from the Introduction to Educational Psychology course collaborate with school counseling practicum students for the career counseling practicum assignment.

## **The Practicum Course**

In light of research showing that school counselors feel unprepared to conduct career counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Lara et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2014) and the university school counselors-in-training reported that they feel uneasy in conducting career counseling in practicum (see Students Pre- and Post-feedback Responses of the CCPA section), the instructor for the Introduction Psychology class and the Practicum for School Counseling class collaborated to provide school counselors-in-training real-life experiences in career counseling. Before taking the master-level school counseling practicum class at the university, students have taken their content courses, which include Lifestyle and Career Development. Lifestyle and Career Development is a semester course that examines and explores career theories, career choice, lifestyle development, and multicultural populations. Students are exposed to various career assessment instruments. For an assignment, students complete, examine, and report to the class findings from two career assessment instruments. The class is offered not only to school counselors-in-training but also licensed professional counselors-in-training.

After taking the Lifestyle and Career Development course, along with other prerequisite classes, students take the master-level school counseling practicum class. The practicum class is a required course for school counselors-in-training. The practicum class allows for practical application of school counseling activities, including academic, personal/social, and career guidance. It is an important experience that helps students comprehend the clinical experiences of school counseling. School counseling students enrolled in the practicum class work with two supervisors throughout the course: school counselor site supervisor and university faculty supervisor. Students are encouraged through assignments to gain hands-on experience and explore new areas of personal and professional

growth. Some assignments include conducting, documenting, reflecting, and presenting case presentations working with pre- K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Pre-K–12<sup>th</sup>) students in one-on-one counseling, group counseling, and character or guidance lessons. An additional assignment to this course is the Career-Counseling Practicum Assignment (CCPA). The CCPA includes conducting, documenting, and presenting a career counseling case presentation. Before completing the career counseling case presentation, school counseling practicum students-in-training prepare themselves through a career counseling review, as described in the next section.

### **Activities for Preparing Students for the CCPA**

The purpose of this section is to describe school counseling practicum students-in-training (SCPST) preparation for the career counseling practicum assignment solely focused on career counseling techniques and interventions specific to the school counseling field. Materials to assist in the career counseling review was informed by various sources, such as Erford's (2015) text *Transforming the School Counseling Profession* and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) (see table 1 for a full summary). First, SCPST explored developmental models of career planning as a component of a comprehensive school-counseling program. Second, SCPST reflected and engaged in discussion regarding the individual needs of student-clients and the continuous revisiting of career plans and changing interests because of changing societal needs.

Third, SCPST examined their own career trajectory and as recommended by Dedmond and Schwallie (2006), brainstormed ways to empower student-clients to become self-aware and knowledgeable of possible career outcomes. Fourth, SCPST explored various career information and projects school counselors engaged at various levels. Examples include

having K–12 students shadow professionals and developing career portfolios.

SCPST were also encouraged to attend career events for K–12 students such as career days and career fairs, and report back their experiences. SCPST discussed the importance of youth gaining work experience and for school counselors to continue to check in with students regarding their career planning. Fifth, SCPST explored career resources to use with student-clients. Examples of resources include Occupational Outlook Handbook, O\*Net, Career Inventory Assessments, and the statewide graduation toolkit. Sixth, SCPST reviewed national, state and local expectations pertaining to student career development and planning. Seventh, SCPST reviewed and practiced applying the ASCA career development domains of the ASCA Student Standards referenced on page 29 of the ASCA National Model (2012). After SCPST have reviewed and practiced the ASCA career development domains, they are reintroduced to the CCPA assignment, a demonstration of their career counseling competencies.

**Table 1**

*Student Preparation for Career Counseling Practicum Assignment*

Activities	Purpose	Relevant Literature
Explore career planning processes	To differentiate career developmental models.	-Lapan (2004) -Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey (2013) -Savickas (2012)
Discuss career guidance and counseling	To describe individual career counseling interventions and assessments	-Gibson (2008) -Holland (1994)* - The Myers and Briggs Foundation (2016)*
Examine personal career paths and outcomes	To interpret career needs through self-examination.	-Dedmond and Schwallie (2006) -Dollarhide and Saginak (2017)
Explore school counselors' career –related example activities	To discover and determine appropriate career-related activities	-Blackhurst, Auger, and Wahl (2003) -Howard and Walsh (2010) -Gysbers & Lapan (2009)

Develop a career counselor resource toolkit	To formalize a professional resource list	-ASCA National Model (2012)* -Bloch (2006)
Explore national, state and local expectations	To understand related legislation, rules and guidelines	-ASCA National Model (2012)* -Chen-Hayes and Ockerman (2015)* -Miller and McWhirter (2006)
Review and practice applying ASCA career-related standards	To understand the practical application of the national profession's guidelines and expectations	-ASCA (2014)* -ASCA National Model (2012)* -In, Akos, and Niles (2015)*

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*Note.* \*= Student assigned readings.

### **Competence Performance Assessment of the CCPA**

The Competence Performance Assessment (CPA), developed by the practicum instructor, assesses SCPST participation in the CCPA. Students utilized as a guide three critical areas of career development from ASCA's (2004), "ASCA National Standards for Students" (as referenced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the ASCA National Model), and the next generation of student standards, the ASCA's (2014) "Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success" to aid freshmen with the postsecondary transition and provide interventions to promote college and career readiness. SCPST are expected to follow an interview guideline while video recording their interviews. After all sessions are complete, SCPST write a report and give a presentation based on the scoring rubric. The CPA assesses the achievement of CACREP (2016) School Counseling Specialty standards 3-e and 3-j, which focus on college and career counseling interventions, assessments, and readiness. A class discussion takes place regarding the CCPA. SCPST are given the opportunity to ask questions. Then, SCPST are presented with career inventories and an interview guide explained in the next section.

### **Career Inventories and Interview Guide for the CCPA**

The student-clients (freshmen students from the Introduction to Educational Psychology class) take two career inventories. One is the Self-Directed Search (SDS) and the other is the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). In preparation to conduct career counseling (i.e. CCPA) with the student-clients, SCPST reviewed the background, purpose and instructions of the two inventories. Information addressed in the review includes a focus on personality and performance. For instance, SCPST have a seminar regarding the connections between personality, interests, discovering abilities, and skills. SCPST review the work of John Holland’s six major personality orientations and individual’s career choice. SCPST examine and explain the history of the SDS and its predecessor, the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) (Holland, 1994). Furthermore, SCPST recap and are able to give descriptions of each of the six personality orientations. Afterward, SCPST review the MBTI. SCPST explore the history of the instrument, the authors, the four-scale model, and the idea of the two opposites (extravert/introvert, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, judging/perceiving). After exploring the MBTI, SCPST examine their personality types and meanings. For example, if a person’s Myers-Briggs’ type is introvert, sensing, thinking, and judging (ISTJ), the person is likely to also embody such traits as responsible, organizer, pragmatic, and analytical (The Myers and Briggs Foundation, 2016). Knowledge of a student-client’s type and traits may assist a counselor in helping the student-client identify satisfying career options. Moving beyond the education and review of the two inventories, SCPST are made aware of the career interview guide for use with student-clients. The career interview guide for this assignment consists of reviewing:

- informed consent (includes permission to video record),
- basic demographic information,

- career preparation (i.e., major, minor, employment history interests),
- personal concerns (i.e., reported problems, plans for future (1, 5, 10, 20 years from now),
- congruencies and noncongruencies (i.e., major, interests, employment histories),
- Self-Directed Search (SDS) results and MBTI results,
- emotional and social maturity,
- goal-setting,
- whether goals are realistic and expectations for the future are possible, and
- processing expressed concerns, recapping, plans for future meetings, as well as ending the session.

The instructor walked SCPST through the interview guide and offered SCPST the opportunity to practice. SCPST were also given the opportunity to ask questions. Lastly, the teacher reviewed the logistics of the CCPA.

### **Logistics and Sessions for the CCPA**

The CCPA was voluntary for students in both courses. Students (or student-clients) in the Introduction to Educational Psychology class were given an explanation of the purpose of the assignment, description of their involvement, and benefits of participating in the assignment. Student-clients signed up for dates and times and were informed that they would be matched with a school counselor-in-training. SCPST were trained in laboratory procedures and equipment protocols. School counselors-in-training from the practicum class also signed up for dates and times and were informed that they would be matched with an Introduction to Educational Psychology student-client.

The practicum course is a weekly three-hour class. The sessions between SCPST

and student-clients took place during four of the practicum three-hour periods. Sessions rotated with class lessons during each period. During the first half of the class, half of the SCPST participating joined the student-clients in the lab to conduct career-counseling interviews. The interviews took up to 50 minutes. Afterward, the SCPST returned to class and a different set of SCPST attended the lab to conduct sessions. Practicum students or school counselors-in-training were tasked in completing a minimum of two sessions with student-clients during the four-week period.

After sessions were completed, SCPST used a guide to complete a write-up of the sessions. The guide included detailed descriptions of the student-clients' demographics, career preparation, expressed concerns (reported problems especially regarding plans for the future), and assessments. Summary and recommendation sections were added as well. SCPST also gave an oral presentation of the assignment that included reflection, feedback, and generated pointed discussions. Other feedback included pre- and post responses that helped to discern the overall helpfulness of the experience.

### **Students Pre- and Post-feedback Responses of the CCPA**

An IRB was approved to pilot this class assignment and collect preliminary data from SCPST. SCPST were provided informed consent and given the option to participate without penalty or loss to their class grade. Of the 14 SCPST, 10 chose to participate in the CCPA. All 10 participants are female and Hispanic. Before and after participating in the CCPA, willing participants were given the following prompt from the instructor to respond to in writing: write a brief statement reflecting on your education and needs in career counseling knowledge and competencies. Of the 10 participants, nine wrote a brief statement before and after the career counseling experience. One SCPST wrote a pre-statement but did not write a post-statement.

For the prestatement, SCPST highlighted the areas of knowledge, previous experience,

and concerns before completing the assignment. In regard to knowledge, one SCPST stated she needed to “acquire more knowledge on the individual application” of career counseling. In respect to previous experience, a SCPST expressed that she had some experience, but had not “mastered the ability” of her skills in career counseling. In respect to concerns, a SCPST stated she had concerns regarding “making mistakes.” The majority of SCPST’s perceptions regarding their readiness seemed to center around their knowledge, previous experience, and concerns, as indicated in the first column of Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Pre- and Poststatements of Participating School Counselors-in-Training*

<p><b>Pre:</b> Write a brief statement reflecting on your education and needs in career counseling knowledge and competencies.</p>	<p><b>Post:</b> Write a brief statement reflecting on your education and needs in career counseling knowledge and competencies.</p>
<p>School counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive, developmental, results-based school counseling program that includes career counseling and aligns with the ASCA National Model.</p>	<p>After I had finish[ed] my career interview, I [believe] it help[ed] me to learn new techniques of how to read the results of the test. I feel very competitive in the school field since I have learn[ed] so much from my site supervisor and she has share[d] her ideas and thoughts about career day. We [had been] working on it with different colleges and universities to present to our students as well [as] to our teachers at school. All this material has [been] a great resource for me and my future as a school counselor. I really appreciate all the help and support you [have] provide[d] to me and my classmates. Thank you for sharing all your knowledge.</p>
<p>I have only worked with elementary school children. This is the first time I will work with a client regarding their career. I am very interested in working with this client. I feel that I will benefit</p>	<p>I [now] know I need to learn more on a variety of careers that would encompass all disciplines.</p>

greatly from the experience.

I did my first internship in a high school where I was able to learn different techniques to guide a student to the right education path. I myself have knowledge of what is needed to graduate and guide them through the right path. I still haven't mastered the ability to expand communication and I would like to find ways to address my needs as a career counselor.

I took a career counseling class in which we covered many aspects of careers, but I can't put my finger on it. However, I do remember the importance of knowing many sources available to clients and communities that will help them too. Also, being aware of free services when the client or family is in need. I think that career counseling is a self-exploration and sometimes you just need a small push or guide to help you discover.

As a school counselor, I have a clear understanding of the meaning of confidentiality (A.2.) and also when I can break confidentiality. My weak point as a school counselor is about career counseling (A.3.b., A.3.c.)

[The University] requires that students complete a career counseling class. Part of the requirement for course completion is to visit and get information from various sites in El Paso that help the general population with career counseling and support. This project gave me some exposure to career counseling. I personally did not observe a session in progress but only interviewed the director, who spoke about the initial interview and the testing that is conducted that helps them

This will be my last class [that] I will be taking since I'm graduating in a couple of weeks. I feel that this practicum class is very organized and has taught me a lot. This class has a lot of new things that the program was lacking when I started. I can really see how they have an organized program for school counseling.

[It] helped me to follow a career goal with my client after the first session and I tried to get as much information as possible to help identify a problem and a goal towards him. I missed the opportunity to identify another problem.

Having the opportunity to interview a college student was helpful for me because it gave me the opportunity to practice counseling skills and at the same time listen and motivate a student to continue with goals until they accomplish their goals.

At the end of this project, I discovered how you could combine all your skills as a counselor to help students find their interests and their path to plan for their college education. You would go [through] the whole cycle of a session for career counseling as any regular session.

guide the students in a direction that best fits the student's needs.

I feel I have [a] good, overall understanding of what the counselor's role is in processing career and college readiness. I do feel apprehensive because this will be the first time I do this (except for family members) and I feel the stakes are higher. I'm concerned of making mistakes and the impact this can potentially have on the client.

More hands-on training even shadowing a professional.

I still [do] not feel confident to provide career guidance.

It would have been nice to be briefed on the tests that the students took to better evaluate their results.

My education thus far is a Bachelor in Early Childhood Education, which I have used to teach for 10 years. My counseling graduate program has opened my eyes up to many new experiences. I was lucky to do my Practicum at ..., where one of my clients required career counseling. I understand the process, but would just need more guidance on guiding the clients.

I found it very beneficial. At first I was hesitant but [now] I see the benefit. I think this was a good experience to better understand the role in career counseling. It certainly helped me understand it better.

I know that career counseling is a very important component in the school setting as it is one of three focuses in the ASCA model, however I still feel that I need to acquire more knowledge on the individual application of it.

N/R

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*Note.* The same participant did not necessarily write the pre and post statements that are side-by-side. Statements were collected randomly. N/R = No Response.

For the poststatements, SCPST highlighted the assignment's helpfulness or opportunity to learn and a desire for more learning and experiences. Many SCPST spoke of the experience as being helpful such as "it help[ed] me to learn new techniques." A couple of SCPST stated

they wanted “more hands on training” and wanted to be “briefed on [student-client’s] assessments” before sessions started. Overall, the SCPST appeared to have grown from the experience and increased their interest in gaining more experience. More poststatement examples are included in second column of Table 2.

Statements from SCPST show a clear change in students’ overall perceptions of performing career counseling interviews. This information shows that the assignment seems beneficial for the overall professional development of school counselors-in- training. A fuller discussion of the assignment helps to explain how the assignment fits with previous training and research on career counseling.

### **Discussion**

The intent of the CCPA or career counseling interview assignment for school counseling practicum students was to provide supervised career counseling experience and address the deficit in career counseling preparation for school counselors-in-training. In addition, the CCPA was a way to give students an opportunity to increase their confidence and competency in performing a career-counseling interview. This assignment was optional and more than half of the students chose to participate. It can be reasonably said that a considerable number of SCPST were interested in learning more about career counseling, which underscores Lara et al.’s (2011) findings that students were not confident in facilitating career counseling, and Osborn et al.’s (2004) findings that school counselors would like to engage more in career counseling. Also, the CCPA addresses Morgan et al.’s (2014) findings that current school counselors requests more career counseling specialized trainings for school counselors-in-training from master’s degree programs. Lastly, the CCPA and feedback presented gives preliminary support of

researchers' idea that such specialized training may take place during a practicum course (Alger & Luke, 2015; Knight, 2014; Louis, 2002; Warnake 1993; Warnake 1996). However, the assignment could be altered for a more significant impact on school counselors-in-training career counseling development as explained in the subsequent section.

### **Recommendations and Limitations**

The CCPA proposed has room for improvement. For instance, one practicum student suggested that having client career inventory results prior to starting sessions would help better prepare counselors-in-training. This is a suggestion that the current instructor is considering. To make this suggestion a reality, the current instructors of the practicum and freshman class have to reevaluate the logistics and parameters of the assignment, including class schedule timelines and preparation. Another item of interest is giving the freshmen the opportunity for informed consent before granting the school counselor-in-training access to the freshmen inventory results.

The career training assignment is not without limitations. The CCPA is intended to be applied with secondary school students, and will require some modification for use with younger clients. When considering implementing such a teaching assignment, an instructor would want to keep in mind students who are not planning to work with secondary education students and develop an alternate assignment. SCPST at the current university who chose not to participate in this assignment were given an alternate assignment that included SCPST developing a career or academic lesson plan for students at their practicum site that they would have to teach at their site. School counselors-in-training who were completing the alternate assignment, primarily, were doing their practicum at the elementary-school level.

The alternate assignment seemed more appropriate for practicum students who primarily wanted to work with elementary students; yet and still, SCPST who completed the alternate assignment had to complete a write-up and a presentation of their assignment. Knight (2014) also recognized the need for additional emphasis on career counseling preparation for school counselors-in-training interested in working in an elementary setting. Knight (2014) provided the following additional recommendations for school counseling preparation programs: a) create partnerships between the university and local elementary schools that provide opportunities for SCPST to participate in career development activities (e.g. facilitating parent workshops), b) incorporate into the school counseling program, tools and resources specific to the elementary school student population (e.g. developmentally appropriate career assessments and games), c) require that SCPST engage in consultation and collaboration with critical elementary school stakeholders about elementary students' career development, and d) teach SCPST how to implement data-driven career interventions. These recommendations are adaptable and may be used with or in addition to the CCPA assignment. Also, researchers could include these recommendations with the CCPA assignment to conduct a more formalized research study.

Another factor to keep in mind is paying for career inventories. Because of the emphasis on the importance of career planning and development at the university, monies are provided to purchase career inventories for freshmen taking the Introduction to Educational Psychology class. Such a financial arrangement may not be available at other universities. If not, an instructor might consider advocating for financial support to his or her department chair or dean if he or she concludes that this teaching assignment is worthwhile and a good fit for his or her program.

## **Conclusion**

The author has proposed a teaching assignment for helping to prepare school counselors-in-training in conducting career counseling interviews. The CCPA addresses the need for school counselors-in-training to receive more specialized training in career counseling, gives school-counselors-in-training an opportunity to provide career counseling practical experience under supervision, and it is an alternate approach that counselor educators may engage to increase the competency of future practitioners as well as provide career guidance to college freshman and/or first-generation students.

This teaching assignment should not take the place of a career counseling class, but serve as a supplement to career counseling education. As this teaching assignment was an experience unique to the university students and their perceptions, more research needs to be done regarding career counseling preparation for school counselors-in-training to better prepare future school counselor practitioners (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011).

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