



Counseling students deserve a strong professional identity

Francis A. Martin and W. Cris Cannon's opinion piece, "A profession in peril," in the May 2010 *Counseling Today* featured several disturbing anecdotes concerning professional identity and counseling. Examples included graduates of a mental health counseling program who had no knowledge of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, a licensed professional counselor trained by psychologists who did not know the scope of practice for LPCs, an LPC who referred to herself as a "licensed psychological counselor" and expressed embarrassment that she was not a psychologist, and an LPC who was supervised by social workers and got into trouble in his job for trying to function as a social worker.

To help prevent such scenarios, the *CACREP 2009 Standards* include requirements to strengthen the development of clear professional counselor identities. These requirements affect the structure of the counseling programs, the development of the students and the faculty who can be hired to teach in the programs. Although the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs has received some rather stinging criticism from nonaccredited programs about these requirements, these requirements exist for some important reasons. Consider the cases of Counseling Programs A and B.

Counseling Program A is housed in a psychology department. The faculty are predominantly psychologists, hold memberships in psychology organizations and disseminate research primarily in psychology journals and at psychology conferences. The adjunct faculty represent a variety of disciplines, including psychology, social work and counseling. Within the program, students encounter alternating references between psychology and counseling. Students are exposed to the codes of ethics of both the American Psychological Association and the Ameri-

can Counseling Association, but most case analyses reference the APA code. All courses have a PSY prefix, and references to psychology and counseling are intermingled in the course titles. Offering a psychology degree, Program A also has a chapter of Psi Chi, the honor society for psychology. Some students join ACA and/or its divisions, but just as many go on to join APA's counseling psychology student organization. Although the library holds a mixture of counseling and psychology journals, the majority of syllabi reference only readings in psychology journals. Most of the clinical supervision is conducted by psychologists, although students may also be supervised by counselors or social workers. Yet Counseling Program A is titled Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC), and its students ultimately apply for licensure as professional counselors.

Counseling Program B is also housed within a psychology department and identifies itself as a CMHC program. However, it has taken concrete actions to distinguish itself from other programs in the department through its unique identification with counseling. Program B has a core group of faculty who strongly identify with the counseling profession. Most of the core faculty hold doctoral degrees in counselor education. Those possessing related degrees also maintain a strong identification with the counseling profession. These core faculty members hold or are eligible for licensure as professional counselors and relevant professional certifications. The faculty maintain active memberships in ACA and/or its divisions. They regularly engage in development, conduct research, publish and can document service and advocacy work associated with the counseling profession and its professional organizations. The core faculty participate in the ongoing development, management and oversight of the CMHC program. These faculty make admissions decisions and

provide advising and mentoring to the counseling students. Most adjunct faculty also closely identify with the counseling profession, but when this is not the case, the core faculty ensure that the information in courses taught by adjunct faculty relates to students developing knowledge and skills appropriate to counseling. All course titles clearly indicate the focus on counseling within the curriculum. Although students are aware that multiple codes of ethics exist for the allied health professions, primary emphasis is placed on the codes of ethics of ACA and its divisions — the codes that will be most applicable to their future work as counseling professionals. The program has a chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, the honor society of professional counseling. The majority of site supervisors have degrees in counseling and are LPCs.

Considering the two programs described above, the following questions might be asked. What will the professional identity be for the graduates of each program? How will these graduates choose to represent their chosen professions? In what types of leadership and advocacy efforts will these graduates engage? Where will these students choose to maintain their professional homes?

The answers to these questions are important, not only to the students but also to the counseling profession and its future. Will the profession have members who understand the history of the profession's development? Will it have leaders and advocates who can describe who counselors are by virtue of the educational and skill development requirements? Will there be professionals interested in furthering the counseling profession's goals through professional involvement, research and training?

Addressing these questions in no way devalues the benefits of exposing students to interdisciplinary issues. CACREP recognizes that much is to be gained by engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration.

But CACREP also believes that students who choose to enroll in a counseling program deserve to understand their roles in the context of who they are as *counselors*, and to develop this understanding, they must receive the majority of their entry-level training, advising, mentoring and supervision from faculty who are aligned with and experienced in their chosen profession. We are not familiar with any other profession that chooses to defer the training of its future professionals primarily to a different profession.

The *CACREP Standards*, revised on a regular schedule on the basis of feedback from the members of the counseling profession and related disciplines, clearly address these and related issues. A core group of faculty, charged with the development, management and oversight of the counseling program, should evidence a clear and active identification with the counseling profession (Standard I.W.). In any calendar year, the core faculty should teach the majority of credit hours (Standard I.M.). Programs should promote active student identification and involvement with the counseling profession (Standard II.C.). Library resources should be appropriate for graduate study in counseling (Standard I.E.), there should be space and resources for appropriate clinical instruction (Standard I.H.), and there should be a core curriculum that

is counseling focused (Standard II.G.1-8.). Clinical supervisors should have relevant training in counselor supervision (Standard III.A. and III.C.). In short, CACREP promotes the development of programs that have a clear counseling focus within the faculty, curriculum and clinical experiences.

CACREP believes counseling students deserve the following opportunities in their preparation programs:

- To develop a clear and distinct professional identity
- To understand and appreciate the rich and unique history of their chosen profession
- To be mentored and taught by experts within the field the students have chosen (i.e., counseling)
- To understand research past and current in the field
- To develop an understanding of the ethics they will be expected to abide by both during their counselor preparation programs and after graduation
- To attend and present at conferences held by and for counselors
- To hear about current professional identity issues and challenges in the counseling profession so they can become advocates for their chosen profession

- To understand counselors' roles in relationship to the other helping professions
- To have counselors supervise their clinical experiences
- To have access to learning resources appropriate to the development of counseling knowledge

When these opportunities are honored, the students benefit, while the profession benefits and grows. CACREP calls on the counseling membership associations, certifying bodies, affiliated professional groups and counseling practitioners to support CACREP's efforts around professional identity in counselor preparation programs and to provide necessary attention to this critical element in the ongoing development of the counseling profession. ♦

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