

Suggested APA style reference: Rose, S. R., Portes, P. R., Sandhu D. S. (2011). *Connecting Counselor Preparation Programs With Student Achievement*. Retrieved from http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas11/Article_90.pdf

Article 90

Connecting Counselor Preparation Programs With Student Achievement

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School days were once thought to be the “best years of one’s life” or “the good ol’ days,” however students in today’s schools are experiencing difficulties that their parents did not face. They are expected to learn more at a much faster pace with conflicting emotional struggles coming at them from all directions with each passing day. These expectations of student place a greater expectation on educators to prepare them for these academic and emotional struggles. How is it possible to balance the emotional reality of children’s developmental needs with the necessity to show academic success?

This debate has tended to divide children’s learning along two axes, the emotional and the academic. Either we can address children’s academic performance, the conventional thinking holds, or we can address their emotional and social needs. Before more children suffer from this divide, it is necessary to deliver some important news: The two kinds of learning are intimately connected. That means that promoting students’ social and emotional skills plays a critical role in improving their academic performance (Greenberg et al, 2003; Shriver & Weissberg, 2005; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Steven Wolk (2007) further supports this line of thinking by stating:

If the purpose of our schools is to prepare drones to keep the U.S. economy going, then the prevailing curricula and instructional methods are probably adequate. If however, we want to help students become thoughtful, caring citizens who might be creative enough to figure out how to change the status quo rather than maintain it, we need to rethink schooling entirely. (p. 648)

This kind of schooling that addresses *thinking* and *caring* provides the foundation necessary to help these students across the hurdles they are facing.

The basic principle of academic success is that all students, to be optimally motivated to learn and thus close the achievement gap, need to feel a sense of security, love, belonging and connectedness before they can accept the basic concept of learning (Maslow, 1943). They must continue to feel this connectedness in terms of competence, autonomy, and relatedness to others in the learning setting to feel motivated to learn. The emotional challenges that underlie the problem causing the achievement gap and the academic needs that lay on the surface are so intertwined that one cannot be disentangled from the other.

Decades of research have not provided adequate answers to guide schools in blending the higher expectations of high accountability and continuous improvement of the 21st century with the necessary social skills that would address the problem. A recent reform publication stated that “by the year 2020, the majority of America’s public school students will be living under conditions that place them at risk of education failure” (Irmsher, 1997, p.1).

When children become convinced that they will not be able to make it in society, they tend to take the skills they have and use them to take the low roads of life (Portes, 2005). An effective educator can give a child hope, and with hope a child can overcome seemingly impossible obstacles. As the support person within the school, it seems natural that this role of providing hope would fall to the counselor. In 1997, the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds and Education Trust launched *The Transforming School Counseling Initiative* (TSCI), based on the assumption that school counselors can and should serve as “proactive leaders and advocates for high achievement for all students, especially poor and minority youth” (Education Trust, 2000, p.1.) Paisley and Hayes (2003) further support this notion with the statement,

Clearly, school counselors have a significant role to play in ensuring student success. Because they have a school-wide perspective on serving the needs of every student, schools counselors are in an ideal position to serve as advocates for all students and as agents for removing systemic barriers to academic success. (p. 198)

Hence, the counselor needs to be prepared to do so.

The counselor preparation program seems to be the best place to begin this influence on the counselor’s ability to develop these skills. Appropriate counselor preparation will help provide necessary training for all counselors to work better with students placed at risk, allowing them to benefit from current educational reforms. Hence, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge and attitudes of practicing counselors regarding their counselor preparation programs in relation to being

able to address the needs of all students and, thus, assist in closing the achievement gaps. A survey was used to explore the knowledge and attitudes of practicing counselors regarding their counselor preparation programs in relation to being able to play a significant role in student achievement. The study examined the knowledge base that schools counselors have in relation to the school setting, population, and other factors involved with the achievement gap. The survey continued to probe counselors' attitudes and beliefs about the counselor role. Responses to the survey were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive methods as well as qualitatively through review of individual comments.

Method

All 1,271 school counselors listed on the 2007 Kentucky Department of Education's registry were given the survey instrument through an e-mail addressed to each participant. Participants were assured that the study would be based on non-usage of names of districts and employees to better secure the honesty of responses and, thus, the reliability and validity of the study.

The survey was completed by 788 counselors, which resulted in a 62% response rate. Females completed 89.8% (n=708) and males completed 10.2% (n=80). This is representative of the female/male ratio of school counselors within the represented districts. The majority of respondents, 93.8% (n = 739), identified themselves as Caucasian; 3.8% (n = 30) identified themselves as African American; 1.3% (n = 10) identified themselves as Native American; and 1.1% (n = 9) identified themselves as Asian American.

The professional experience of the school counselors was quantified using survey responses: 34.6% (n = 273) worked as high school counselors; 44.3% (n = 349) worked as elementary school counselors; and 21.1% (n = 166) worked as middle school counselors. Years of experience were quantified by survey responses: 13.5% (n = 107) of the sample had served as a school counselor for 0 – 5 years, 44.4% (n = 350) had 5 – 10 years of experience, 22.1% (n = 174) had 10 – 15 years experience, 12.3% (n = 97) had 15 – 20 years experience, and 7.6% (n = 60) possessed more than 20 years of experience.

The survey instrument was developed by examining previous surveys designed within the realms of school reform, closing the achievement gap, and counselor preparation. Section I of the survey asked about demographic data. Sections II through VIII asked closed-ended questions using a likert-type scale to gauge the level of impact that counselors felt specific factors had on closing the achievement gap and to gather information regarding the participant's knowledge base, content knowledge regarding the gap and counseling, counselors' education and training, participants' skills and experience, and to gather counselors' perceptions in relation to dispositions and attitudes regarding program effects on closing the achievement gap. Section IX closed the survey asking participants to comment on their counselor preparation program's strengths and weaknesses as well as make suggestions for improvement.

Results

Content Knowledge in Relation to Closing the Achievement Gap

Table 1 reports the response frequencies and means for the items dealing with respondent perceptions of the content knowledge they gained from their own counselor preparation program. The survey item reporting the highest content knowledge factor was for collaboration with a mean of 4.43. This is significant because collaboration between school and community professionals is an integral component in addressing the needs of our nation's children. The act of collaboration should be driven by the possibility of aiding students in reaching increased levels of school success (Perry, 1995; Rowley, 2000; Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Stone & Clark, 2001).

Following close behind was the item, "I believe that having students participating in Social Skills programs will increase academic achievement" at 4.42 with counselors reporting a mean of 4.27 for their understanding of how to implement a social skills program. This is significant given the research behind social skills programs. Ignoring the affective aspects of learning actually contradicts much of what we gleaned from neuroscience about the role of emotions in learning (Jensen, 2006; Sousa, 2006). Learning is affective as well as cognitive; "We have to play to the emotional brain; then and only then, will we open up the intellectual brain" (Gilbert, 2002, p. 2).

In regards to the question, "*My counselor preparation program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to advocate for children*", the mean for counselors was 4.133. The comments section of the survey qualifies these numbers reporting both positive and negative data. A number of counselors praised the skill development that occurred throughout the program, commenting "All in all, the program was very thorough" and "Overall, I think my training was very good." A few counselors commented that the university faculty is important in providing this knowledge base stating positive aspects such as, "I had several excellent professors and feel that I could call on them if I had questions about an issue." Others reported negative aspects such as, "College faculty who are not current practitioners in schools should spend time in schools and/or use current school counselors to come in and teach topics that they (the university staff professors) do not have experience with."

Some respondents thought more emphasis on skills was necessary, stating, (1) "More knowledge and practice in large group guidance activities – this is the only way to reach all the students in your school;" (2) "I do a great deal of paperwork concerning scheduling, enrolling and withdrawing students and, of course, testing. I received NO training for such tasks in my program. Programs should concentrate more on practical skills and less on theory;" (3) "I would like to see less time spent on theory and more time spent on real life practical application of those theories. A balance must be found between developing counseling skills and meeting the demands of the role of the counselor within the local school system;" and, (4) "More emphasis on the day to day running of a school guidance program. The theories are great, but application in twenty minutes or less is the norm."

Table 1: Content Knowledge in Relation to Closing the Achievement Gap

Item	1 (Strongly Disagree)		2 (Disagree)		3 (Neither Agree Nor Disagree)		4 (Agree)		5 (Strongly Agree)		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
I believe that having students participating in Social Skills programs will increase academic achievement.			10	1.3	39	4.9	349	44.3	390	49.5	4.42	.648
I understand how to implement a Social Skills program.			38	4.8	68	8.6	329	41.8	353	44.8	4.27	.811
I believe that learning communities which practice collaboration improves student achievement.					87	11.0	272	34.5	429	54.4	4.43	.683
I have developed a clear understanding of Diversity Issues in my Prep. Program.			48	6.1	96	12.2	418	53.0	226	28.7	4.04	.807
In my Prep. program, I learned how Ethnic Culture is related to student achievement.	9	1.1	66	8.4	213	27.0	353	44.8	147	18.7	3.71	.902
My Prep. Program helped me to feel confident in my Leadership Skills.	10	1.3	69	8.8	194	24.6	331	42.0	184	23.4	3.77	.946
My Prep. Program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to advocate for all children.			30	3.8	137	17.4	319	40.5	302	38.3	4.13	.823
My Prep. Program helped me to feel confident in my skills of Counseling & Coordination.			40	5.1	107	13.6	447	56.7	194	24.6	4.01	.765
My Prep. Program helped me to feel prepared to use data and accountability to help students in closing the achievement gap.	29	3.7	185	23.5	283	35.9	252	32.0	39	4.9	3.11	.942
My Prep. Program helped me to understand the ASCA standards as they relate to counselors.	39	4.9	60	7.6	153	19.4	350	44.4	186	23.6	3.74	1.06
My Prep. Program helped to instill in me the belief that all students have the capacity to achieve.					98	12.4	427	54.2	263	33.4	4.21	.644

Content Knowledge in Relation to Counseling

In regard to the question, “*How often did you observe someone counseling?*”, only 49.4% had opportunities to observe a practicing counselor. Comments such as the following show that less than 50% is not good enough: (1) “I would have liked observing more counseling sessions with children as clients;” (2) “I believe that students interested in the Counselor Education program need the opportunity to visit a real life school counseling setting;” (3) “...receive more consultation and observation of ‘practicing’ counselors that actually get to do counseling and guidance;” and (4) “... bring in real-life situation that counselors deal with and let students see how to resolve/deal with these issues; have counselors come to classes and share about their day to day routines and how

they deal with faculty, parents, peer conflicts, staff, etc.” Descriptive data for these survey items appear in Table 2.

Table 2: Content Knowledge in Relation to Counseling – Frequency/Rate of Occurrence

Item	1 (Never)		2 (Seldom)		3 (Sometimes)		4 (Occasion- ally)		5 (Frequently)		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Discussions about Counseling Phil.	39	4.9	192	24.4	245	31.1	205	26.0	107	13.6	3.19	1.10
Feedback about counseling skills	30	3.8	97	12.3	204	25.9	232	29.4	225	28.6	3.67	1.13
Opportunities to reflect on feedback (Comments and Suggestions from Professors and Supervisors)	49	6.2	76	9.6	186	23.6	261	33.1	216	27.4	3.66	1.16
Observation of Counseling	59	7.5	146	18.5	194	24.6	234	29.7	155	19.7	3.36	1.20
Discussions about learning differences	40	5.1	94	11.9	263	33.4	263	33.4	128	16.2	3.44	1.06

Counselor’s Perceptions of University Coursework

The survey asked respondents to rate 18 most commonly offered courses in Counselor Education Programs on two levels, (1) the relevance of the course to the job activities, and (2) the value of knowledge and skills gained. Results are reported in Table 3. Counselors rated Research Methods and Techniques at a mean score of 2.93 and Supervised Research at a mean score of 2.86. Lower scores for these courses may signify possible issues regarding students’ perceptions of the quality of these courses.

Counselors agreed that consultation was important with a relevance of 3.62 and a value mean of 3.57. Supporting comments from counselors were (1) “...we also spend a great deal of time counseling and consulting with parents so this needs to be an area of focus;” (2) “...working with community agencies such as social services, law enforcement and local comprehensive care or other mental health agencies;” and (3) “Students in college need examples and experiences meeting with parents and about student concerns.”

For the course, Group Process and Practice, responses resulted in a mean of 3.32 for relevance and a value mean of 3.25. Many comments seem to agree that

...more time with individuals and small groups would definitely help close the achievement gap...Students with things on their minds, whether they be large of [sic] small, have difficulty concentrating on learning...Getting rid of these obstacles to learning would increase the efficiency of the class teacher and the lessons provided.

The range of scores from 2.77 to 3.65 shown on Table 3 indicates that, overall, counselors agree that they gained valuable knowledge and skills in most courses. Yet, one comment addressed an issue regarding the perceived value of instruction: “Things that would help the program would be the universities and colleges working more with the public schools and the role of the counselor.” This statement along with the high

ratings for courses that put counseling students in the schools – Practicum and Internship – show counselors put great value in learning from those “on the job.”

The following comment summarizes a suggestion proposed by several counselors regarding the program:

I believe the program should be one of practicality and varied experiences. I also believe team-building within the school environment is crucial if counselors are to be respected for their expertise and professionalism. The guidance office is the ‘clearinghouse’ for the whole school and thus ... counseling programs need to have their students actively involved in the local schools and have increased experience in the realities of the job.

Table 3: Counselor’s Perceptions of the Value of Knowledge and Skills Gained from College Coursework

Item	1 (Very Little)		2		3		4		5 (Very Much)		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Research Methods and Techniques	168	21.3	117	14.8	232	29.4	175	22.2	68	8.6	2.81	1.26
Statistics	118	15.0	116	14.7	235	29.8	156	19.8	77	9.8	2.94	1.22
Counseling Practicum	30	3.8	70	8.9	274	34.8	200	25.4	214	27.2	3.63	1.09
Internship	40	5.1	69	8.8	134	17.0	177	22.5	164	20.8	3.61	1.20
Intro. to Counseling and Psychotherapy	50	6.3	153	19.4	282	35.8	148	18.8	108	13.7	3.15	1.11
Evaluation and Measurement	69	8.8	49	6.2	214	27.2	272	34.5	116	14.7	3.44	1.13
Human Development	29	3.7	87	11.0	173	22.0	295	37.4	119	15.1	3.55	1.04
Career Development and Counseling	58	7.4	107	13.6	253	32.1	203	25.8	98	12.4	3.25	1.11
Consultation	19	2.4	50	6.3	116	14.7	185	23.5	78	9.9	3.57	1.03
Organization and Admin.	59	7.5	29	3.7	116	14.7	245	31.1	78	9.9	3.48	1.15
School Guidance Programs and Services	39	4.9	20	2.5	195	24.7	205	26.0	107	13.6	3.57	1.05
Theories and Techniques of Counseling	40	5.1	128	16.2	259	32.9	194	24.6	139	17.6	3.35	1.12
Assessment Methods for Counselors	10	1.3	30	3.8	302	38.3	183	23.2	70	8.9	3.46	.829
Group Process and Practice	60	7.6	117	14.8	281	35.7	145	18.4	137	17.4	3.25	1.17
Professional Ethics	70	8.9	50	6.3	202	25.6	163	20.7	168	21.3	3.47	1.25
Multicultural Issues	49	6.2	20	2.5	215	27.3	213	27.0	146	18.5	3.60	1.10
Learning theory	20	2.5	69	8.8	156	19.8	183	23.2	89	11.3	3.49	1.05
Supervised Research	80	10.2	62	7.9	161	20.4	49	6.2	40	5.1	2.77	1.21
Counseling Children and/or Adolescents	50	6.3	39	4.9	163	20.7	225	28.6	167	21.2	3.65	1.16

Basic Counselor Beliefs and Attitudes

Table 4 shows that counselors were somewhat split about whether the courses in their program had been sufficient to prepare them to close the achievement gap, responding with a mean of 3.07 for the item that stated, *I believe the courses above have been sufficient to prepare me to close the achievement gap.*

Table 4: Counselor Beliefs and Attitudes about Preparation for Closing the Achievement Gap

Item	1 (Strongly Disagree)		2 (Disagree)		3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree		4 Agree		5 (Strongly Agree)		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Courses prepared me to close the achievement gap	19	2.4	213	27.0	293	37.2	224	28.4	39	4.9	3.07	.920
Children from low SES groups achieve at lesser levels	87	11.0	156	19.8	243	30.8	254	32.2	48	6.1	3.03	1.10
District Personnel can improve student achievement	20	2.5	49	6.2	125	15.9	448	56.9	146	18.5	3.83	.890
Principals can improve student achievement			10	1.3	79	10.0	420	53.3	279	35.4	4.23	.673
School counselors can improve student achievement					59	7.5	419	53.2	310	39.3	4.32	.606
Teachers can improve student achievement					10	1.3	185	23.5	593	75.3	4.74	.467
Parents can improve student achievement					10	1.3	98	12.4	680	86.3	4.85	.391

Counselor's Perceived Competency

This section focused on the major areas for which school counselors are trained within their counseling programs. Primarily, these areas support student achievement by providing the mental health and social skills at the foundation of Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). Providing that necessary encouragement and support is paramount to student success. Jalongo (2007) supports this assertion by stating, "feelings may assume even greater importance for learners who, based on their limited experience, can become discouraged easily, decide that they simply are not 'good at' something, or overgeneralize to conclude that they are 'not very smart' " (p. 397). This is the beginning of the self-fulfilling prophecy that Students Placed at Risk (SPAR's) adopt. When anyone believes they can achieve, then they will fulfill that belief and vice versa. Hence, these areas that provide this hope and belief in oneself are delineated within the American School Counselor Association (2007) model as:

- *School Guidance Curriculum (SGC)* – structured lessons designed to help students achieve the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge and skills appropriate for their developmental level.
- *Individual Student Planning (ISP)* – ongoing systemic activities designed to help students establish personal goals and develop future plans.
- *Responsive Services (RS)* –prevention and/or intervention activities to meet students' immediate and future needs. These needs can be

necessitated by events and conditions in students' lives and the school climate and culture, and may require any of the following:

- individual or group counseling
- consultation with parents, teachers and other educators
- referrals to other school support services or community resources
- peer helping
- psycho-education
- intervention and advocacy at the systemic level
- *System Support (SS)* – management activities including professional development, consultation, collaboration, supervision, program management and operations.

Table 5: Counselors Perceived Competency in Selected Areas Related to Closing the Achievement Gap

Indicate the relative amount of experience you gained in relation to the following activities in your preparation program	1 (Very Little)		2		3		4		5 (Very Much)		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Individual Counseling (RS)			67	8.5	148	18.8	339	43.0	234	29.7	3.94	.907
Small Group Counseling (RS)	20	2.5	127	16.1	194	24.6	360	45.7	87	11.0	3.47	.972
Large Group Guidance (SGC)	58	7.4	135	17.1	252	32.0	285	36.2	58	7.4	3.19	1.04
Social Skills Programming (SGC, ISP, RS)	40	5.1	114	14.5	294	37.3	311	39.5	29	3.7	3.22	.917
Consultation (RS, SS)	57	7.2	207	26.3	195	24.7	261	33.1	68	8.6	3.10	1.11
Testing Administration	194	24.6	126	16.0	245	31.1	175	22.2	48	6.1	2.69	1.23
Scheduling	400	50.8	185	23.5	88	11.2	68	8.6	47	6.0	1.96	1.23
Recordkeeping/Paper work	361	45.8	187	23.7	116	14.7	96	12.2	28	3.6	2.04	1.19
Diversity or Multicultural Issues (SGC, ISP, RS, SS)	58	7.4	108	13.7	279	35.4	274	34.8	69	8.8	3.24	1.04
Career Counseling and/or Job Placement (ISP, RS)	117	14.8	114	14.8	299	37.9	205	26.0	50	6.3	2.94	1.12
College Admissions (ISP, RS)	389	49.4	177	22.5	163	20.7	50	6.3	9	1.1	1.87	1.02

Overall, a majority of respondents indicated they felt prepared in most of the areas with mean scores in six of the 11 areas falling above 3.0 in the range of 3.10 and 3.94. Skill areas in which counselors felt most prepared were Individual Counseling with a mean of 3.94, Small Group Counseling with a mean of 3.47, Diversity or Multicultural Issues with a mean of 3.24, Social Skills Programming with a mean of 3.22, Large Group Guidance with mean of 3.19 and Consultation with a mean of 3.10. Counselors felt least prepared in the areas of Career Counseling with a mean of 2.94, Testing Administration

with a mean of 2.69, Recordkeeping and paperwork with a mean of 2.04, Scheduling with a mean of 1.96 and College Admissions with a mean of 1.87. One graduate managed to combine one of the highest rated competencies with one of the lowest rated competencies to better her performance as she mentioned that she

...does some office work such as cumulative folders and enrolling new students. In our counseling classes, this was discussed as being negative because it took away from counseling. I have found enrolling new students a great opportunity to get to know the parents and the children. I often, if time allows, talk with the parents and children to find out why they moved, family relationships, etc. I often don't have to say a lot because as they are filling out the paperwork the adults just talk to me. I come away knowing a lot about these children and their families.

This would be good information to share in coursework and training.

Discussion

The research explored whether the program content in current counselor preparation programs satisfies the knowledge base needed for professional competency in relation to closing the achievement gap. The premise was that social and emotional support for students improves academic achievement and, thus, closes the achievement gap. As the primary role of the counselor is to provide this social and emotional support, the survey mined for data to show whether counselors felt that their preparation programs actually provided the necessary tools for these responsibilities. The data revealed that school counselors feel, for the most part, that their preparation program did not prepare them for the demands of the counselor position they now hold. Many of the counselors indicated that they felt unprepared for that first year as a counselor. Counselors viewed the training as inadequate and a limiting factor to both their initial readiness and their current level of satisfaction with their counseling position.

One of the respondents seemed to sum up the counselor's role and the program very well when s/he said,

the role of the counselor is just so all encompassing that I'm not sure any program can fully prepare you for all areas. A counselor must do continuing education on his or her own to stay current and relevant in the area he or she needs to address.

Another respondent further supported this notion of new and evolving practices in the counseling field by commenting, "...this probably needs to be emphasized by having counselors attend yearly meetings of legal updates and refresher workshops." So, it seems that the best practice is to provide the finest preparation program possible as well as continuing to require Effective Instructional Leadership Act (EILA) and/or Professional Development hours so that counselors keep abreast of ongoing needs.

The implications or recommendations here are based on a comprehensive prevention model that envisions the transformation of school counseling as pivotal in closing the achievement gap (Portes, 2005). These reflect an awareness of specific concepts and activities that, if accomplished within the counselor preparation profession and in school practices over time, would result in a more powerful experience for all

students and counselor educators alike. We envision school counselors as primary prevention experts whose new knowledge base enables them to lead educators in closing the achievement gap. A real counselor education transformation begins by maximizing the development of students, particularly those placed at risk. These tasks include:

1. Establish working partnerships with universities, local school districts, and state educators to ensure agreement among counselor preparation programs, local school districts, and credentialing agencies about what school counselors should know and be able to do in their work with students in school settings. This will enable counselors to feel that the program satisfies the knowledge base needed to bring social responsibility into the academic arena in order to close the achievement gap. Paisley & McMahon (2001) agree with this partnership by saying, "Transforming these challenges into opportunities will require that school counselors and school counselor educators and supervisors collaborate in order to: (a) determine appropriate roles and areas of program focus, (b) design and engage in necessary professional development, and (c) demonstrate accountability for outcomes" (p. 107).
2. Integrate counselor preparation courses at the university level with field experiences in public school *early* so that counseling students practice what they are learning in class and, thus, feel competent in the role.
- 3: Revise methods of supporting new counselors as they enter the profession and begin their work in schools with an internship that includes mentoring and carefully supervised practice. Several respondents commented on this saying,

... require an internship with a counselor; bring in real-life situation [sic] that counselors deal with and let students see how to resolve these issues; have counselors come to classes and share about their day to day routines and how they deal with faculty, parents, peer conflicts, staff, etc.

- 4: Include training for non-guidance duties such as record-keeping and scheduling that are typical to the counselor's role. Although these activities are non-guidance duties, they are still an important part of the counselor's role as documentation is key to the planning and development of any role group. One of the respondents expressed this idea best when s/he said,

The counselor education program prepared me for what I would LIKE to do in the public schools, which is work directly with children. However, it did not adequately prepare me for what I actually do, which includes SBARCS (Site-Based Admissions and Release Committee, which are Special Education meetings), other administrative duties, CSIPS (Comprehensive School Improvement Program), committees, and all the minutia associated with state mandated testing.

These are important elements in closing the achievement gap and thus should be addressed within the preparation program.

The survey responses reveal these positive factors as well as problems to confront and solve. On the positive side, counselors, for the most part, feel that current programs address the education and training needs as it should. The means for the knowledge base items for counselors range from 3.64 to 4.93 with removal of same gender schools (2.65), based on the fact that these are a new development and most educators do not have much experience with this due to the low numbers of such schools, indicating that the overwhelming majority of counselors agreed that the program content in current counselor preparation programs with regard to these factors does satisfy the knowledge base needed for professional competency in relation to closing the achievement and supporting students placed at risk. The problem areas where counselors felt the most unprepared were scheduling and college admission with these areas reporting at 74.3% and 71.9%, respectively for little or very little experience. Recordkeeping fell close behind these with a score of 69.5% for little or very little experience gained during the preparation program. Although scheduling and record-keeping can be argued as non-guidance duties, these activities are still an important part of the counselor's day. Hence, these areas should be addressed within the preparation program. The challenge is to engage counselors in a systemic reflective process that further clarifies needs, enhancing the positive areas while improving the problem areas, and then to link the opportunity for counselor development to student improvement.

This empirical evidence about factors that influence the counselor preparation program can assist university personnel in making more useful decisions about program development.

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Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm