

COUNSELING TODAY

June 2012 • Volume 54/Number 12

An American Counseling Association Publication



Addressing grief and loss

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A student perspective on 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling

The 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative calls on all counselors and counselor educators to recognize and consider changes necessary for the sustainability and growth of the counseling profession. As emerging counselor educators, we'd like to offer our perspective on the vision of 20/20 in the only way that we are able: as counselors trained to practice within this millennium, and with a specific set of beliefs and values informed by our entrance into the profession within this past decade. Because it is not clear to what extent future counselor educators have participated in the 20/20 initiative, and because graduate students constitute almost 40 percent of the American Counseling Association membership, we hope to offer an authentic voice and comment on what we consider to be the most relevant strategic areas in the vision.

In 2006, delegates representing 30 counseling organizations (now 31 organizations) first convened for the 20/20 initiative. In 2008, these delegates released their seven *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession*. Since that time, many responses to this proposed vision have been published, and in this article, we offer our own response. We represent diverse counseling specialty areas across cultures and nationalities, and our perspective comes out of a commitment to address the needs of a more globalized and diverse society. In the sections that follow, we identify the most relevant aspects of each 20/20 principle from our perspective as diverse students and future counselor educators.

Strengthening identity

As future counselor educators, we anticipate encountering a more austere economic reality than has previously existed in higher education. Therefore, we may be called on to expand and apply our common set of core principles, knowledge and skills across diverse specializations. In our own academic training programs, both at the

master's and doctoral levels, classes have been composed of individuals specializing in different areas. However, regardless of our specialties, we all acquire foundational counseling knowledge and skills through curriculum and practice. The future reality of counselor training programs will likely incorporate students from separate and distinct counseling specialties.

Emphasizing this foundation while simultaneously expanding our reach into specializations unifies us as a profession. Recognizing and reflecting on this philosophy clarifies our identity of a single profession. With a strong unified professional identity, we can focus on strengthening our foundation, advocating for the profession and propelling the profession forward.

Presenting ourselves as one profession

As emerging counselor educators, we are empowered to shape new directions for the future of counseling. If we hope to expand the reach of our field both nationally and internationally, it is key that those outside of our profession, as well as those proximate to our profession, see us as a unified group of scientists and practitioners with a common purpose/mission. Although this mission should be fluid to adapt to the growing and changing needs of clinical work, presentation of ourselves as one profession should become more solidified. Because counseling is becoming increasingly international in scope, a need exists to create a unified curriculum for the education of counselors that will promote a singular identity. As more international students enroll in graduate programs in the United States, the transferability of curriculum across countries becomes even more important. Additionally, gaining exposure to different specialties worldwide allows counselor education students to assist in bringing this universal curriculum to life. In the United States, specialties provide a basis for the development of highly specific skills,

which enhances the versatility of counselors. As counseling unifies as a profession, focus should be placed not only on building confidence in theory and practice, but also on enlisting current professionals to subscribe to our unified front.

Improving public perception/ recognition and advocating for professional issues

The 20/20 vision suggests that promoting our profession at the state and federal levels and educating the insurance industry are and have been crucial to our profession's growth. As the profession continues to diversify and expand internationally, we believe our efforts to promote public perception should go beyond the boundary of our professional association, state or nation.

To improve the public's perception of the field, we have worked to distinguish ourselves from other mental health professions. For example, we make a distinction between ourselves and psychiatrists by explaining that counseling focuses not just on alleviating symptoms but on developing the individual's agency and well-being. We should also consider improving the public recognition of the counselor's role internationally. In some countries, for example, the role of counselors as traditional "healers" is not well recognized.

One way to improve worldwide recognition of the profession is by working collaboratively with counseling professionals throughout the world while promoting our understanding of diverse indigenous and contemporary healing practices. Those of us who are future counselor educators should take responsibility for collaborating with international counseling associations to develop standards and competencies for the profession that are culturally sensitive and acceptable in a global context.

Creating licensure portability

In his December 2011 column for *Counseling Today*, ACA President Don W. Locke asserted that licensure portability

is “the single-most-voiced professional concern” he encounters among counselors. How can we expect to reflect a professional identity when educational practices and licensure certification standards are not uniform? All states should be held to the same degree of accountability and training, thus ensuring that all counselors are equally able and qualified to practice. Maintaining these high standards of practice, counseling licensure should also expand to national/international regulation. Transitioning to this should not be much of an issue logistically with organizations such as ACA, the National Board for Certified Counselors, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, and the American Association of State Counseling Boards to defend and advocate for the profession in terms of standards and oversight of graduate programs. The real accountability rests with those practicing to push for this national licensure to happen. Among the benefits of national licensure would be that future counselors and counselor educators would not be deterred by complex licensure portability issues as they develop their careers in an increasingly challenging job market.

Expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling

Building research capacity in counseling is integral to the growth of the profession and critical to informing our practices and policies. Often, the focus in counseling and related journals has been on clinical interventions, practices and relevant societal issues, even while the 20/20 vision suggests the need to expand and improve counseling research. Central to the process of building and sustaining individual and

institutional research capacity is endorsing the strength of interdisciplinary partnerships and collaboration, which can be instilled in students at every level.

In response to the 20/20 vision, it is important that counselors and counselor educators contribute to the science that informs our practices by developing partnerships in practice and in qualitative and quantitative research. While directly serving clients, we should also be researching solutions. It might be time for a unified professional effort to articulate our vision for advancing the future of counseling research by engaging practitioners in the identification of important research directions, design and implementation.

Focusing on students and prospective students

The importance of defining our unified vision as counselors and counselor educators naturally extends to those who come after us — namely, counselors-in-training. As indicated by the 20/20 initiative, focusing on current and prospective students through networking, mentorship, supervision and membership in professional associations is critical to the vitality and international relevance of our field. As emerging counselor educators within a global context, we believe that we need to move beyond approaches traditionally used in universities and colleges as we focus on recruiting and retaining new professionals.

One way we can move beyond traditional approaches is to engage in interdisciplinary and intercultural mentorship. Due to our training and educational backgrounds, mentorship comes naturally to most counselor educators. Therefore, why not expand our roles as mentors beyond the scope of counselors-in-training and involve

ourselves in undergraduate campus life? This would further solidify and integrate our role in the academy. In the same way we train counselors to work in a collaborative manner within schools, agencies and other settings, we should model collaboration across university campuses by reaching out to diverse undergraduate majors as potential new members of our field. Even if our efforts do not result in recruiting new counselors-in-training, they can improve students’ perception of our role universitywide, which will in turn positively affect the way future members of other professions view us.

Promoting client welfare and advocacy

As counselors, our role is not only to support individual clients in resolving their concerns but also to promote social change that can help ensure equity and inclusiveness. As counselors, we can engage in interfaith, intercultural, intercountry and interdisciplinary dialogue to promote mutual understanding and collaboration worldwide. Recent events such as the global economic recession, several natural disasters and political upheaval require counselors to play an active role in advocating for global harmony and alleviating international tension.

Therefore, counseling programs should continue to provide education and training in areas of multiculturalism, social justice, advocacy and holistic well-being. However, instead of incorporating these concepts in separate classes, it is important to infuse learning about these areas throughout the curriculum through open dialogue, self-reflection and social-action research. By designing a comprehensive counseling curriculum, we can train counselors to empower people and contribute to

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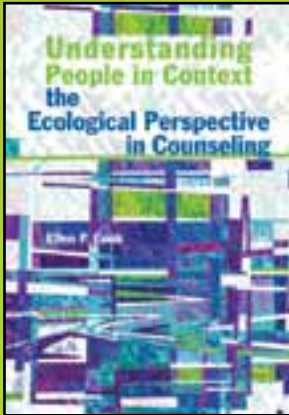
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Conclusion

Our profession has achieved some significant benchmarks in the recent past, including licensure recognition in all 50 states, ACA membership exceeding 50,000 individuals and growing acknowledgment of CACREP accreditation in state licensure requirements. In addition, counselors have responded to various national and international disasters. Despite these advances, however, there are areas in which we still need to grow to ensure that we are meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse society. This article represents our collectivistic ideals as emerging counselors and counselor educators to expand the 20/20 principles to address the importance of empowering a global clientele.

Our aspiration is that this article will serve as a call for counseling students to engage in active dialogue regarding the critical decisions that shape the future of our profession. We must make our voices heard for further advancement of our profession.



For an overview of the 20/20 initiative, including complete text of the seven *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession*, as well as the consensus definition of counseling, current 20/20 activities and concepts for future exploration, visit counseling.org/20-20/index.aspx. Also see the November 2011 article “20/20 delegates pushing toward licensure portability” in *Counseling Today* (available at ct.counseling.org). *CT* expects to publish another update on the 20/20 initiative later this year. ♦

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