

Global Links and Gaps in Counselor Education Programs: Establishing a Baseline



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As the world grows more connected, the counseling profession has developed a significant focus on multicultural concerns and internationalization (the incorporation of international perspectives), but the extent of this phenomenon is currently unknown. The current pilot study established baseline data concerning how counselor education programs encouraged and supported international opportunities for students and faculty. Representatives from 62 of the 215 (as of spring 2011) programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs completed a survey describing their institutions' and departments' commitment to incorporating student and faculty international activities into their counselor preparation programs, and the nature of such activities in faculty involvement and counselor training. Two primary themes emerged from the data: (1) a disconnect between commitment to and execution of international activities, and (2) a one-sided approach to internationalization and cultural exchanges. Implications for research and counselor preparation are considered.

Keywords: internationalization, counselor preparation, cultural exchanges, baseline data, international activities

Heppner, Leong, and Chiao (2008), writing from the perspective of counseling psychology, observed that increased global dialogue and the incorporation of international perspectives has resulted in a shift toward viewing the counseling profession as part of a larger global movement. In the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Counseling & Development* focused on counseling around the world, Hohenshil (2010) asserted that the growth of this movement is “one of the major and most exciting emerging trends in the counseling profession” (p. 3). The importance of this trend was underscored by Leung et al. (2009), who provided an extensive rationale for and discussion of internationalization in counseling. However, Leung et al. (2009), along with other authors, notably Pedersen (2003), Leong and Ponterotto (2003), and Heppner (2006), noted that internationalization is still a fresh concept and that understanding and implementing it is a work in progress.

Ng and Noonan (2012) asserted that internationalization is “a multidimensional movement in which professionals across nations collaborate through equal partnerships to advance the practice of counseling as a worldwide profession” (p.11). These collaborations will likely include many who identify as professional counselors, but must be inclusive so as to encourage contributions from those of other identities and traditions who promote mental health, wellness and development from different, though compatible, perspectives. In order to foster such collaborations, Leung et al. (2009) have advocated for “the nurturance of a global perspective in counseling scholarship, through our teaching, research, and service” (p. 112). Numerous authors have promoted such a perspective through articles that focus on the nature of counseling in various countries (e.g., Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010; See & Ng, 2010; Stockton, Nitza, & Bhusumane, 2010), those that explore counseling-oriented topics across borders (e.g., Chung, 2005; Furbish, 2007) and several that describe the

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challenges that international students face in Euro-American counseling training and supervision (e.g., Crockett & Hays, 2011; Yakunina, Weigold, & McCarthy, 2010).

The global aspects of counseling, teaching and service also are central to research that explains and analyzes the involvement of extended cultural immersion experiences in counselor education programs (e.g., Alexander, Kruzek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009; Shannonhouse & West-Olatunji, 2013; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Throughout this cultural immersion literature, a primary emphasis is the use of cultural exchanges as an avenue toward increasing multicultural counseling competence. If it is true that international experiences promote multicultural counseling competence, as suggested by Alexander et al. (2005), Shannonhouse and West-Olatunji (2013) and Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010), inclusion of such experiences as part of counselor training seems important. Though Shannonhouse (2013) provided a current review of the literature regarding the relationship of cultural immersion to multicultural counseling competence, a solid understanding of the extent of international cultural immersion across programs is not currently available. Although several authors have described the nature and measure of international involvement among counseling psychology faculty and students (see Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, Leung & Norsworthy, 2009), the literature lacks information concerning the involvement of counselor educators and counselor education programs with the international counseling community.

The present pilot study was undertaken to obtain baseline data on the amount of counselor preparation program involvement beyond U.S. borders. The authors' intent was to determine the extent to which counselor education programs incorporate (and are committed to) international and cultural immersion activities as part of faculty involvement and counselor training. The authors proposed the following research questions: How many counselor education programs have a departmental commitment to international activities? To what extent do faculty and students participate in international activities? What kinds of activities are included?

Method

Through a multi-step revision process, the authors drafted a survey to examine the nature of international activities in faculty involvement and counselor training. First, two counselor educators not involved with the study who had expertise in international activities reviewed an outline of the study design, research questions and draft survey questions. The authors then revised the survey per the feedback they received, and subsequently field-tested it with one counselor educator and two doctoral students with prior counseling experience outside the United States. Based upon their feedback, the draft survey underwent wording, content and structural changes, which resulted in the final instrument used in this study. The authors presented the final version of the survey to an Institutional Review Board and it received approval for use as intended.

Eight quantitative survey items assessed demographic characteristics of each respondent (e.g., gender, ethnicity) and his or her counselor education program (e.g., Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES] region, program tracks). Twenty additional questions assessed the nature of international experiences for both faculty (Table 2) and students (Table 3), and the extent of program and institutional support (incorporated throughout Tables 2 and 3). Participants provided comments in relation to several questions to expand upon their initial responses.

The authors sent a link to the online Qualtrics survey along with information about the study via e-mail to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) coordinators of all (as of spring 2011) 215 CACREP-accredited programs. The e-mail included a request to forward the link to another faculty member if the coordinator thought that person would be better suited to complete the survey. It is unknown how many program coordinators or other faculty completed the survey; however, 66 counselor

educators initiated responses, with 62 completing the full survey. While the initial response rate was 31%, the survey completion rate was 29%. The number of responses to individual items varied from 59–62. The sample size was insufficient to make valid within- and between-groups comparisons.

Participants and Program Information

The counselor educators who completed the survey included 24 males (41%) and 35 females (59%). Most were Caucasian ($n = 55$, 90%). Two were African American (3%), one each identified as Asian American or Latino (2%), and two indicated “other.” The authors asked participants how many study-abroad, immersion or international travel experiences they had taken part in as either a participant or facilitator. Equal numbers of respondents reported either none or more than four ($n = 13$, 21% in each group), and one participant noted having more than 25 such experiences. Slightly fewer respondents reported one international experience ($n = 11$, 18%), and six (10%) reported two such experiences.

Program-level information that the respondents provided is included in Table 1. As one can see from this table, more than one-third of the respondents were from the Southern Region (37.7%), slightly more than one-quarter were from the North Central Region (27.9%), and substantially fewer were from the North Atlantic, Rocky Mountain or Western Regions. This distribution of respondents approximates the ACES regional membership, which includes regional percentages of 41.3% Southern, 26.4% North Central, 17.3% North Atlantic, 8.7% Western and 6.3% Rocky Mountain. All the programs that the respondents represented offered a master’s degree and 34% offered a doctoral degree. Accredited program tracks varied, with most programs offering clinical mental health or community counseling tracks (90.3%) and school counseling tracks (74.1%). Though there was no place for respondents to indicate the student enrollment of their programs, the average full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty size was 7.2 persons, with only 12% of programs having 12 or more faculty.

Table 1

Program-Level Information on Respondents

Program Information	<i>N</i>	%
ACES region		
Southern	23	37.7
North Central	17	27.9
North Atlantic	14	23.0
Rocky Mountain	2	3.3
Western	5	8.2
Degree programs offered		
Master’s	62	100.0
Specialist	15	24.0
Doctorate	21	34.0
Accredited program tracks offered		
Addiction counseling	0	0.0
Career counseling	3	4.8
Clinical mental health counseling/community counseling	56	90.3
Marriage, couple and family counseling	7	11.3
School counseling	46	74.1
Student affairs and college counseling	10	16.1
Other	13	21.0

Results

Responses to the core survey items offered insight into the specific nature of international activities in counselor preparation programs and how much support and structure the programs devoted to these activities. The authors examined these activities separately for both counselor educators and counselor trainees, with a majority of the responses summarized for each individual question in Table 2 (faculty activities) and Table 3 (student activities). For each of these two populations, the results characterized the nature and type of the international activities, how they were incorporated into expected practices, how they were financially supported, and what role international partners had in those activities.

Faculty Involvement in International Activities

The authors asked several questions to determine the level and type of program support for international activities of faculty. Responses are summarized in Table 2. Among the counselor education programs that the respondents represented, most (87.1%) did not incorporate international activities as a regular and expected endeavor for faculty. However, in most programs (82.2%), the institutional mission statement or philosophy supported or advocated for such involvement. The authors consistently found that a structured international component was lacking in over three-fourths of programs (77.4%).

Table 2

Program Support for and Faculty Involvement in International Activities

Item	Response	<i>N</i>	%
Does your program incorporate international activities as a regular and expected activity for faculty?	Yes	8	12.9
	No	54	87.1
Does the philosophy of your institution (mission statement) support/advocate for international programs and activities?	Yes	51	82.2
	No	10	16.1
	Missing	1	1.6
Does your program have a structured (organized) international component?	Yes	14	22.6
	No	8	77.4
	Missing	1	1.6
Is there departmental support for this international component?	Yes	13	21.0
	No	1	1.6
	Missing	48	77.4
Does your program have partner schools outside the United States?	Yes	17	27.4
	No	45	73.6
Do faculty regularly visit partner schools/agencies?	Yes	15	24.1
	No	2	3.2
	Missing	45	73.6
Is there faculty exchange with partner schools/agencies?	Yes	9	14.5
	No	8	12.9
	Missing	45	73.6
During the past 3 years, have any of your program faculty participated in international activities?	Yes	52	83.9
	No	10	16.1

During the past 3 years, in which of the following international activities have your faculty participated (check all that apply)?	Attendance at conferences outside the United States	35	56.5
	Presentations at conferences outside the United States	35	56.5
	Joint research with faculty outside the United States	23	37.1
	Study-abroad tours conducted individually or through American Counseling Association (ACA), Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) or other organizations	19	30.1
	Worked as a counselor or counselor educator outside the United States	18	29.0
	International faculty exchange	6	9.7
	Fulbright Scholar	8	12.9
	Other	9	14.5

Item	Response	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The financial contributions toward faculty participation in international activities include the following (scale of 0–100%):	Faculty member	30.75	38.38
	Department	24.88	34.99
	University	36.75	37.55
	Professional organizations	7.63	21.57

Most respondents (83.9%) reported that faculty had participated in international activities within the past 3 years. International activities of faculty included attendance and presentations at conferences outside the United States (56.5% each), joint research with faculty outside the United States (37.1%), and study-abroad tours (30.1%). Relatively few respondents reported international faculty exchange (9.7%) and Fulbright Scholars (12.9%).

Financial support for faculty international activities was reported to come from the faculty member or university in almost equal proportions, with a lower level of financial support from departments and extremely little from professional associations. The authors asked respondents to report relative percentage contributions from each of those four sources. As shown in Table 2, the standard deviations of responses to all four categories were relatively large, in all cases exceeding the absolute value of the mean. In short, there was a significant amount of variability in response to the question concerning sources of financial support for international activities of faculty.

Not shown in Table 2 are responses concerning departmental support for international programs, as most counselor educators who completed the survey did not respond to this question. Among the 14 who did respond, 13 (93% of those responding) indicated that there was departmental support for international activities, through either curricular focus or financial commitments. Over one-quarter of respondents (27.4%) reported that their program had a partner school outside the United States, and nearly all (88.2%) of those respondents reported that faculty regularly visited the partner school. Roughly one-half (52.9%) of respondents from programs with such international partnerships noted that they had reciprocal faculty exchanges with their partners.

Student Involvement in International Activities

Survey responses to questions concerning student involvement in international activities are summarized in Table 3. Slightly over one-fourth of the programs that respondents represented (29%) incorporated international activities as part of counselor training. Responses were split 50/50 on the question of whether students were actively encouraged to be involved in international activities outside the counselor education program. Respondents from only two programs (3.2%) noted that participation in international activities was required for graduation. Almost one-quarter of respondents represented programs (24.1%) that provided academic credit to students for participating in international activities. When programs did offer academic credit, it was more often for an elective course than a required one, though five respondents (8.1%) did note that their programs required the international course.

Table 3

Program Support for Student Involvement in International Activities

Item	Response	<i>N</i>	%
Does your program incorporate international activities as part of counselor training for students?	Yes	18	29.0
	No	44	71.0
Do students regularly visit partner schools/agencies?	Yes	9	14.5
	No	8	12.9
	Missing	45	73.6
Is there student exchange with partner schools/agencies?	Yes	6	9.6
	No	1	17.7
	Missing	45	73.6
Are students actively encouraged to be involved in international activities outside your program (e.g., international activities sponsored by other schools/organizations like AMCD or Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES])?	Yes	31	50.0
	No	31	50.0
Is participation in these international activities required for students to graduate?	Yes	2	3.2
	No	16	25.8
	Missing	44	71.0
Can students receive academic credit for participating in these international activities?	Yes	15	24.1
	No	3	4.8
	Missing	44	71.0
The academic credit offered for international activities is best described as:	A required course	5	8.1
	An elective course	7	11.2
	A required or elective course	1	1.6
	Other	1	1.6
	Missing	48	77.4
Item	Response	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The financial contributions toward student participation in international activities include the following (scale of 0 to 100%):	Student	73.41	28.91
	Department	14.12	25.07
	University	11.35	18.13
	Professional organizations	1.12	3.16

Financial support for student participation in international activities was apparently limited. Again, participants responded to this question based on the percentage of funding provided by each of the four sources. Three-quarters of funding came directly from students themselves. Departments provided some support ($M = 14.12$, $SD = 25.07$), with some coming from the universities ($M = 11.35$, $SD = 18.13$), while support from professional associations was almost nonexistent ($M = 1.12$, $SD = 3.16$). As was true of faculty financial support, there was significant variability in responses to this question except in regard to support provided by professional associations.

Not shown in Table 3 are responses from the 17 respondents who reported their programs having partner schools. Among those respondents, 53% reported that students regularly visited the partner programs. Only 35% engaged in reciprocal student exchange with partner schools.

Discussion

Despite the respondents' reports of strong departmental and institutional commitments to internationalization from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs, the responses of 62 faculty members suggest that these programs have a relatively low level of actual involvement in international activities. However, over the past 3 years a significant number of individual faculty members have participated in international activities of their own accord. Attending and presenting at international conferences have been the primary faculty activities, with few engaging in faculty exchange or Fulbright scholarships. This finding contrasts with reports from counseling psychologists, for whom Fulbrights and faculty exchanges have been more frequent (Heppner et al., 2008).

Funding for international involvement differs considerably for faculty and students. Although faculty contribute more than one-third of the costs for their international involvement, they are much more likely than students to obtain support from their department and university. Professional associations are also slightly more likely to provide financial support for faculty than for students. If students are to engage in international activities, some consideration of financial support seems imperative.

Among programs that have partner schools, faculty and to a lesser extent students regularly visit their partners. However, faculty and student exchanges *from* international partners *to* American CACREP programs are not nearly as prevalent. From the current findings, it appears that internationalization occurs primarily in one direction, which validates several conclusions from Gerstein and Ægisdóttir's (2007) comprehensive review of the literature. The reasons for such a one-sided approach to internationalization are likely complex, and at this stage are still unknown. It could be that U.S. counselor education programs either do not encourage or may actually discourage international visitors or enrollment of international students. If that is the case, determining and addressing underlying reasons, such as language or logistical barriers, is an important next step. If other factors are involved, learning what those are could be a step toward reducing barriers and increasing more equal international exchanges.

Though structured (and reciprocal) international activities are not the norm across programs represented in this survey, two stand out as particularly interesting examples with regard to the effects of internationalization on counselor trainee development and on the logistical realities of implementing two-way internationalization. While at the University of Florida, Dr. Cirecie A. West-Olatunji organized two month-long immersions to South Africa and Botswana (see Shannonhouse & West-Olatunji, 2009, for a program summary). These events were optional for participating students, who received no course credit and some financial support for participation. However, they were effective at enhancing multicultural awareness (Shannonhouse & West-Olatunji, 2013;

West-Olatunji, Templeton, Goodman, & Mehta, 2011), and were structured in such a way as to validate and allow the students to learn from the natural helpers and para-professionals in southern Africa. Meanwhile, Dr. Suhyun Suh at Auburn University has developed an ongoing reciprocal international exchange between Auburn and Korean counseling students (for more information, see http://education.auburn.edu/academic_departments/serc/outreach/south-korea.html). This activity is provided at reduced cost to students by leveraging university funds (Auburn students pay the equivalent of 5 credit hours for 3 hours of credit plus a week of immersion), and it involves exchanging students and faculty from both institutions for coursework in addition to cultural immersion (Suh, Hansing, Booker, & Radomski, 2013).

While the results of this study were designed to serve as a baseline of internationalization in counselor education and not a compendium of current activities, the authors choose to showcase the initiatives of these two programs in order to facilitate dialogue. The first provides a peer-reviewed look at the benefits of internationalization and serves as a reminder of why the counseling profession has joined other disciplines in welcoming globalization: much can be learned from those who help in different places and different ways. The second serves as a model for how a counseling program can implement a reciprocal exchange that is structured into the curriculum and financially supported by funding sources invested in diversity. Both programs are built upon the premise that internationalization is multidirectional, in that all those working toward wellness across the globe have valuable perspectives from which others may learn, in an effort to better advance human dignity.

Implications

The current findings raise a number of questions concerning student and faculty participation in international counseling activities. For example, what are the reasons underlying faculty choices for international involvement? What inhibits involvement? Are language barriers or a lack of contacts, resources or finances the strongest deterrents? Though financial realities may prevent many international faculty and students from visiting U.S. counseling programs and thereby encourage one-way internationalization, is the exchange between U.S. counseling programs and their counterparts in wealthier nations also one-sided? How can reciprocal international cooperation and involvement increase? Larger systemic issues such as political pressures or economic strain may have an important effect on some of these unanswered questions, and future researchers should consider them.

Limitations

Whether the respondents adequately represented all accredited programs is impossible to determine. It is likely that some CACREP liaisons were faculty with international experiences while others were not. Though the authors asked that those in the latter group forward the survey link to a faculty member with more relevant experience, the number of participants who did so is unknown. In each case, the respondent provided program-level information rather than reporting as an individual. It is probable that even in the programs for which respondents reported high levels of international involvement, the respondents simply may not have known about some relevant faculty activities. It is also likely that respondents representing programs with international involvement were among those most inclined to respond to the survey. Overall, the results were limited by the response rate and respondents' knowledge of program faculty activities. While one must interpret the results with caution due to these limitations, these findings did provide the beginnings of a baseline to determine counselor education program involvement in international activities, which offers an important first step for future systematic efforts (e.g., Shannonhouse, 2013) to contextualize the internationalization of the counseling profession.

Conclusion

As the counseling profession continues to internationalize, it will be necessary for counselor education programs to provide training for both students and faculty to increase cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity. Institutional support will be essential in terms of both mission and financial resources for both students and faculty. Beyond the institution, faculty may require training and encouragement to undertake international activities beyond conference attendance. While international presentations and partner school visits are impressive for faculty vitae and university reports, true internationalization is a two-way process. The authors challenge counselor educators to find ways to extend a welcome to international visitors, which will result in increasing numbers of faculty and student exchanges, and equalize the balance of trade relative to the internationalization of the counseling profession.

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