



## Counseling as an essential component in student affairs training

As the counseling profession continues to evolve, perhaps its most recognizable grounding is in the knowledge, skills and practices that define its core and fundamental nature. In addition, each of the professional practice emphases defined by the 2009 CACREP Standards (addiction counseling; career counseling; clinical mental health counseling; marriage, couple and family counseling; school counseling; and student affairs and college counseling) has grown to align strategically with a common template of focused education and training within the respective domains. These include foundations; counseling, prevention and intervention; diversity and advocacy; assessment; and research and evaluation. Additional specialty domains are included for addiction, career, clinical mental health and school counseling emphases.

Through significant discussion, debate and collaboration among counselor educators and practitioners representing and supporting CACREP and its accredited programs, each set of professional practice standards has been refined to more fully address and enhance the role and mission of each training specialty.

### 2009 CACREP Standards

A welcome change in the revised standards, applauded by many in the counselor education and student affairs fields, is the re-merging of the Student Affairs Programs Standards with the College Counseling Standards. Prior to 2001, these two sets of standards were together as one. However, with the adoption of the 2001 Standards, they were separated into two distinct program areas.

The thinking behind the separation was that students would be better served with a defined emphasis for each area. Thus, graduate students who desired to work in clinical or personal counseling roles with college counseling centers would be most

effective when trained under the College Counseling Standards, while those who preferred to work with college students in a wider range of student services would benefit most through training with the Student Affairs Programs Standards. Although the intent of this effort seemed well founded at the time, we now realize the benefit and necessity of training graduate students for higher education settings comprehensively with both components.

### Student mental health needs on campus

College counselors and other student services professionals widely recognize that college students' mental health and emotional needs have increased significantly in recent years. Students have presented with a range of issues through the years. However, increased college enrollment nationwide by students representing diverse backgrounds and needs relative to culture, disability, ethnicity, first-generation challenges, race, sexual orientation and unique life experiences has expanded these issues into realms that were often less common or recognizable in previous decades. Essentially, our campus population profiles have become more characteristically diverse with a broader range of personal and emotional needs.

Historically, a majority of students meeting with college counselors shared emotional challenges emerging from homesickness, personal relationships, roommate conflicts and adjustment to college life. Today's students are visiting college counseling centers with a more expansive range of issues. These include, but are not limited to, addiction, family stress, financial concerns, mental and psychiatric disorders, suicidal tendencies and trauma. This is documented not only through a range of searchable articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Journal of College Counseling* and the *Journal of College Student Development*,

but in personal commentaries and observations offered by college counselors and student services professionals across our campuses. Addressing these challenges clearly requires that college counselors be trained professionally and at a high level of competency to ethically and responsibly work with clients in campus counseling centers.

### Student affairs competencies

At the same time the educational and clinical training requirements of college counselors have expanded, professionals who represent a broad range of related student affairs programs and services have come to recognize the necessity and benefit of advanced education and training in their specialties. These may include, but are not limited to, academic advising, admissions, career services, disability services, financial aid, Greek affairs, intercollegiate athletics, multicultural education centers, residence life, student health-recreation-wellness, student leadership and organizations, student support services, student unions and veterans services. Specific competencies identified include advising, assessment and evaluation, community building, conflict management, consulting, leadership development, and multicultural awareness and integration, to name a few. Notably, what is just as important is that counseling is included in the range of competencies student affairs professionals recognize as essential to their skills and responsibilities.

As the field of student affairs has expanded its services and program offerings to enhance students' overall growth, development and learning outside the classroom, certain realities have emerged as essential aspects of working with college students. Students seek advising, counseling and mentoring throughout a range of campus programs and services. Examples may include a student meeting with a financial aid adviser for assistance with financial

concerns and presenting with stress about being unable to pay tuition. A freshman or a senior may begin a session with a career services counselor about choosing a major or preparing for a job search, respectively, and simultaneously share related personal challenges that are complicating choices and decision-making. Others may experience conflict in the residence halls and trust that their hall advisers can help them navigate and manage their personal issues.

The critical importance and expanded benefit of having student affairs professionals trained from a counseling foundation and perspective becomes clear. The more knowledgeable, skilled and competent student services professionals are, the better college students' overall needs, including their emotional and mental well-being, will be served. These abilities are most helpful in the immediate moment when a student becomes overwhelmed with all that is going on in his or her life. At the same time, these professionals are trained to recognize when individual students might need more help than it is in their role to offer and can then make appropriate

referrals to the campus counseling center.

Another benefit relates to student affairs professionals with counselor training who supervise graduate students during their internships. Site supervisors regularly note that supervision is more effective and productive in cases in which the intern possesses a solid education and training foundation in counseling knowledge and skills.

#### **Coming full circle**

For graduate students pursuing careers in college counseling centers, possessing the knowledge and skills to better understand college student development in its range of aspects becomes a tremendous asset in their work. In addition to their training as clinical mental health counselors, there are added advantages to studying college students as their primary population through student affairs courses and emphases.

In personal disclosures to me as a counselor educator, current student affairs students and graduates continue to indicate a clear understanding of the importance of learning about and integrating counseling components into their work. In addition, graduate students in related

programs such as educational leadership and higher education administration have enrolled in our student affairs courses and transferred into our program, stating that the counseling training is more in line with their goals of working with college students.

Perhaps most of all, we as counselor educators have an ethical and professional responsibility to our graduate students and, ultimately, to our campus communities as a whole, to provide education and training that best serves all students comprehensively and competently. It is gratifying to know that CACREP's endorsement of this effort is clear with the 2009 Standards. ♦

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