

20/20

Next step taken in shaping profession's future

Counseling organizations begin to endorse 20/20 principles for unifying, strengthening the profession

By Angela Kennedy

For the past three years, 30 counseling associations and organizations have been collaborating to determine where the counseling profession should be in the year 2020 and to identify the best means of arriving at that point. The initiative, known as 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling, is being spearheaded by the American Counseling Association and the American Association of State Counseling Boards and includes representatives from all ACA divisions and regions, as well as the National Board for Certified Counselors, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the Council on Rehabilitation Education, the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification and Chi Sigma Iota.

In August, the group released its *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession*, a document that lays out strategic focus areas on which the 20/20 delegates have reached consensus. The delegates have identified these seven principles as being critical to the mission of continuing to move the counseling profession forward:

- Sharing a common professional identity is critical for counselors.
- Presenting ourselves as a unified profession has multiple benefits.
- Working together to improve the public perception of counseling and to advocate for professional issues will strengthen the profession.
- Creating a portability system for licensure will benefit counselors and

strengthen the counseling profession.

- Expanding and promoting our research base is essential to the efficacy of professional counselors and to the public perception of the profession.
- Focusing on students and prospective students is necessary to ensure the ongoing health of the counseling profession.
- Promoting client welfare and advocating for the populations we serve is a primary focus of the counseling profession.

The delegates have been tasked with taking the document back to their sponsoring organizations and asking their governing officials to sign it as a way of showing support for a common vision for the counseling profession.

The document reads in part, "As the profession expands and develops, continued attention to a unified counselor identity is important. The opportunity to establish a cohesive counseling identity leads to multiple benefits for professional counselors, including the presentation of a clearer image of professional counseling to clients, students and the general public, and the promotion of legislative efforts that are in the best interest of the counseling profession and the people we serve."

By endorsing the document, the various counseling organizations and associations will officially indicate their support for the seven principles identified by the 20/20 delegates as well as their willingness to participate in a continuing

dialogue to facilitate and assess progress toward a unified professional position.

As *Counseling Today* went to press, the National Employment Counseling Association, the Association for Counselors and Educators in Government, Chi Sigma Iota, the ACA North Atlantic Region, CACREP, the Counseling Association for Humanistic Education and Development, the National Career Development Association, the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling and the ACA Midwest Region had already returned their endorsements of the principles. Thus far, there has been no indication from any of the other participating organizations that they do not plan to endorse the document.

An uphill battle

Admittedly, the process of finding common ground among so many stakeholders has sometimes been tedious, says J. Barry Mascari, the delegate for AASCB and a member of the 20/20 Oversight Committee. "It's like we are pushing this big stone up a hill and, just as we get it near the top, it rolls back on us," he says. "We are a diverse bunch in so many ways. That makes us more interesting in comparison to some of our sister professions, but it also presents us with a lot of challenges. If you look at psychology and social work, they do have some problems with their licensing and portability, but generally speaking, every social work program is NASW (National Association of Social Workers) approved and every psychology

program is APA (American Psychological Association) approved. But ours (the counseling profession's) is really almost chaotic. For years I've thought that this reflected badly on our profession. We look less unified than before we started getting state licensure. We needed to do this (undertake the 20/20 initiative). It goes beyond professional association issues. This is about the public perception of who we are and presenting a unified profession for federal legislation."

Mascari notes that the 20/20 meetings and summits have provided the myriad counseling organizations the opportunity not only to discuss their differences but also to learn about their similarities. "We have finally put aside some of those old disagreements and started moving forward together," he says. "Maybe it didn't happen as fast or as big as I would have liked for it to happen, but that's just me. I think we are going to get a majority of the organizations to endorse the document. This broad, overarching agreement to who we are and what we believe is a really big step. This is the farthest we've come. The rock is at the top of the hill."

More work to do

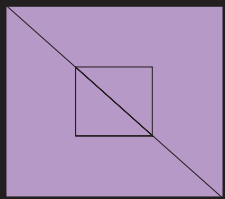
"This is quite a historic document. To get representatives from 30 counseling organizations to come to a consensus and approve these principles is significant," says ACA Chief Professional Officer David Kaplan, a member of the 20/20 Oversight Committee. "However, this is just the foundation of what needs to be done."

In addition to agreeing to the seven principles viewed as necessary for unify-

ing and strengthening the counseling profession, Kaplan explains that the delegates generated a list of possible strategies for achieving the goals reflected by the principles. These strategies will be the focus of Phase II of 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling.

Among the strategies included on the list:

- The counseling profession shall focus on a body of core knowledge and skills shared by all counselors.
- The counseling profession shall speak with a united voice at the state and federal levels.
- The counseling profession shall have the highest respect for all counseling specialties.
- Counselor education programs shall reflect a philosophy that counseling is a single profession with specialized areas of training.
- Counseling accrediting bodies shall reflect a philosophy that counseling is a single profession with specialized areas of training.
- The counseling profession shall develop an outreach/marketing process that reflects a shared identity.
- Professional counseling organizations shall involve front-line practitioners at all policy and decision-making levels.
- The counseling profession shall establish common preparation standards and a single training model to be used by all counselor preparation programs.

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- The counseling profession shall establish uniform licensing standards with LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) as an entry-level title for counselor licensure.
- The counseling profession shall encourage evidenced-based, ethical practices as the foundation for counselors in training and for professional counselor interventions across settings and populations served.

The complete list of strategies is included in the 20/20 document *Ideas for Future Action and Discussion*, which will be posted in the online version of this article at the *CT Online* section of the ACA website (counseling.org).

20/20 delegate perspectives

Counseling Today caught up with several of the 20/20 delegates and asked them to share their perspectives on the seven principles for unifying and strengthening the profession as well as why their organizations chose to endorse the document.

Cindy Chapman, executive director, CRCC

“ACA and AASCB have brought together the largest gathering of counseling organizations in history to address the future of counseling in a proactive manner in order to promote unity and a common vision. CRCC has actively attended and contributed to this process since it began and looks forward to continuing to work with other counseling organizations.”

What did you find most challenging in this process?

“The challenge with this type of process is to find those points of commonality that all organizations can support without becoming stagnant when matters arise that are more contentious. Opportunities for growth and understanding of various perspectives, whether those of other organizations or of your colleagues, always provide for a rewarding experience.”

Chapman notes that the *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession* arrived just after CRCC’s annual meeting. The organization’s Executive Committee

was scheduled to meet in October to formally discuss the document.

“As CRCC moves forward in its own strategic initiatives as well as our ongoing partnership with professional associations in the rehabilitation counseling arena and the general counseling field, we anticipate integration of these principles in our planning for the future. We envision a more unified profession with a common vision that incorporates respect for the various practice areas and is understood both within our profession and by our publics at large.”

Carrie Wilde, delegate, American Rehabilitation Counseling Association

“I believe what makes these documents and, even more important, the process ‘historic’ has been the collaboration and inclusiveness that have been a part of the project design from the outset. Such discussions have taken place previously. However, this time a total of 30 organizations were involved. I think this is essential to the task of strengthening our identity. In order to do this, we must bring together and involve all counselors in the profession.”

What did you find most challenging in this process?

“If I am to be honest, there have been several aspects of this process that I personally found challenging:

A) When the process began, it was envisioned that each organizational delegate would be committed from start to finish. Of course, we didn’t know at the time that one year would turn into three years. So, while there was consistency in the organizations represented, there were changes in delegates from meeting to meeting. As with any group, this changes the historical knowledge of members as well as the group dynamic and process.

B) Time and financial resources for this task were limited. The group was terrific about meeting at least twice a year in addition to e-mail and teleconference work, but a task this large could benefit from more time and, as with everything, more money.”

What was the most rewarding aspect?

“While it is obvious to say, it was an honor to sit in a circle with so many committed counselors and leaders in our field. I gained an appreciation for those qualities that we all share as counselors but also learned to embrace those things that make each of our specialties within the profession unique. Throughout the process, everyone demonstrated a respect for the wide variance in views represented.

“I am always telling my students how much ACA and its members have contributed to my professional development. I tell them that each of them can be a part of the profession and actively shape the way the profession develops and responds to the needs of the clients we serve. I can’t think of a better way of communicating that to them than through role modeling.”

How does your organization plan to support and implement the seven principles?

“This is something that will be a part of our upcoming discussion (at ARCA’s Fall Board meeting in October). It is my hope that we will examine ways to also include the ARCA general membership in the discussion and implementation of the seven principles. This process began with a group of 30 delegates, but the real work remains, and it is my belief that it will only succeed by involving all counselors.”

With this foundation in place, how do you see the counseling profession in the year 2020?

“I think we are on our way but that we must remember this is an ongoing process. I think we will be in a better place than today. I am hopeful that we will have licensure in all states, see counselors included in Medicare and other important legislation, etc. But we will not achieve these things and others by sitting around in rooms talking. We must continue the dialogue and implement strategies as we go.”

“The delegates and the Oversight Committee refer to these documents as the outcome of Phase I. I hope it is just that — Phase I. We did a lot of good work. However, I also believe that in order to strengthen our identity and to continue

moving our profession forward, we still have more work to do. Talking about our commonalities is the easy part. Previous attempts have stopped right about where we are in the process now. I look forward to the next phase and the opportunity to examine and address those things that prevent us from unifying the profession. However, I worry that if we don't address the latter, we will not be much further than we are today. That is the history we need to still make."

Carol Bobby, executive director, CACREP

"CACREP Chair Craig Cashwell signed the statement (endorsing the document) on behalf of the CACREP Board of Directors on Sept. 23.

"CACREP believes that its accreditation standards provide a foundation for a unified profession by defining a core curriculum of knowledge and skill areas necessary for the preparation of *all* counselors regardless of specialty area or work setting. CACREP Standards also require counselor preparation programs to teach students the fundamental importance of:

1) Advocating for both the profession and those who are served by the profession, and

2) Understanding the role of research and how to conduct research.

Further, CACREP as an organization believes in working as an equal partner with all counseling organizations and professionals to improve understanding and recognition of our profession."

Cathy Malchiodi, delegate, Counseling Association for Humanistic Education and Development

"I definitely agree that the process this committee has undertaken is historic for two reasons. One, the participation of representatives from all the major stakeholders — ACA divisions and related counseling organizations — is an achievement in and of itself. The counseling field is made up of many voices and beliefs. That multiplicity makes the profession vibrant but also challenges collaboration when ideas and values are at stake in discussions. Second, this venture has set the pace and trajectory for the profession

for the foreseeable future. It is personally satisfying to realize that one is part of an effort that will define the field and secure its place in mental health and health care.

"The C-AHEAD leadership carefully reviewed the documents and quickly reached a consensus to support the contents and intention."

How does your organization plan to support and implement the seven principles?

"Historically, C-AHEAD's mission has contained core values that underlie the counseling profession, including human development, the capacity for all individuals to achieve wellness in every sense of the word and a commitment to service to others. I do not believe C-AHEAD would have supported the principles if these aspects were not inherent to the intention of the 20/20 documents."

With this foundation in place, how do you see the counseling profession in the year 2020?

"I am not so great at predicting the future! But, personally, I maintain a clear

vision that counseling will be a widely embraced profession recognized for its contributions to mental health and wellness. I also believe that the original objective of the 20/20 project, to support reciprocity for state licensure as well as recognition of the counseling field, proposed by Barry Mascari, Charlie Gagnon, Sam Gladding and others, will be achieved."

Tom Sweeney, executive director, Chi Sigma Iota, international honor society for professional counselors, counselor educators and students

"Our (Executive Council) signed off on the seven principles in hopes that our joint efforts could result in the changes the delegates aspire to achieve. CSI's mission is already in concert with the principles, and we continue to do what we can, as we have since 1985, when we started as an organization. We have 60,000 members initiated who basically share a vision for one strong, socially motivated profession in service to a society that respects and advances the dignity and worth of all people."

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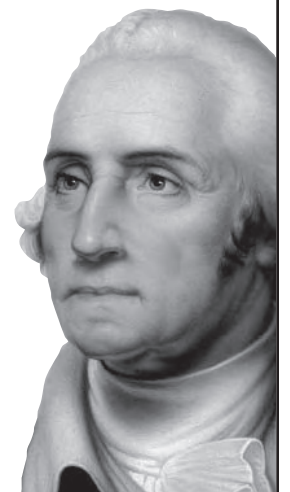
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How does your organization plan to support and implement the seven principles?

“By serving our mission to recognize and promote excellence in the profession of counseling. We have 252 active chapters throughout this country (one abroad). We have 12,000 currently active members, half of whom are students and half practitioners, supervisors and counselor educators. We will initiate 5,000 new members in coming months. All commit to an oath of membership that addresses the seven principles and more.

“Through our CSI strategic planning activities going on now, I perceive a renewed commitment to promoting excellence as professional counselors. The commitment includes advancing the profession in stature for the purpose of being better able to serve those who need counselors. As noted previously ‘... in service to a society that respects and advances the dignity and worth of all people.’ These are ambitious goals, but we believe in them and will continue in our efforts. I wish the 20/20 effort every success in helping to bring greater consensus in the future on these matters.”

With this foundation in place, how do you see the counseling profession in the year 2020?

“I regret that I do not see a foundation in place yet. If such a foundation could be realized, then I would see equity for professional counselors in all settings, and those whom we serve or seek to serve would be our primary focus — that is, a focus on how can we do even better.” ♦

Angela Kennedy is a former staff writer at *Counseling Today*.

Letters to the editor:
ct@counseling.org