

2014-2015 CSI & CACREP Leadership Essay Contest

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Promoting Professional Identity through Unity and Mentorship

The most challenging issue facing the profession today falls within the realm of leadership and advocacy. Currently, there is a great need to develop and nurture leaders and advocates who will continue to advance the field of counseling—a profession that is largely misunderstood by the general public and allied professionals. More recently, this challenge has been the impetus for works by notable scholars who point to promising movement related to leadership and advocacy development that is arguably slower than warranted (e.g., Chang, Barrio-Minton, Dixon, Myers, & Sweeney, 2012; West, Osborn, & Bubenzer, 2003). How then do we, as a profession, pick up the pace so that we can fulfill our shared vision of promoting growth-fostering experiences that serve to better the lives of individuals, their communities, and the broader society?

We must unite.

Unity entails building and strengthening interlocking bridges between counseling divisions and organizations, preparation programs, mental health settings, and diverse individuals who are entering and serving in the field. Professional identity serves as the foundation that keeps these bridges strong and steady, no matter what forces threaten to knock them down. A strong professional identity can be witnessed in gestures of kindness, service to an organization, and client and professional advocacy efforts. How then do we, as a profession, promote a strong professional identity among each and every counselor?

We must promote the practice and promotion of quality mentoring experiences.

Professional identity is strengthened through our connections with others, particularly within mentoring relationships. Mentors who embrace a strong professional identity behave in ways that exemplify a commitment to our guiding philosophies—which emphasize normative development, prevention and early intervention, wellness, appreciation for diversity, and the primacy of the counseling relationship—and have a unique opportunity to inspire and serve as a role model for others. Current research supports the need for quality mentoring

relationships among counseling graduate students and faculty (e.g., House & Sears, 2002; Magnuson, Norem, & Lonneman-Doroff, 2009; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Thus, the need for mentoring needs to be at the forefront of the minds of leaders in our counseling organizations. How then do we, as a profession, bridge the gap between mentoring research and practice to promote professional identity?

We must recognize the voices of the field and celebrate accomplishments.

The responsibility rests on CSI and its chapters, CACREP, and accredited programs to invite individuals and groups to dialogue about ways in which we can promote mentoring relationships to strengthen and solidify professional identity. Research in this area should be funded and effective strategies and programs should be made available. Importantly, recognition should be given to mentors who promote professional identity. Mentors are leaders and advocates for our profession, and oftentimes their dedication to the field goes unnoticed on the state and national level. Let us all give thanks and learn from those who inspire future generations of the field.

References

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