

Introduction to the Special Issue on Doctoral Counselor Education



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This lead article introduces a special issue of *The Professional Counselor* designed to inform and support faculty, staff, and administrative efforts in starting or revitalizing doctoral degree programs in counselor education and supervision. We review the 14 studies that make up this issue and summarize their key findings. Seven key themes emerged for faculty and staff to consider during program development: (a) the current state of research, (b) doctoral program demographics and distribution, (c) defining quality, (d) mentoring and gatekeeping, (e) increasing diversity, (f) supporting dissertation success, and (g) gaining university administrator support. We recognize the vital contribution of these articles to doctoral counselor education and supervision program development while also highlighting future directions for research emerging from this collection.

Keywords: doctoral, counselor education and supervision, research, quality, diversity

This special issue of *The Professional Counselor* features 14 articles on doctoral counselor education and supervision (CES) to inform and support faculty, staff, and administrative efforts in starting or revitalizing doctoral degree programs in CES. In this introductory paper, we begin by providing context for the special issue's focus on doctoral CES programs. We then reflect on the series of articles in this special issue that collectively address a myriad of topics pertinent to high-quality doctoral programs in CES. We further suggest critical themes and principles for faculty and administrators to follow when starting and operating doctoral counselor education programs and for students to reflect on when selecting a doctoral counselor education program. In our conclusion, we offer future directions for research emerging from the contributions to this special issue.

Doctoral CES Programming in Context

The CES doctorate is an increasingly sought-after degree. From 2012 to 2018, the number of CES doctoral programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) increased by 50%, with a 43.8% increase in student enrollment (CACREP, 2013, 2019). At the time of writing, there are now 84 CACREP-accredited doctoral programs (CACREP, n.d.). These CACREP-accredited doctoral programs have nearly 3,000 enrolled students and produce almost 500 doctoral graduates each year (CACREP, 2019). Doctoral study within counselor education prepares leaders for the profession (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013; West et al., 1995).

For over 70 years, the allied mental health professions, including counseling, were heavily influenced by psychology's scientist-practitioner (aka Boulder) model of the 1940s (Baker & Benjamin, 2000), the scholar-practitioner model of the 1970s (Kaslow & Johnson, 2014), and the lesser-known clinical-scientist model of the 1990s (Stricker & Trierweiler, 2006).

In contrast to psychology, the purpose of doctoral counselor education was never to train entry-level clinicians. Instead, it has historically been to prepare counseling professionals to become counselor

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educators and advanced supervisors to train entry-level clinicians at the master's level (West et al., 1995; Zimpfer et al., 1997). Counseling has needed to develop its own model(s) for effective doctoral education. Yet, relatively little literature exists to inform the development and implementation of doctoral programs within counselor education.

This special issue represents a concerted effort to address that knowledge gap. Research teams consisting of 46 counselor educators and student researchers from across the country answered the call with findings from 14 studies that we have organized under seven themes and related critical questions. The collective research provides invaluable information for anyone desiring to initiate, develop, and sustain a high-quality CES doctoral program on their campus. The following is a summary of the key themes, organizing questions, and findings.

Key Themes, Questions, and Findings

In preparation for this special issue, *The Professional Counselor* put out a call for papers with no restrictions on covered topics. The request simply asked authors to submit their scholarly contributions to a special issue on doctoral counselor education. Those accepted for the special issue fell naturally into one of the following seven themes: (a) the current state of research, (b) doctoral program demographics and distribution, (c) defining quality, (d) mentoring and gatekeeping, (e) increasing diversity, (f) supporting dissertation success, and (g) gaining university administrator support.

The Current State of Research

Research on the preparation of doctoral-level counselor educators shaped the first theme. Litherland and Schulthes (2020) conducted a thorough literature review in their paper, "Research Focused on Doctoral-Level Counselor Education: A Scoping Review." They examined peer-reviewed articles published on the topic from 2005 to 2019 found in the PubMed, ERIC, GaleOneFile, and PsycINFO databases. After initially retrieving nearly 10,000 citations, they found only 39 studies met their inclusion criteria, an average of less than three published studies per year. Their work suggests the need for a long-term research strategy and plans to advance CES program development. The studies comprising this special issue begin to address some of that void by adding 14 peer-reviewed articles to the 39 Litherland and Schulthes already found, a significant increase in just a single publication in one year.

Doctoral Program Demographics and Distribution

The current number and location of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs relative to present and future demands for graduates to serve our master's programs or the CES doctoral pipeline is the essence of the second theme. Field et al. (2020), in "The Pipeline Problem in Doctoral Counselor Education and Supervision," analyzed regional distributions of existing doctoral programs. Despite recent growth in the number of doctoral programs, they found a significant difference in the number of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs by region. For example, the Western United States has the largest ratio of counseling master's degree programs to doctoral programs (18:1), with only two doctoral and 35 master's programs with CACREP accreditation in a region with nearly 64 million inhabitants. The data demonstrate a greater need for more CES doctoral programs in certain geographical regions. Without developing new CES programs accessible in regions with few doctoral degree options, a pipeline problem may persist whereby demand surpasses supply. This pipeline problem may result in some master's programs struggling to hire faculty in regions with fewer doctoral programs, as prior studies have found that geographic location is a key reason why candidates accept faculty positions (Magnuson et al., 2001).

Defining Quality

The third theme centers on how to define high quality in CES doctoral education. Four studies in this special issue were aimed at exploring questions of quality doctoral counselor education in depth. Areas of investigation included program components, preparation for teaching and research, and promoting a research identity among students.

High-Quality Doctoral Programs

Preston et al. (2020) examined this theme in “Components of a High-Quality Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision.” Their qualitative study of 15 CES faculty revealed five critical indicators of program quality: (a) supportive faculty–student and student–student relationships; (b) a clearly defined mission that is supported by the counseling faculty and in alignment with the broader university mission; (c) development of a counselor educator identity with formal curricular experiences in teaching, research, and service; (d) a diversity orientation in all areas, including the cultural diversity of faculty and students, as well as a variety of experiences; and (e) reflection of the Carnegie classification of its institution, as aligned with its mission and level of support.

These findings on the components of a high-quality CES doctoral program are useful to multiple audiences. Faculty engaged in doctoral program development can use this as a partial checklist to ensure they are building quality components into what they are proposing. Faculty of existing programs can use these findings as a self-check for reviewing and improving their quality. Finally, potential doctoral students can use these five critical indicators of quality to inform their program search.

Quality Teaching Preparation

Teaching is a significant activity of faculty. Despite its importance, at least one recent study (Waalkes et al., 2018) found a lack of emphasis and rigor in graduate student training. Baltrinic and Suddeath (2020) conducted a study on the components of quality teacher preparation to inform preparation efforts. Their article, “A Q Methodology Study of a Doctoral Counselor Education Teaching Instruction Course,” found three broad critical factors of teacher preparation: course design, preparation for future faculty roles, and a focus on instructor qualities and intentionality in their communications. Most interesting are the practices they found were of less value yet commonly utilized in programs across the country. A detailed read of their study will likely challenge some of the activities currently deemed to be best practices.

Quality Research and Scholarship

The ability of doctoral graduates to demonstrate research and scholarship prowess is critical in their competitiveness in securing top faculty positions. In a prior study on faculty hiring by Bodenhorn and colleagues (2014), over half of faculty position announcements asked for demonstrated research potential. How we prepare students for their role in generating knowledge for the profession was an area of preparation addressed by Limberg et al. (2020). They suggest in their article, “Research Identity Development of Counselor Education Doctoral Students: A Grounded Theory,” that programs need to have strong faculty research mentors. Faculty who can involve students experientially in their research are more apt to instill a robust research identity and sense of self-efficacy in their doctoral students. Limberg et al. also offer other practical steps programs can take to increase research-oriented outcomes in their graduates.

In their article titled “Preparing Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Students Through an HLT Lens: The Importance of Research and Scholarship,” Brown et al. (2020) examined CES faculty publication trends from 2008 to 2018 from 396 programs. They found that although programs from Carnegie-classified R1 and R2 universities accounted for nearly 70% of the research, 30% was

produced by faculty from doctoral/professional universities (D/PU) and master's programs (M1). There is clear evidence that research is essential for all counselor education faculty, no matter the Carnegie level at which their university is classified.

Mentoring and Gatekeeping

The fourth theme pertains to how CES doctoral faculty can best serve as mentors and gatekeepers, as well as educate and train doctoral students to help in that same role when they graduate and become faculty in other institutions. Given the importance of the professional relationship in counseling (Kaplan et al., 2014), relationship building would seem to be a natural part of the mentoring and advising experience. Dipre and Luke (2020) advocate for such an advising model in their article, "Relational Cultural Theory–Informed Advising in Counselor Education." Kent et al. (2020) provide further guidelines for a more specialized student population in their article, "Mentoring Doctoral Student Mothers in Counselor Education: A Phenomenological Study."

Mentoring and advising are generally rewarding experiences as we prepare the next generation of leaders in the profession, but at times the conversations we need to have are challenging and tough. DeCino et al. (2020) provide an important view to an often-stressful component of advising with their article, "'They Stay With You': Counselor Educators' Emotionally Intense Gatekeeping Experiences." Their work uncovered five powerful sets of issues for faculty advisors to consider, including the early warning signs to look for, elevated student misconduct, the trauma of student dismissal, the stress of involvement in legal interactions, and the changes that occur from such experiences. Their article is a must-read for any new faculty mentor or advisor.

Many of the students we mentor and advise will assume similar roles as faculty members and confront the issues above. Freeman et al. (2020) provide a model and exploratory data in "Teaching Gatekeeping to Doctoral Students: A Qualitative Study of a Developmental Experiential Approach." Intentional integration of gatekeeping training is essential to preparing future faculty for their duties as faculty advisors and mentors.

Increasing Diversity

The fifth theme encompasses research on what changes to the structure of programs are needed to establish more diverse CES doctoral learning communities. There is a need for more doctoral graduates in CES, but more importantly, we need more graduates and faculty from culturally diverse backgrounds. The *2016 CACREP Standards* (2015) emphasized this in requiring accredited programs to engage in a "continuous and systematic effort to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community" (Standard 1.K.). CACREP sets the standard to be met, but programs are often at a loss as to what is most effective.

Ju et al. (2020) generated findings to help guide faculty in the most effective strategies in "Recruiting, Retaining, and Supporting Students From Underrepresented Racial Minority Backgrounds in Doctoral Counselor Education." They suggest that faculty must prioritize getting involved with students from the onset of recruiting and staying engaged through the student's program completion. The involvement needs to be personalized, which requires a robust faculty–student connection. Another principle they espouse is that faculty need to value the cultural identity of diverse students and help to connect them to that identity. Faculty can better foster this connection when they share their own cultural identity, encourage students to express their uniqueness, and share research interests connected to their cultural identity. Ju et al. also remind us that diverse students are more than members of a cultural group—they desire individual mentorship and support tailored to their specific needs. Finally, faculty are encouraged

to work with diverse students to address multicultural and social justice issues at the institution and in the profession. If the principles derived from this article are sincerely applied, they will likely go a long way to promoting a more culturally sensitive academic culture.

Many doctoral programs are under-resourced, and funding to increase diversity is often hard to come by. Branco and Davis (2020) provide insight on a significant financial and mentoring support program for diverse students funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors in their article, "The Minority Fellowship Program: Promoting Representation Within Counselor Education and Supervision." Their study found that although the scholarship funds were helpful, students also appreciated the program's networking, cohort model, and mentorship. This program has successfully aided in the graduation of 158 doctoral students to date who will go on to serve their diverse communities.

Supporting Dissertation Success

The sixth theme is grounded in helping students complete their dissertation and avoid becoming an "all but dissertation" (ABD) statistic. This concern is critical, as the doctoral completion rate across all disciplines is only 57% (Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). It is unclear if CES doctoral programs do any better or worse than other disciplines, and up until now, there has been a dearth of research on how to improve the odds of a student finishing their doctoral program (Purgason et al., 2016).

Ghoston et al. (2020) provide informed guidance in their article "Faculty Perspectives on Strategies for Successful Navigation of the Dissertation Process in Counselor Education." Five principles for how to support dissertation completion effectively emerged from their research: (a) program mechanics with structured curriculum and processes with a dissertation focus from the outset; (b) a supportive environment with solid mentoring and feedback tailored to the style and needs of the individual student; (c) selecting and working with cooperative, helpful, and productive dissertation committee members; (d) intentionality in developing a scholar identity to include a research and methodological focus; and (e) regular accountability and contact in supporting a student's steady progress toward the final dissertation writing and defense. Programs attentive to all five factors cannot guarantee dissertation completion on time, but they can certainly increase the probability of student success.

Gaining University Administrator Support

It is critical to have the support of university administrators who set priorities, allocate resources, and ultimately determine if a new degree program proposal lives or dies. Administrators who give their stamp of approval and invest resources will want to see evidence of success to commit to ongoing support. The seventh and final theme entails how to collaborate with administrators in supporting our doctoral programs. Scherer et al. (2020) provide keen analysis and insights into this issue in "Gaining Administrative Support for Doctoral Programs in Counselor Education." They caution faculty that before embarking down the path of program development, there are many issues involved that faculty generally are not accustomed to considering.

First, higher education administration has a certain amount of politics involved, and faculty need to remain aware of the political minefields they may be entering. Understanding and navigating university organizational dynamics and cultivating buy-in from the broader university constituency is a critical skill. Second, the payoff for such an endeavor may not be self-evident, so faculty must demonstrate how a new doctoral program fits the university's mission, helps local communities and the profession, and ultimately raises the university's prestige and reputation. Third, program leadership must establish credibility and gain the administration's confidence that counseling faculty

have the intellectual capital and expertise to educate, train, and graduate high-quality doctoral graduates. This article is an essential read for anyone planning to start or revitalize a program.

Future Directions

The 14 studies contained in this special issue represent a vital contribution to doctoral counselor education, yet important questions remain. We highlight four important directions to help guide future research.

First, there is a need to promote a more focused, systematic, ongoing agenda for the scholarship of doctoral counselor education. This special issue is an important first step, but leadership is needed to continue the effort. It is unclear how stakeholders such as CACREP, professional associations, doctoral program faculty, and editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals may build on and initiate efforts to promote scholarship in this area. It may be that a unified and intentional approach is key to ensuring that research proceeds in a strategic and methodical fashion and moves the profession steadily forward.

Second, we need to better understand how the advent of online programs is shaping the landscape of doctoral education. Based upon the findings in this special issue, we know residential doctoral programs are not distributed evenly across the country, but does it really matter if there is now an online option for all students? It is important to understand how potential employers now perceive online graduates and how potential doctoral students perceive online programs as acceptable alternatives to a brick-and-mortar campus experience.

Third, the important work of this journal's special issue in promoting high-quality outcomes in doctoral education should continue. Current descriptions of quality rely heavily on expert faculty opinions and judgments. We need to evaluate how these suggested best practices actually translate into more empirical outcomes, such as student satisfaction and retention, dissertation pass rates, job-seeking success, and post-degree productivity. Future studies can also benefit from larger sample sizes and broader representation from more programs to increase the generalizability of findings.

Finally, the work of better understanding and improving the student experience—especially that of students from culturally diverse backgrounds and identities—is critical. This special issue strikes a good balance with six student-oriented articles and two focused on helping programs recruit, retain, and support students from underrepresented minority backgrounds, but we have more yet to do. The work must continue until the words “underrepresented minority” are a thing of the past and we have doctoral student cohorts that truly reflect the diversity of our world.

Conclusion

As we conclude our introduction to this special issue on doctoral education, we are grateful for the contribution of the 14 studies and their authors. We now know more about the state of research in the profession, potential geographic gaps in program coverage, how to define and improve program quality, strategies to gain administrative support, and most importantly how to best increase diversity and promote student success. We hope that the combined insights in the assembled studies will help inform CES doctoral programming and contribute to a focused research agenda for years to come. We look forward to revisiting this first CES special issue in the future to observe its influence and the positive outcomes we trust will follow.

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