Featuring a Special Section on
Distance Counselor Education

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Distress Response Scale: Implications for counselors. *The
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Cross-Validation of the Mental Distress Response Scale

Implications for Counselors

Michael T. Kalkbrenner

There is a growing demand for mental health services on college campuses. One way that college counselors are striving to meet this demand is by facilitating gatekeeper training workshops to prepare university community members (e.g., faculty members) to recognize and refer students who are showing warning signs for suicide or other mental health issues to support services. Faculty members are particularly valuable counseling referral agents because they tend to interact with large groups of students on more frequent occasions than college mental health professionals. However, the results of a recent national survey indicated that approximately 63% of faculty members are not making student referrals to the college counseling center.

The purpose of this study was to test the utility of the Mental Distress Response Scale (MDRS), a screening tool for assessing responses to encountering a student in mental distress, including but not limited to making a referral to mental health support services, with a sample of faculty members. The MDRS is comprised of two subscales or responses of faculty members to encountering a student in mental distress—Approach/Encourage and Diminish/Avoid. The Approach/Encourage subscale measures responses to mental distress that are consistent with providing support and encouragement to a student in mental distress (e.g., "suggest that they go to the health center on campus"). The Diminish/Avoid subscale measures adverse or inactive responses to encountering a student in mental distress (e.g., "try to ignore your concern"). Results were promising and indicated that the MDRS is a valid (the test measures what it was designed to measure) and reliable (consistent) screening tool for use with faculty members.

The MDRS has potential to enhance college counselors' outreach and mental health screening efforts. In particular, college counselors can attend new faculty orientations and department meetings to administer the MDRS, establish relationships with faculty, and discuss the benefits of gatekeeper training as well as supporting college student mental health. The results of the MDRS can be used to gain insight into the types of responses that faculty members are likely to have when encountering a student in mental distress. This information can be used to structure the content of gatekeeper training workshops aimed at promoting faculty-to-student referrals to mental health support services.

The author also found demographic differences in faculty members' responses to encountering a student in mental distress. Faculty members who identified as male were more likely to report a diminish/avoid response to encountering a student in mental distress compared to female faculty members. College counselors might consider focusing outreach efforts, including gatekeeper training and mental health awareness workshops, in academic departments that are comprised of high proportions of male faculty members. The author discusses a variety of additional recommendations for how college mental health professionals can use the MDRS to support college student mental health.

Michael T. Kalkbrenner, PhD, NCC, is an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. Correspondence can be addressed to Michael Kalkbrenner, 1220 Stewart St., OH202B, NMSU, Las Cruces, NM 88001, mkalk001@nmsu.edu.

A Comprehensive Perspective on Treating Victims of Human Trafficking

Kathryn Marburger, Sheri Pickover

Human trafficking, also known as modern-day slavery, is a multibillion-dollar industry prevalent throughout the world. Defined as the recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring, or receipt of human beings through force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation, human trafficking often occurs in plain sight, going unnoticed in both legal and illegal industries. Contrary to popular belief, most trafficking occurs domestically within the same country.

Sexual exploitation accounts for 19% of human trafficking victims but is responsible for 66% of trafficking profits, most likely because traffickers are able to repeatedly sell their victims. Traffickers also do not discriminate when they choose victims to exploit. While all men, women, and children risk becoming trafficked, marginalized groups are most susceptible to trafficking. Runaway and homeless youth, victims of physical or sexual abuse, and individuals who experience social discrimination, such as racial minorities, individuals living in poverty, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals, are all at higher risk of falling prey to human traffickers due to their already compromised social status. Human trafficking also often is fueled by poverty and addiction. Families turn their children over to traffickers in hopes of escaping poverty, or in other cases, become the traffickers themselves to support a substance addiction.

Traffickers physically and psychologically break victims down into subservience by using physical violence, threats against family members, and substance abuse to control and exploit their victims. Victims of human trafficking are often robbed of their identities, have their self-esteem demolished, and are forced to rely on the traffickers to meet the basic needs of food and shelter. Like many victims of abuse, trafficked individuals develop significant bonds with their traffickers, making them reluctant to escape. Yet, even if they do escape, trafficking victims suffer ongoing consequences from the legal system. They may be charged with drug and prostitution offenses, which further complicates their ability to establish trusting relationships with law enforcement or social service agencies.

The forceful and brutal nature of human trafficking inflicts complex layers of physical and emotional trauma. In addition to the shame, guilt, and stigma associated with being trafficked, victims and survivors suffer from a wide array of physical and mental health problems, including reproductive disorders, sexually transmitted infections, PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Working with trafficked clients poses a series of challenges, and it is crucial for counselors to recognize the multifaceted layers of trauma survivors may have endured. Counselors must not only engage the individual in treatment, but also act as an advocate against stigma within the family and the community. Interestingly, interventions specific to sex-trafficked survivors have yet to be developed. Treatments are borrowed from evidence-based interventions initially developed for PTSD, domestic violence, and ecological family therapy approaches. However, much of the literature points to the need to use a holistic approach that gives survivors choice and empowers them to regain control of their lives. Survivors need to be met with nonjudgmental attitudes, acceptance, empathy, and authentic concern and slowly encouraged to take on risks associated with leaving their traffickers.

Kathryn Marburger is a graduate student at the University of Detroit Mercy. Sheri Pickover, PhD, LPC, is an associate professor at Central Michigan University. Correspondence can be addressed to Sheri Pickover, 195 Ojibway Court, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859, picko1s@cmich.edu.

Read full article and references:

Cook, R. M., Welfare, L. E., & Jones, C. T. (2020). Incidence of intentional nondisclosure in clinical supervision by prelicensed counselors. *The Professional Counselor*, *10*, 25–38. doi:10.15241/rmc.10.1.25

Incidence of Intentional Nondisclosure in Clinical Supervision by Prelicensed Counselors

Ryan M. Cook, Laura E. Welfare, and Connie T. Jones

Counselors pursuing licensure as full, independent professional counselors are mandated to complete a postgraduate supervised field experience. The supervisor's evaluation of the prelicensed counselor's clinical skills is highly influential to that counselor's ability to obtain full licensure. As such, it behooves prelicensed counselors to present themselves in a manner they perceive will lead to positive evaluations from their supervisors.

As compared to university-based supervision, prelicensed counselors are often asked to more autonomously self-identify their clinical concerns and developmental needs and to convey these concerns and needs to their clinical supervisors. Thus, supervisors of prelicensed counselors often rely on supervisee self-report to facilitate supervision, which can be problematic. Given the stakes of supervision, it is understandable that supervisees sometimes omit or distort information. In these instances, a supervisee identifies a concern as significant to their clinical work or supervision experience but decides to withhold it anyway. Supervisee intentional nondisclosure is a well-established phenomenon in the supervision literature. Supervisee intentional nondisclosure is widely conceptualized as either supervision-related incidents (e.g., negative reactions to a supervisor, evaluation concerns, fears of correcting a supervisor) or client-related incidents (e.g., clinical mistakes, general reactions to clients). The rate of supervisee intentional nondisclosure ranges from 60% to 97.2%. To date, no study has examined supervisee nondisclosure in a sample of prelicensed counselors.

We found that 95.3% of prelicensed counselors in our study reported some degree of intentional nondisclosure (i.e., partially or fully withheld) for at least one item. The number of incidents of intentional nondisclosure ranged from 0 to 26 (of 30 possible incidents). Further, 53.3% of participants reported that they fully withheld information from their supervisors for at least one item. The most commonly withheld or partially withheld nondisclosures were "disagreement with one's supervisor" (69.2%), "negative reaction to supervisors' behavior or attitudes" (66.3%), and "perceived that my supervisor was wrong" (60.7%). Results also revealed that 22.4% of participants reported completely withholding their negative reaction to their supervisor's behavior or attitudes and 16.8% of participants did not discuss their concerns about their supervisor's competence. In sum, prelicensed counselors were far more hesitant or completely unwilling to discuss their supervision-related concerns as compared to their client-related concerns. These findings underscore the inherent power imbalance between supervisees and supervisors.

Prelicensed counselors who are considering withholding information from their supervisors may want to consider their ethical obligation to clients and seek help from a trusted colleague if needed. In order to mitigate some of the commonly occurring client-related concerns, supervisors may find it helpful to discuss with their supervisees the lifelong growth and challenges of being a professional counselor. These discussions may aid in normalizing some of the client-related concerns. Further, supervisors should work to create an open and safe environment in order to facilitate supervisee disclosure. Finally, state licensure boards and nationwide credentialing bodies may want to consider more clearly defining the requirements of supervision (e.g., frequency of supervision, direct observation requirements) in order to address some of the concerns expressed by supervisees in this study.

Ryan M. Cook, PhD, ACS, LPC, is an assistant professor at the University of Alabama. Laura E. Welfare, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPC, is an associate professor at Virginia Tech. Connie T. Jones, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPCA, LCAS, is an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Correspondence can be addressed to Ryan Cook, 310 Graves Hall, Box 870231, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, rmcook@ua.edu.

Distance Counselor Education

Past, Present, Future

William H. Snow, J. Kelly Coker

*D*istance education has become commonplace within counselor education programs with approximately 25% of students enrolled in online programs. Given the growth in this teaching modality, it is time to think critically about best practices in the use of technology in the distance education of professional counselors, clinical supervisors, and counselor educators. This is the lead article in a special section of *The Professional Counselor* that explores a range of critical questions regarding pedagogy, student selection and retention, issues of diversity, legal and ethical considerations, and more.

It is worth considering that disruptive change in education as a result of emerging technologies is not a new phenomenon. Oral methods of teaching and learning were supplanted by the adoption of the written word. Gutenberg's printing press made possible the mass distribution of those written materials. Radio, telephone, and television emerged to compete with books and newspapers. The modern digital age, with the worldwide connectivity of the internet and smartphones, has brought all the preexisting technologies together in the palm of your hand. Counselor education programs have the potential to use all of these accumulated technologies to improve student learning, but only if they adjust their instructional pedagogies accordingly.

The U.S. Department of Education has officially adopted the broader term of *distance education* to describe programs that deliver over half of their content using technology to faciliate learning for students separated from their instructor. The Department of Education requires these programs to guarantee "regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously."

The ability of students and faculty to connect at a distance and develop meaningful connections is improving every year. Asynchronous models of instruction have evolved with the addition of interactive videos and training modules, and recorded lectures. Synchronous models use live videoconferencing for classroom experiences, advising, and clinical supervision. Many online learning experiences are now better characterized as *virtual remote classrooms*. These programs are demonstrating how to leverage technological tools to create impactful and compelling experiences as they shorten the distance in distance education.

What does it take for students to have a positive distance learning educational experience? Much is dependent upon the faculty member. They must of course have expertise in their subject matter, demonstrated skill teaching in the online environment, and proven effectiveness in utilizing technology.

The academic program leadership also have a responsibility for student success in that distance education students who felt connected and a part of the university community report more satisfying learning experiences. In many studies, a strong sense of connection to the program and university was more important than any particular teaching pedagogy or technology. Student success is also predicated upon selecting the right students. Self-regulated learners with a supportive family and the ability to make connections with classmates are generally more successful in the online environment.

There are some unique challenges to distance education, including ethical and legal issues. Programs accepting students from other states and countries must understand the confusing regulatory environment to ensure that graduates can obtain licensure and practice upon graduation.

It is the authors' conclusion that distance counselor education is here to stay and that there are excellent reasons for its current use and expansion. Both residential and online programs will surely benefit as long as our pedagogy can keep up with the technological advances that continue to come our way.

William H. Snow, PhD, is an associate professor at Palo Alto University. J. Kelly Coker, PhD, NCC, LPC, is an associate professor at Palo Alto University. Correspondence can be addressed to William Snow, 1791 Arastradero Road, Palo Alto, CA 94304, wsnow@paloaltou.edu.
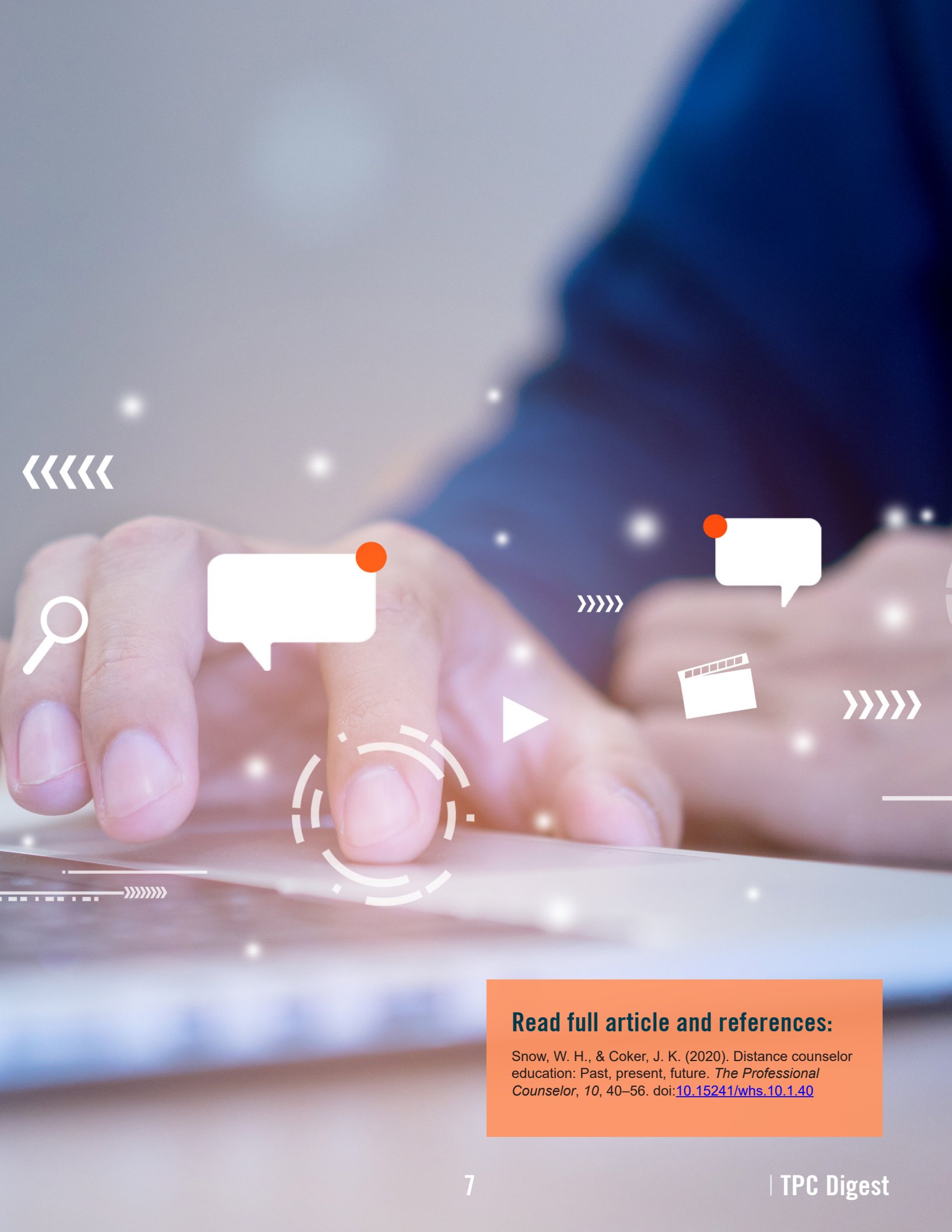
Read full article and references:

Snow, W. H., & Coker, J. K. (2020). Distance counselor education: Past, present, future. *The Professional Counselor*, *10*, 40–56. doi:10.15241/whs.10.1.40

Student Selection, Development, and Retention

A Commentary on Supporting Student Success in Distance Counselor Education

Savitri Dixon-Saxon, Matthew R. Buckley

Increasingly, distance education is being used as a learning and development modality for training counselors. Although some educators and practitioners continue to express skepticism about the effectiveness of training counselors at a distance, increasing numbers of stakeholders have realized that it is possible to deliver high quality counselor education and training programs in a distance learning modality. Those who have participated in distance counselor education and training recognize that, in addition to increasing access and opportunity for those who are unable to pursue their education at traditional institutions, distance learning has resulted in a more diverse professional workforce and increased access to counseling services in traditionally underserved communities.

For some of the first counselor educators to venture into the distance modality, there was very little in the way of prescriptive advice about how to do this well. Using the best guidance around quality counselor preparation from the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the American Counseling Association, a myriad of professional experiences in traditional counseling training programs, training in distance learning best practices, and trial and error, distance counselor educators were able to develop models for providing students with the necessary experiences, evaluations, and developmental activities to be competent entry-level professional counselors.

We have learned that quality distance education includes ample opportunity for skill development, student development, and evaluation and feedback. The first task in creating a quality distance education program is creating a selection process that allows program administrators and faculty to identify those students who are ready to engage in the learning and training involved in counselor preparation programs at a distance. Many non-traditional students pursue distance education because it allows them the flexibility needed to manage multiple competing responsibilities. Some counseling programs have established broad access admissions practices that allow for consideration of previous work and service activities in addition to previous academic performance in admission decisions, affording a "second chance" to students whose academic performance or standardized test scores might not afford them access to other programs.

Beyond admissions, distance learning counseling programs must create programs in which students are provided with experiences that increase the likelihood that they will remain in the program. Focusing on students' orientation to program resources and requirements; providing instruction reflective of andragogical principles; supporting students in developing digital competence; and ensuring that students and faculty have adequate resources for skill development, supervision, and evaluation all contribute to student success and retention.

There is variability in the ways distance education counseling program faculty and administrators achieve this goal, but the authors of this commentary describe practices that include strong student- and skill-development protocols, a well-trained faculty that builds strong relationships with students and carefully monitors and addresses students' development as counselors-in-training, and residential laboratories. With over 35 years of collective professional experience, the authors summarize their experiences with distance counselor education and provide recommendations for consideration by other counselor educators.

Savitri Dixon-Saxon, PhD, NCC, LPC, is Vice Provost at Walden University. Matthew R. Buckley, EdD, NCC, ACS, BC-TMH, LPC, LCMHC, is Senior Core Faculty at Walden University. Correspondence can be addressed to Savitri Dixon-Saxon, 100 Washington Ave. South, Suite 900, Minneapolis, MN 55401-2511, savitri.dixon-saxon@mail.waldenu.edu.

Read full article and references:

Chen, S.-Y., Wathen, C., & Speciale, M. (2020). Online clinical training in the virtual remote environment: Challenges, opportunities, and solutions. *The Professional Counselor*, *10*, 78–91. doi:10.15241/syc.10.1.78

Online Clinical Training in the Virtual Remote Environment

Challenges, Opportunities, and Solutions

Szu-Yu Chen, Cristen Wathen, and Megan Speciale

The *2016 CACREP Standards* indicate that students are expected to demonstrate ethically, developmentally, and culturally appropriate strategies and techniques for building and maintaining face-to-face and technology-assisted therapeutic relationships, as well as prevention and interventions regardless of the context of the training medium. As the number of CACREP-accredited online programs continues to grow, online clinical training has become a controversial topic given the nature of therapeutic relationship-focused and skills-based education. Some major concerns include whether distance students obtain as much knowledge and are able to develop comparable counseling skills to students who attend face-to-face training programs. To date, limited literature focuses on online clinical training and few researchers have examined the efficacy of teaching counseling skills through online courses. Concerns about the ability to translate clinical skills in an online environment remain prevalent among educators.

This article focuses on the clinical training aspects of a distance counselor education program and highlights what clinical courses look like in a remote and online synchronized classroom. Using group counseling, child and adolescent counseling, and practicum and internship as examples, we share unique challenges in the online learning environment, such as facilitating a humanistic relationship between group members and instructors, maintaining confidentiality during and after class meetings, and assessing students' counseling competencies. Some suggested solutions for training distance students on counseling skills include establishing virtual classroom ground rules, incorporating synchronized technological tools, and using multiple points of skills observation and evaluation inside and outside of the classroom.

Examples of ground rules that ensure a safe and respectful online environment include: (a) using headphones in class to prevent the accidental sharing of classmates' private information, (b) limiting background noise, (c) ensuring there is proper lighting so the student's face is illuminated, (d) closing all other open windows on the computer to increase focus, and (e) avoiding side conversations with other students or outside persons during class.

During the online class meeting, we suggest applying synchronized technological functions for clinical skills training and assessment. For example, many videoconferencing software programs have a breakout rooms feature, which functions similarly to small group breakouts in traditional classrooms. With breakout rooms, educators can assign students to small groups in a virtual classroom where students can conduct role-plays and educators can join each small group remotely to facilitate observations, feedback, and assessment of students' clinical skills. This allows students to receive feedback immediately and to incorporate recommendations into their practice simultaneously. This also helps educators enhance student engagement and bolster students' sense of safety in smaller group settings.

Because of the variations in the placement of student webcams and computer monitors, nonverbal communication cannot be measured consistently, so it is suggested that educators attempt to capture this behavior using role-plays in class, as well as pre-recorded role-plays of the student performing mock counseling with an outside acquaintance (e.g., friend, family member, or other student). Using multiple points of observation, educators can gain deeper insight into the student's nonverbal abilities and have multiple opportunities to provide feedback.
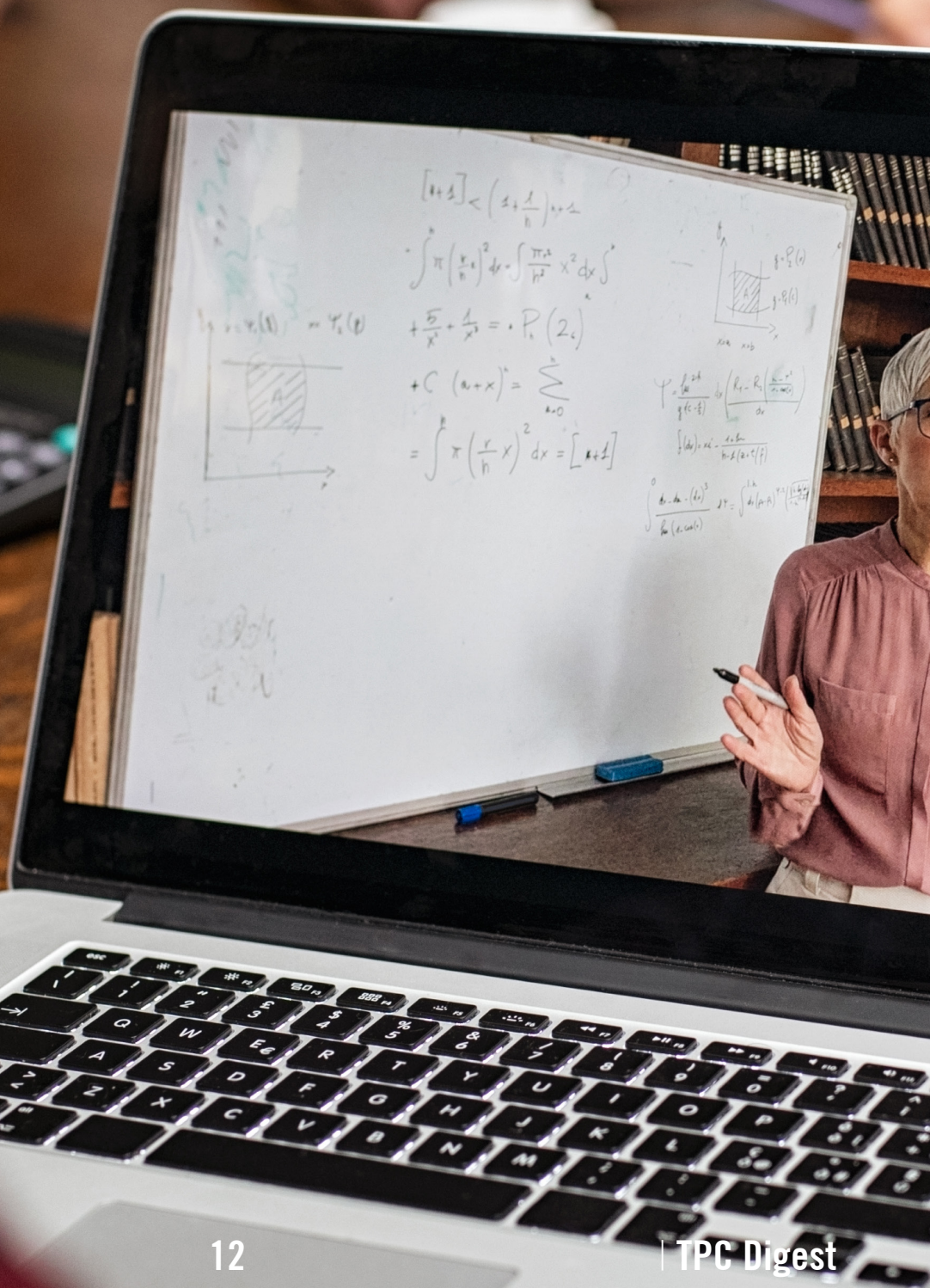
When facilitating online clinical training, educators must understand the unique nature of counseling and be mindful of maintaining student relationships within the realm of technology. If educators can intentionally and creatively use technology to foster distance students' learning and training, a distance delivery format can reach students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to pursue counselor education.

Szu-Yu Chen, PhD, NCC, LPC, RPT, is an assistant professor at Palo Alto University. Cristen Wathen, PhD, NCC, LCPC, is a core faculty member at Palo Alto University. Megan Speciale, PhD, NCC, LMHC, is an assistant professor at Palo Alto University. Correspondence can be addressed to Szu-Yu Chen, 1791 Arastradero Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94304, dchen@paloaltou.edu.

A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Online Counselor Training Program Delivery and Instruction

Laura Haddock, Kristi Cannon, Earl Grey

Counselor training programs are available in a variety of learning formats, and the number of accredited online training programs is higher than ever. Regardless of whether courses take place in a traditional classroom or online, there are similarities in programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, such as specific curriculum requirements, graduate-level coursework, and a student body comprised of adult learners. There are also distinct differences in the way the curriculum is delivered, faculty and student engagement, assessment, and gatekeeping.

Existing counseling research emphasizes the importance of effective training because of the highly interpersonal nature of counseling practice and calls into question the efficacy of online learning environments. However, higher education research has firmly established the value of online instruction while highlighting the need for andragogy specific to online instruction. The purpose of this article was to provide a broad overview of similarities and differences between classroom-based and online counselor training programs. Although the analysis of similarities and differences was not intended to be exhaustive in nature, the investigation was comprehensive. Following the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for defining a program as *residential* or *distance*, we began with an exploration of the characteristics of the typical student body for each setting as well as attrition rates and the role of student perceptions of the learning community as an element for successful completion of a program.

Diving deeper, we examined the relationship between instructional practices and technology and how these elements have implications for the learning process across each setting. We also illuminated the parallel process between asynchronous instruction and trends in the counseling profession, such as the paradigm shift into asynchronous delivery of counseling services. The common thread of the synchronous requirements for field experience bring all counselor training programs full circle back to synchronous, face-to-face supervised experience as the training capstone. This investigation concluded with an exploration of assessment and gatekeeping practices common to each instructional setting.

It is clear that both residential and distance settings overlap in many ways with regard to admissions, assessment, remediation, and gatekeeping. Interestingly, what stood out is that there are common gaps in processes regardless of educational setting related to cultural considerations and differentiating between normal developmental and problematic behavior and a clear need for appropriate and effective assessment and gatekeeping practices in each setting. Overall, this analysis provided empirical evidence to address common myths related to the efficacy of online education and demonstrated that regardless of setting, there is a need for the expansion of empirically based curriculum development approaches that not only engage students, but promote increased connection with the material, faculty, and peer learning communities. Future directions for counselor training and suggestions for research were also included.

Laura Haddock, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPC-S, is a clinical faculty member at Southern New Hampshire University. Kristi Cannon, PhD, NCC, LPC, is a clinical faculty member at Southern New Hampshire University. Earl Grey, PhD, NCC, CCMHC, ACS, BC-TMH, LMHC, LPC, is an associate dean at Southern New Hampshire University. Correspondence can be addressed to Laura Haddock, 3100 Oakleigh Lane, Germantown, TN 38138, l.haddock@snhu.edu.

Legal and Ethical Challenges in Online Counselor Education

Donna S. Sheperis, Ann Ordway, Margaret Lamar

There are many reasons to consider online education when becoming a counselor or choosing a career as a counselor educator. Convenience, accessibility, and opportunities to interface with colleagues across the country and around the world are common attractions of an online environment. The majority of students in a university setting take at least one course online. Currently, as many as 79 accredited counselor education programs are offered fully online. Yet as many opportunities as there are in this educational space, legal and ethical challenges also exist. While these challenges may be unique to the online world, they are navigable.

From a legal perspective, vicarious liability arises in counselor education training in both the in-person and online environments. However, in an online program, that liability may be exacerbated by faculty and students living in different states or even countries. Gatekeeping considerations are heightened when faculty spend less face-to-face time with online students, perhaps only seeing them at academic residencies rather than more regularly like their in-person counterparts. In addition to faculty challenges, students in online programs must navigate state licensure laws that may be different from those in their university's location. Online training can impact student privacy and FERPA when videoconferencing is used for classroom interaction and student information is safeguarded electronically.

Ethically, online programs help students understand the codes of ethics under which they may fall in their respective states. Some states allow students to go against the *ACA Code of Ethics* because of state law mandates. Duty to warn, the use of bartering, and the ability to refer clients based on religious reasons also vary from state to state. While faculty members cannot be experts on all state, province, and territory laws, it is helpful for them to have a solid understanding of the primary issues impacting students. It would benefit online counselor educators to become familiar with the main state licensure board challenges for their institutions and have knowledge of key differences in laws impacting counselors.

Regarding the overwhelming nature of keeping up with legal and ethical differences, we suggest counselor educators keep an open mind and realize that for all of the complications of online learning, the benefits may outweigh the disadvantages. The opportunity to learn across state and national borders, interface with colleagues across the country and around the world, and develop your identity as a professional counselor or counselor educator within this space is replete with rewards for all parties. Realistically, education is moving more and more toward an online format, and for counselor education, it is simply a matter of being cognizant of the legal and ethical dilemmas in order to meet them head-on.

Donna S. Sheperis, PhD, NCC, CCMHC, ACS, LPC, is an associate professor at Palo Alto University. Ann Ordway, JD, PhD, NCC, is a core faculty member at the University of Phoenix. Margaret Lamar, PhD, LPC, is an assistant professor at Palo Alto University. Correspondence may be addressed to Donna Sheperis, 5151 El Camino Real, Los Altos, CA 94022, dsheperis@paloaltou.edu.

Read full article and references:

Sheperis, D. S., Ordway, A., & Lamar, M. (2020). Legal and ethical challenges in online counselor education. *The Professional Counselor*, *10*, 106–119. doi:10.15241/dss.10.1.106

Opportunities and Challenges of Multicultural and International Online Education

Szu-Yu Chen, Dareen Basma, Jennie Ju, Kok-Mun Ng

The growth in distance learning has led to an integration of technology in the curriculum over the past two decades. Counselor educators now can deliver distance learning courses internationally via videoconference systems, such as two-way audio and video software programs, for students to attend classes either synchronously or asynchronously, and many programs are moving toward distance education. This shift in educational platforms allows both domestic and international students to receive counselor education and training remotely without having to commute or leave their home countries. However, to date, there seems to be a lack of attention in the literature to how online training programs can address global students' multicultural and social justice counseling competencies given their non-traditional mode of learning delivery. Moreover, with the emphasis on the helping relationship in the counseling profession, online instructors encounter additional challenges because of a lack of in-person contact with students and may feel skeptical about the effectiveness of creating a safe and interactive space virtually, especially in relation to addressing challenging and complex topics.

Promoting global students' multicultural and social justice counseling competencies in distance education requires thoughtful teaching strategies. Therefore, this article discusses pedagogical strategies that we have found valuable to enhancing and assessing global learners' multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. With the movement toward internationalizing the counseling profession, we postulate that multicultural counseling distance education must extend beyond U.S. borders, class meetings, and the curriculum. It is critical that counselor educators provide multicultural and social justice counseling competencies training through systemic modeling by internationalizing the curriculum and training environment and collaborating with training programs and institutions to advocate for, attend to, and support the needs of globally diverse students in distance education.

Using a master's-level multicultural counseling course as an example, we propose that instructors use an intersectional and social construction online pedagogy in which instructors focus on students' examinations of social locations concerning global privilege and oppression. This approach can also provide global students with a critical framework for analyzing structural power and oppression, examining the complexity of identities, and discussing action plans for empowerment and advocacy. It can further cultivate an inclusive global learning environment.

We also discuss recommendations for creating a safe virtual learning environment such as establishing virtual classroom ground rules, using chat boxes as an option for students to express their thoughts and feelings, and attending to students' nonverbal communications. To support global students' needs and enhance the retention of students in online counseling programs, we further share innovative approaches counselor educators and institutions can incorporate outside of the virtual classroom, including online multiculturally oriented student services, online student-centered multiculturally based organizations and workshops, and dedicated office hours for mentoring online international students. Finally, we provide recommendations for future research to enhance multicultural and international distance counselor education.

Szu-Yu Chen, PhD, NCC, LPC, RPT, is an assistant professor at Palo Alto University. Dareen Basma, PhD, LPC-MHSP, is a core faculty member at Palo Alto University. Jennie Ju, PhD, LPC, is a core faculty member at Palo Alto University. Kok-Mun Ng, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPC, is a professor at Oregon State University. Correspondence can be mailed to Szu-Yu Chen, 1791 Arastradero Drive, Palo Alto, CA 94304, dchen@paloaltou.edu.

Online Counselor Education

A Student–Faculty Collaboration

Donna S. Sheperis, J. Kelly Coker, Elizabeth Haag, Fatma Salem-Pease

Online counselor education has been studied extensively since its inception in the late 1990s. With nearly 80 fully online programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs and many more in a hybrid format or not accredited, online counselor education has been consistently growing. Experiences of students within these programs have received limited attention. In addition, much of the existing literature is related to overall online learning and is not specific to counselor education. Although this manuscript did not take on the topic as a research study, students were invited to participate in informal interviews about their experiences and to serve as coauthors if they were interested.

Graduate students are taking more online courses than ever before, with the number of options increasing almost 50% over the last 8 years. Many of the participating students shared that flexibility was a huge factor in choosing an online program. They shared that having online classes allowed them to be part of the graduate school experience while still managing work and family.

Because research on the rigor of online programs shows that students receive similar levels of training with little difference in academic outcomes, online counselor education programs must look at ways to maximize the online learning experience for students. Something that students talked a lot about in this regard was the concept of asynchronous versus synchronous learning. Asynchronous learning simply means that students do not attend required meetings of the class during a given week, although they likely have assignments with required dates. Much more than the old correspondence course model, asynchronous classes hold students to defined learning outcomes on a weekly basis but allow the student to determine when they will do the work in order to submit assignments by the due date. Synchronous learning, on the other hand, occurs online but in real time. The most common form of synchronous interaction is the use of online class meetings or residencies. When online counselor education students shared with us about these two modalities, they were almost universally supportive of some synchronous options in a program. Students shared feeling more connected with their program, professors, and peers via synchronous learning opportunities.

Much of what students shared fit with existing literature around something called the *community of inquiry*. The *community of inquiry* is the social, cognitive, and teaching presence in the online coursework that can provide a foundation for learning. Overall, this manuscript strove to share the stories of students who participated in both synchronous and asynchronous distance counselor education programs at the master's and doctoral level. Students talked about finding online programs to be viable options to work flexibly within their adult lives. In addition, they shared that they were more satisfied when there were efforts to foster connection through synchronous or other means found in a community of inquiry. Finally, this manuscript provides additional areas for research in exploring the experiences of students in online counselor education programs.

Donna S. Sheperis, PhD, NCC, ACS, CCMHC, LPC, is an associate professor at Palo Alto University. J. Kelly Coker, PhD, NCC, LPC, is an associate professor at Palo Alto University. Elizabeth Haag was a graduate student at the University of the Cumberlands. Fatma Salem-Pease was a graduate student at Southern New Hampshire University. Correspondence can be addressed to Donna Sheperis, 5150 El Camino Real, Los Altos, CA 94022, dsheperis@paloaltou.edu.

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