SACES
SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION

NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY: promoting connection, leadership, and service within the profession

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy 2024!

As we usher in the new year, we welcome you, our dedicated counselor educators, counselors, supervisors, and graduate students. Your unwavering commitment and profound impact on the lives of those you guide continue to shape the futures of individuals and immensely contribute to the vibrancy of mental health in our world. This year promises opportunities to refine our approaches, expand our horizons, and deepen our understanding. As we navigate the challenges and triumphs that 2024 will undoubtedly bring, remember that your role is pivotal in fostering resilience, growth, and well-being with those we serve.

It is hard to believe that my term as President is already halfway over. The SACES Executive Committee has been a joy to work with, and we continue to navigate the needs of our membership in a manner that honors the diversity of each of our members. Our work is not done, and I look forward to the next six months as we strive to strengthen the various foundations of our organization.

We have several upcoming events that we implore you to be a part of to take full advantage of your membership. We will announce our President-Elect-Elect and Secretary-Elect-Elect candidates later in January to start the year. It is crucial that each of you vote as we continue a great legacy of leadership in SACES. We will also open the call for proposals for the SACES Conference later in January. Our conference will be in Dallas, TX, from November 7-9. It will be a fantastic conference, and we hope you all will get it on your calendars.

Your dedication, especially in the face of the past years' unique challenges, has been inspirational. Your passion, empathy, and expertise transform lives and create a lasting impact. As we embark on this 2024 journey, remember you are not alone. We are here to support, collaborate, and celebrate with you every step of the way. Let's make this year remarkable, filled with growth, achievement, and heartfelt connections.

Thank you for being a vital part of SACES. Here's to a fulfilling and prosperous 2024!

Dr. Michael Jones, LPC-S, NCC, BC-TMH

MICHAEL JONES
SACES PRESIDENT
2023-2024

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Call for Submissions: Spring 2024 Issue

The editorial team is seeking submissions for consideration in our Spring 2024 issue of the SACES Newsletter. The issue's theme is **Education: Foster best practices in teaching and professional development.**

Submissions must be between 500 and 800 words (not including references) and sent electronically as a Word document to newsletter@saces.org. Please include the author name(s), credentials, and affiliation(s) in the title page. Editorial staff request that authors submit photos in .jpg format as additional files (separate from the manuscript). Submissions must be received by **February 28, 2024**.

For questions or more information, please contact the editorial team at newsletter@saces.org.

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IMPROVING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COUNSELOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SITE SUPERVISORS

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As summarized by Bjornestad et al. (2014), "Counselor education programs rely on site supervisors to provide direct supervision to counseling students in practicum and internship placements, and site supervisors have a great influence on the aspiring counselors they supervise" (p. 242). A body of literature has targeted the need for these programs to provide [sufficient] supervisory training or professional development to site supervisors (e.g., Bjornestad et al.; DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011; Landon et al., 2020; Merlin & Brendel, 2017; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2018), especially as this is both an American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical standard (ACA, 2014, *Section F.2.a.*) and a Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requirement (CACREP, 2023, *Standard 3.P.*). For reference, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Taskforce on Best Practices in Clinical Supervision (2011) provided a competency framework that programs can use to develop such training. However, little has more specifically addressed the connection between these entities regarding relational and other supportive strategies. This article briefly highlights the importance of the relationship between counselor education programs and site supervisors and provides concrete methods to strengthen their collaboration.

CACREP (2023) requires that counselor education programs provide site supervisors with orientation, consultation, and professional development opportunities (*Standards 4.I. to 4.K.*), yet there is neither direction nor specificity on achieving this end. Uellendahl and Tenenbaum (2015) furthermore found that approximately one-third of their sample "… expressed a desire for greater clarity of university expectations, guidelines, and standards" (p. 281). Programs are advised to mandate site supervisors attend a pre-semester orientation providing an overview of the program and its faculty, its clinical requirements and expectations for both site supervisors and students, utilize technology (e.g., Supervision Assist or Tevera), and general processes. Programs may mandate only yearly attendance for site supervisors who more regularly provide site supervision. It is additionally suggested that they record and post these orientations to a program's website for site supervisors' reference at a later date and for those who cannot attend. Programs may alternatively or further consider creating a site supervisor handbook, which could be a modified version of their students' clinical handbook, or providing a copy of the student clinical handbook to all site supervisors. Programs may consider obtaining and offering continuing education credit to incentivize site supervisors to engage and complete these professional development activities.

Additionally, CACREP (2023) standards require counselor education programs to provide consultation for site supervisors (*Standard 4.J.*), which may be practiced inconsistently. Uellendahl and Tenenbaum (2015) found that 16% of their site supervisor sample had no contact with the program but that face-to-face contact between site supervisors and counselor education programs led to better follow-through in creating plans for interns' field experiences; the latter underscores the potential benefit of this contact toward student professional development. Counselor

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education faculty and site supervisors may disagree on points of clinical or ethical issues and practice, and increased collaboration and consultation can mitigate student confusion about how best to respond and adapt professionally (Lee & Cashwell, 2001). Faculty supervisors may consider face-to-face or virtual introductions of themselves to their supervisees' site supervisors at the start of each semester as well as weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly one-to-one check-ins regarding student progress, developmental and/or practical concerns, potential areas for growth and goal setting, etc. Still, at least periodic or midterm and final check-ins regarding student progress are imperative. Faculty supervisors conducting weekly or monthly check-ins with site supervisors could assist with monitoring student progress and provide opportunities for addressing student problems of professional competence (Elman & Forrest, 2007). Remediation planning would be best completed in joint sessions with the student, site supervisor, and faculty supervisor as this would emphasize the collective's awareness, teamwork, and support.

Personal and professional support may not be required by counselor education programs for site supervisors; however, it could strengthen working relationships and improve supervisory skills to the benefit of students. Programs may consider offering monthly or bi-monthly group supervision sessions and informal socialization opportunities for site supervisors. Uellendahl and Tenenbaum (2015) advocated using technology-based support through program-created discussion boards, blogs, etc., to provide space for site supervisors to consult with one another. Another approach to facilitate collaboration is to invite site supervisors to share their contact information with one another. Expressions of appreciation can be a vital empowerment tool. Programs can send site supervisors personalized tokens of appreciation (e.g., thank you notes, university/college "swag," etc.) or invite them to celebratory events at the semester's end. Any act to acknowledge, empower, support, and express gratitude toward site supervisors can promote stronger connection.

Site supervisors are critical to both counselor education programs' functioning and student development. To support students and site supervisors and maximize their potential in their roles, university faculty are advised to consider creative practices to connect with site supervisors that aids both their development and efforts.

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PARTNERING WITH SCHOOL AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS: FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Learning Disabilities – Facts and Statistics

A Learning Disability (LD) is a neurological disorder where a person has difficulties with reading, spelling, expressing, mathematics, and understanding meaning (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022). About 32 percent (2.4 million) of students enrolled in public schools, which is the largest population amongst the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), have an LD (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). While one in five children and adolescents in the United States have LD and attention issues, only one in 16 receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in public schools (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017).

Research suggests that children and adolescents with LD have higher reported rates of depression (Chaturvedi, 2015; Gallegos et al., 2012; Li & Morris, 2007), anxiety (Chaturvedi, 2015; Gallegos et al., 2012; Mammarella et al., 2014; Nelson & Harwood, 2011; Peleg, 2009) and lower self-esteem (Crane et al., 2017; Lahane et al., 2013; Peleg, 2009; Shafaei et al., 2021) as compared to their peers without LD. There is a negative correlation between test anxiety and self-esteem; children with high test anxiety have lower self-esteem (Peleg, 2009). Children and adolescents with LD view themselves as less competent than their counterparts without LDs, especially in academic achievement (Bear et al., 2002), even though there is no difference in the IQ of students with and without LDs (Nunez et al., 2005). This could be due to the unpleasant emotions experienced stemming from struggling with academic tasks (Alesi et al., 2014). School Counselors can address these feelings and emotions; they received the education to work with some of these concerns within the school; hence, this paper focuses on the importance of focusing on counselor education programs to help school counselors learn the appropriate skills to address mental health issues among children with LD.

Recommendations for Counselor Educators and Programs

Different states are now focusing on the education and mental health of children with LD. For example, Texas introduced new education standards for University programs and school districts to train teachers, and the focus on mental health suggests teachers and parents use affirmations to foster engagement and success (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021). While teachers, administrators, and school staff are the focus of *The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders* (TEA, 2021), there is no mention of school counselors due to the focus on education rather than the mental health of children and adolescents with LD. Some southern states fail to discuss mental health among children with LD in their manuals (Southern Regional Education Board, n.d.). School counselors, counselor educators, and counselor education programs can highlight the importance of meeting the mental health needs of children and adolescents with LD.

Focusing on the mental health needs of individuals with LD is pivotal. Meeting these mental health requirements can be done through research, awareness, discussion, and enhancing professional skills (Simonoff, 2005). While States discuss the importance of education and meeting educational standards, partnering with school districts and schools can help counselor education programs and counselor educators understand the gaps in mental health services for children and adolescents diagnosed with LD. Upon learning about the gaps and eventual need, programs can be proactive and ahead of the curve by teaching and discussing the techniques school counselors can use with the large population of children and adolescents with LD.

School counselors, working short term, would need a tool kit to address the mental health issues of children with LD in both

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an individual and group settings, which would include skills to help with clinical symptoms like irritability and difficulty concentrating, which can be a sign of anxiety (Nelson & Harwood, 2011); stress induced by taking tests, being evaluated, receiving feedback (Peleg, 2009); being at school and separated from their family (Mammarella et al., 2014); feelings of depression possibly caused by increased loneliness and negative mood (Li & Morris, 2007) leading to lower self-esteem and an inability to make friends (Alesi et al., 2014); and tools to advocate for focusing on the mental health of children with LD and adding that to the IEP. In addition to the above concerns, it would be important to remember that LDs are a lifelong issue and can only be managed by educational interventions, hence the school counselors might meet with the same students to review the learned techniques as they navigate their learning. This partnership can lead to professional development courses and training for current school counselors. In addition to partnering with schools and school districts, counselor educators must also address the gap in research on the mental health of children and adolescents with LD.

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STUDENT VOICES ON BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ALBANY STATE UNIVERSITY'S ONLINE MASTER'S COUNSELING PROGRAM

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Online Master's counseling programs have witnessed a surge in popularity due to their flexibility and the ever-increasing demand for professional counselors (O'Brien, 2018). These programs, often hosted by accredited universities and delivered through web-based platforms, provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to embark on careers in counseling while accommodating a diverse range of learners (Kaplan et al., 2019). The benefits of online education, such as accessibility and reduced geographical barriers, have made these programs attractive to individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences (Allen & Seaman, 2017). However, a critical aspect of any educational experience is developing a sense of community among students, which can be particularly challenging in the digital space. This article highlights the voices of some students enrolled in online Master's counseling programs at Albany State University (ASU), shedding light on the strategies, challenges, and benefits of building a sense of community within this virtual learning environment.

Challenges in Building Community
"At first, I found it hard to connect with most of my peers because of the age gap, but over time, I realized that we all help each other."

Online education brought several challenges for ASU students aiming to establish a sense of community. Inconsistent classmates and fluctuating course enrollments made it difficult for some students to forge lasting connections within their academic cohorts. Additionally, timing issues within online groups led to missed interactions and delayed responses, hindering the development of a cohesive online community. Initially, age differences posed a barrier to connecting with peers. However, as time passed, students realized the value of cross-generational support and task reminders, recognizing that age diversity enriches the learning community. Lastly, some students struggled with the motivation to connect with classmates who fell outside their comfort zones or held differing viewpoints, with individual preferences and workload influencing their willingness to engage with peers.

Overcoming Challenges
"I've overcome [challenges] by getting out of my comfort zone and directly reaching out to individuals whenever our paths cross."

Students stated that taking the initiative is essential to overcoming community-building challenges. They actively reached out to their peers, formed study groups, and engaged in meaningful discussions, all of which they believed were instrumental in fostering valuable connections. Moreover, some students proposed that optimizing assignment designs to necessitate physical or virtual collaboration could significantly enhance community-building efforts, encouraging students to establish more effective connections. Additionally, students stressed the importance of adaptability through flexible communication, stating that employing various methods like phone calls and emails to address online interaction obstacles ensures the maintenance of their connections. Lastly, faculty support was a pivotal component in cultivating a positive learning environment and a strong sense of community within the online counseling program, with students appreciating the faculty's accessibility and their willingness to offer guidance and feedback.

Positive Impact of Synchronous Residency and Classes
"Residency was a great way to build a community. It allowed me to interact with my peers beyond the discussion post."

One prominent aspect of ASU's online Master's counseling programs that students identified as fostering a sense of community is the residency component. Residency programs allow students to unite for synchronous interactions, which goes beyond the typical online discussion posts. This opportunity for synchronous connection is valued for its

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ability to facilitate deeper relationships and create a sense of belonging. According to research by Guiffrida and Douthit (2018), students who participated in residencies reported a heightened sense of community, enhanced motivation, and a stronger connection with their peers and professors. Furthermore, students mentioned that occasional synchronous classes, where they met in real time, played a crucial role in bringing students together. Such classes provided a sense of immediacy and human connection.

Peer Support and Community Building
"Peer support has been beneficial because I can get advice from others who are experiencing the same thing I am"

Peer support and mentoring were highlighted as integral components of community-building in online counseling programs. Students found great value in connecting with their peers, discussing exams, sharing advice, and practicing counseling techniques. This peer interaction not only provided practical assistance but also served as a source of emotional support. Research by Walker et al. (2020) emphasized the significance of peer interactions in online learning, suggesting that they contribute to a sense of belonging, increased engagement, and improved academic outcomes.

Additionally, small class settings, group assignments, and connecting via online platforms were highlighted methods for building community. Students appreciate the benefits of small class settings, which facilitate bonding, closer connections, and a more personalized learning experience. Also, collaborative assignments, such as pairing for coursework or group projects, were mentioned as effective in fostering a sense of community. These assignments encouraged students to work together and build relationships. Lastly, online platforms like GroupMe and other communication tools helped students stay connected, share resources, and provide mutual support. These platforms created a virtual community that extended beyond the official course environment.

Conclusion
The benefits of fostering connections within an online program are multifaceted. Firstly, students found that building relationships with their peers enriched their learning experience, offering valuable insights into their areas of study and exposing them to diverse perspectives. This broadened their horizons and deepened their understanding of their subjects. Secondly, the opportunity to connect with professors and professionals in their respective fields offered

"valuable mentorship and served as a wellspring of encouragement and motivation." This support inspired students to excel in their academic and career pursuits. Lastly, the act of sharing goals and ideas with peers not only solidified their sense of belonging but also strengthened their focus on academic and career objectives. This collaborative environment nurtured personal growth and development, creating a supportive and nurturing space for students to thrive.

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WORK AND WELLNESS: FORMING COMMUNITY AMONG COUNSELOR EDUCATORS THROUGH SELF-CARE

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Wellness

Wellness is a well-known construct within counseling literature that boasts benefits for counselors such as reducing counselor impairment and burnout (Kim & Mumbauer-Pisano, 2022). One prominent model of wellness in the literature is the indivisible self model, which is an empirical, strengths-based model (Myers & Sweeny, 2004). The model includes five areas that comprise the self, which are social, essential, physical, creative, and coping. Self-care is located within the essential area of the indivisible self model. The goal of the indivisible self model is to achieve balance in each of the areas to experience overall wellness. Wellness is a holistic construct focused on improving the overall functioning of an individual (Kim & Mumbauer-Pisano, 2022).

Both the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) require that counselor wellness and self-care be infused throughout counselor education programs (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2023; Kim & Mumbauer-Pisano, 2022). Additionally, counselor educators (CES) are supposed to model for counselors-in-training how to achieve balance and maintain wellness through self-care (Harrichand et al., 2021a, b). By modeling balance, CES impact both their students and the clients served by those students (Harrichand et al., 2021a). Although CES are tasked with modeling self-care, faculty can be overwhelmed with high teaching loads, research expectations, administrative duties, and leadership roles (DeDiego, 2023; Harrichand et al., 2021a). One way to mitigate faculty stress and increase wellness is through connection. Connectedness is an important aspect of wellness (Umberson, 2010) and social connectedness was deemed "a primary strategy for self-care," particularly for healthcare professionals (Jordan, 2023, p. 1).

Connection

Connection is ingrained in us and is critical to wellness (Martino et al., 2015). Additionally, wellness is described as connection, specifically the ability to engage with others (Cummings & Bently, 2018). Connection is an aspect of belonging, opposite of isolation, and is a vital step in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Moreover, connectedness is the extent an individual experiences other people as meaningful and important (Schulze & Naidu, 2014) and social connectedness is the experience of significant relationship and belonging (van Bel et al., 2009).

Connection builds resilience (Ozbay et al., 2007) and impacts CES wellness as an identified life task (Adler, 1927) related to work. Work-related stress decreases one's sense of wellness (Myers et al., 2000). For CES, academia is often an isolated career (Himelein & Anderson, 2020) and faculty report a lack of connectedness (Rice et al., 2000), especially with the rise of online education (Snow & Coker, 2020). Additionally, connection can be perceived differently across cultures (Cummings & Bently, 2018) and isolation increases for male or minority CES (Ray et al., 2016).

However, accessibility to engage with colleagues is dependent on opportunities for interaction (Himelein & Anderson, 2020). Further, faculty connections, in the form of supportive

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work relationships, safeguard against work-related stress (Himelein & Anderson, 2020), increase work satisfaction (Chonody et al., 2023; Rice et al., 2000), and combat isolation (Weissinger, 2000). When considering space for connection, both in-person and virtual connections are beneficial (Brawner, 2020) to promote and sustain wellness (Cummings & Bently, 2018).

Application

Although mandated, wellness can easily fall by the wayside for CES and counseling students alike. As CES, we often do not model wellness to our students (Harrichand et al., 2021b). CES often feel isolated in the workplace and have higher rates of burnout, supporting the need for connection and wellness (Harrichand et al., 2021a; Himelein & Anderson, 2020).

Faculty involvement in learning circles, faculty who meet to learn together, provided a sense of belonging among faculty colleagues, helping combat feelings of isolation (Himelein & Anderson, 2020). Additionally, research has shown in physical wellness that individuals with social accountability were 11% to 16% more physically active than those without accountability (Forester et al., 2020). The combination of this research supports that faculty combine self-care and connectedness through intentional social gatherings, whether virtually or in-person.

We suggest that CES connect, forming groups surrounding different hobbies. For example, running/walking groups, book clubs (pleasure-reading only!), nature groups (we know there are some birdwatchers out there!), yoga groups, movie clubs, or spiritual groups. Online educators can form these groups through online platforms (MS Teams, Google Workspace, etc.), and residential educators may find the opportunity to meet over lunch or after classes. The intention is to provide accountability for self-care, encouraging one another, and forming community through self-care preferences. Committing to wellness and community-building among CES, through self-care groups, may promote healthier educators, increase job satisfaction, and prevent burnout (Harrichand et al., 2021a). Further, as CES prioritize self-care and community with fellow educators within their institutions, the parallel process includes encouraging students to start their own groups, teaching and modeling the importance of wellness and connectedness with other counselors (Harrichand et al., 2021b).

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