

CACREP Position Statement on Licensure Portability for Professional Counselors

CACREP

Since 1981, CACREP has served as the premier accrediting organization of the Counseling profession, accrediting over 600 graduate counseling programs at over 270 institutions in the United States and throughout the world. These programs educate a diverse body of students currently totaling more than 39,000. CACREP programs graduate over 10,000 students annually. The CACREP standards were developed and have been maintained by professional counselor educators and practitioners. The standards represent the Counseling profession's minimum knowledge and skill areas required to enter the profession. Recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a quality assurance provider, CACREP is a national partner in public protection.

Issue

CACREP has spent the last three decades focusing on accreditation of programs without an explicit plan for its involvement in public policy. With recent efforts to incorporate CACREP accreditation into federal programs and state licensure, CACREP is establishing a policy for legislative action. The policy will help CACREP respond to inquiries from state licensure boards and other stakeholders, as well as establish a platform for licensure portability.

Rationale

- Of the 50 states, more than half specifically identify graduation from a CACREP-accredited program as an option for meeting the education requirements for licensure. Almost all of the remaining states (plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia) incorporate CACREP's core curricular areas within their education requirements. Several states have already begun the process of revising their licensure regulations to require graduation from a CACREP-accredited program.
- CACREP is regularly consulted by state licensure board leaders and administrators regarding program accreditation and quality assurance issues in counselor education. Some of these issues include training standards for licensure, information on federal hiring requirements, trends in education criteria, research, and new models of educational delivery for counseling programs, such as online learning.
- Research studies demonstrate that students from CACREP-accredited programs perform better on the National Counselor Examination for Licensure and Certification (NCE) (Adams, 2006) and pass the NCE at higher rates (Milsom & Akos, 2007). Another recent national study found that 81.7% of licensed professional counselors sanctioned for ethical violations graduated from *non*-CACREP-accredited programs (Even & Robinson, 2013).
- In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), at the request of Congress, examined the role of mental health counselors under the TRICARE program. The IOM recommended that only licensed professional counselors who graduate from a CACREP-accredited program be hired to work independently within the TRICARE system. Other federal agencies have followed suit by specifying CACREP in their hiring requirements, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Army Substance Abuse Program.
- Many established professions already require programmatic accreditation for licensure, such as medicine, pharmacy, and physical therapy. By requiring accreditation for licensure, these professions have experienced benefits such as public and federal recognition, third-party reimbursements, legislative clarity and unity, and national uniform education requirements which facilitate licensure portability.
- "20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling" was a group of 31 counseling organizations that came together to insure the future growth and direction of the counseling profession. In 2013, the Education Work Group (EWG) from 20/20 proposed education requirements for counselor licensure based on the results of a Delphi study conducted by leaders from, including the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB), the co-sponsors of 20/20. This proposal recommended graduation from a CACREP-accredited mental health counseling or clinical mental health counseling program as the educational requirement for licensure. The EWG proposal also included considerations for grandparenting language for non-CACREP graduates, graduates from other CACREP program areas, and current licensees.

Addressing Potential Concerns

As with any maturing profession, growing pains will accompany the adoption of educational requirements that mandate graduation from an accredited program for licensure. These growing pains may cause controversy within the professional community as some members may fear the negative impact of these changes. CACREP wants to make clear that this proposal will not adversely affect licensees or counseling students. Of significance, the proposal:

- Will not change the status of anyone who obtains licensure prior to the effective date of the legislation. Graduates from non-accredited programs who obtain a counselor license will not be affected, it only applies to future applicants.
- Will provide a seven (7) year grandparenting period to allow current students and graduates on non-accredited programs to obtain a counselor license prior to implementation. Additionally, the period allows all programs adequate time to obtain accreditation if desired.

Currently licensed counselors and currently enrolled counseling students have nothing to fear from this proposal. It is intended to affect future graduates who have been given adequate notice of the new requirements.

Further, non-accredited programs are provided substantial notice and opportunity to ensure compliance with the proposal. As the majority of counseling programs are accredited by CACREP, the impact on these educational programs will be manageable. The review process to obtain accreditation typically spans only 18 months and the cost is modest compared to other disciplines.

Moreover, the proposal will provide significant benefits to counselors and the public by:

- Establishing a quality assurance model that ensures all counselors meet the rigorous education, training and institutional requirements established by CACREP. The licensing board and public will benefit by knowing that counselors who obtain a license have met a national educational standard.
- Providing a platform for portability of the license across the states. The lack of a uniform educational standard in counselor licensure laws is a key impediment to obtaining a license in other states. This proposal, once implemented, will remove that barrier and pave the way for licensure portability.

Proposal

The counseling profession must be held accountable to ensure that graduate counseling programs are meeting the minimum standards set by the profession for the preparation of future counselors. Counselors-in-training have the right to be taught and mentored by members of their chosen profession to ensure they become competent and ethical practitioners able to meet the health, safety, and welfare needs of the public. As such, CACREP proposes that all state counseling licensure boards adopt the requirement of graduation from a CACREP-accredited counseling program for licensure. This makes licensure portability for licensed professional counselors a future reality and strengthens the protection of counseling programs, students, practitioners, and the public.

A broad timeframe for implementing the proposed CACREP requirement is provided along with suggested legislative language.

Model Legislation Providing Educational Requirements for Counselor Licensure Portability

Beginning seven (7) years from enactment of this Act, an applicant for licensure in counseling must possess a master's or higher-level degree from a clinically-focused program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), including addiction counseling, clinical mental health counseling, clinical rehabilitation counseling, and marriage, family and couples counseling.

An applicant for licensure prior to the effective date of this Act shall meet the education requirements established under (cite relevant section(s) of previous licensing law).

A person who is licensed as a counselor under the provisions of (cite relevant section(s) of previous licensing law) as of the effective date of this Act shall be deemed to have met all requirements for licensure under this Act and shall be eligible for renewal of licensure in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

Adopted by the CACREP Board on 7/13/13.