

Student Selection, Development, and Retention: A Commentary on Supporting Student Success in Distance Counselor Education



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This article reviews relevant research that provides context for a commentary by two long-time distance counselor educators and supervisors with over 35 years of combined professional experience. The authors explore factors that support successful outcomes for graduate students within distance counselor education programs, which include how students are selected, supported in their development, and retained in the program. Discussion targets how distance learning promotes open access to students who historically have been marginalized, who are living in rural areas, and who have not had the same access to educational opportunities. We focus on the roles and responsibilities of institutional and program leadership and program faculty in the areas of building and sustaining a learning community, faculty engagement in and out of the classroom, and retention and gatekeeping of students. Finally, we discuss considerations for building and sustaining credibility within the university culture, supporting the specialized needs of a CACREP-accredited program, and managing the student–program relationship.

Keywords: student selection, student development, student retention, distance education, counselor education

Distance counselor education has evolved from a place of skepticism to an accepted and legitimate method of training master’s- and doctoral-level counselors and counselor educators and supervisors. Snow et al. (2018) noted that “Changing the minds of skeptical colleagues is challenging but naturally subject to improvement over time as online learning increases, matures, and becomes integrated into the fabric of counselor education” (p. 141). A foundational driver in this evolution has been the necessity of program stakeholders to be creative and innovative in using distance technology to achieve similar or sometimes better results than traditional, residence-based programs. In this article, we will address characteristics of students in distance counselor education programs, their specific needs, the concept of andragogy and adult learners, considerations for selecting and retaining distance learning students, the importance of supporting the development of digital competence, and orienting students to the distance program. Additionally, we will discuss the roles and responsibilities of institutional and program leadership and program faculty in three key areas related to optimal student development and program efficacy: community building, faculty presence and engagement in and out of the classroom, and student retention and gatekeeping. Finally, we raise considerations in building and sustaining credibility within the university culture, supporting the specialized needs of a program accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and managing the student–program relationship (Urofsky, 2013). In this article, we use the research literature on distance counselor education to support insights we have gained over 35 years of combined experience teaching and administrating online counselor education in a large for-profit institution. To avoid confusion, throughout this article we will be using the term *distance counselor education* as encompassing online learning, virtual learning, online counselor education, or other terms denoting distance learning in counselor education.

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The thought of training counselors using distance education has stimulated incredulity in many counselor educators because of the nature of counselor education (Snow et al., 2018). The underlying concern was that students trained in distance education programs could not be adequately prepared because of the high-touch, interpersonal nature of counselor preparation in which students encountered faculty and supervisors in traditional face-to-face settings. For those venturing into this new frontier, the challenge was to create an effective combination of academic and experiential learning that would provide students with the appropriate foundation for practice to ensure that there were sufficient opportunities to observe and evaluate skills development and comportment. An outcome of distance counselor education was also the realization that offering students a more flexible higher education format was one of the best vehicles to increasing opportunity and access for students (Carlsen et al., 2016). Over the years, we have recognized that facilitating distance learning opportunities was one of the counseling profession's greatest opportunities to create a more diverse workforce of counselors equipped to provide services in a myriad of traditionally underserved communities, strengthen and support counselors using a variety of technological tools in their work, and enhance students' exposure to diversity, thereby creating a counseling workforce better able to practice cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Shaw, 2016). This enhanced cultural competence happens in part because students engage with a widely diverse set of colleagues and faculty that represent various regions of the United States and the world and touch on the areas of socioeconomic, sociocultural, ethnic, spiritual, and religious domains in learners, practitioners, and clients. Essentially, we have recognized that distance education benefits both student and educator, consumer and provider, community and profession.

There have been significant advancements in best practices regarding student selection, development, and retention for distance counselor education. These advancements and modifications, however, need to align with the expectations and guidance of the *2014 ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014) and the accreditation standards of CACREP, which also changed to accommodate distance counselor education preparation programs. Many of the best practices for student selection, development, and retention in distance education emerged from what counselor educators gleaned from traditional educational environments. In addition, curricular activities evolved and have been developed with a healthy respect for the interpersonal nature of educating counselors, while developing and utilizing technologies that could accomplish the same objectives achieved in traditional programs, even though the activities to accomplish those objectives are distinct. We have found that developing best practices for selection, development, and retention of counselor education students at a distance has resulted from working with and observing students and responding to their unique needs while balancing where we have "been." Additionally, engaging in continuous dialogue with program stakeholders and using essential assessment data has helped us become better at meeting students' needs in a distance education environment. An important aspect of developing best practices is understanding who our students are and what specialized needs they bring to their graduate work when enrolling in a distance counselor education program.

Understanding Our Students in Distance Counselor Education

The first generation of students who pursued distance counselor education were mostly older students, women, people with disabilities, working adults, and students who were more racially and ethnically diverse (Smith, 2014), and although those distinctions are not as clear now as they were a decade ago (Ortagus, 2017), responding to the needs of early distance education students informed counselor educators in creating a model of educating these students that met their educational and developmental needs. Programs committed to facilitating student access and inclusion discovered the need to adjust outdated thinking from traditional criteria as the basis for selection and admission into

graduate counseling preparation programs (Bryant et al., 2013) to broaden access. One area of focus essential to program success was looking carefully at the needs of non-traditional and minority students.

Choy (2002) defined non-traditional students as students who either are enrolled part-time, are financially independent, have dependents other than a spouse or partner, or are single parents. In addition, we know that non-traditional students are likely to have delayed enrolling in higher education, work at least 35 hours a week, and be over the age of 25. These circumstances contribute to non-traditional students being much more career-decided than traditional students, and we find that these students are very disciplined, with non-traditional female students having higher grade point averages than their peers (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014). However, we also know that these students have challenges. For example, non-traditional students are more likely to have a history of academic failures in their past, which may undermine confidence in their ability to succeed. They also have significant time constraints and family responsibilities (Grabowski et al., 2016). We know that although students in distance education succeed overall at a comparable rate to students in traditional residential institutions, students from underrepresented groups do not perform as well in distance education (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014; Minichiello, 2016). While there have been some changes in the demographics of distance education students in higher education, with an increasing number of traditional student consumers of online education (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), the majority of students in distance education counseling programs are still non-traditional students, precipitating the need for admissions policies that may not mirror traditional graduate admissions practices but allow for consideration of work and service activities in the process. The importance of understanding the demographics of distance counselor education students is in being responsive to their needs on a situational, institutional, and dispositional level.

Responding to the Needs of Distance Learning Students

Effectively engaging distance learning students and creating learning experiences responsive to their specific needs requires understanding that factors impacting success are situational, institutional, and dispositional (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014). As mentioned earlier, at any one point in the student's academic career, a non-traditional student can be a parent, a partner, an employee, a caregiver, or some other significant and time-consuming role, which constitutes a situational factor (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014). These competing responsibilities have a significant impact on student success (Grabowski et al., 2016).

There also are institutional considerations that impact a student's success. Institutional considerations include programmatic policies and practices, limited course offerings or offerings that are only available during the day, lack of childcare, and lack of financial assistance (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014). Students in brick-and-mortar environments often feel that they are not receiving the support they need from their educational institution (Grabowski et al., 2016; Kampfe et al., 2006). The distance learning environment certainly makes managing childcare, work responsibilities, and inflexible schedules less of an obstacle in pursuit of higher education. Finally, there are dispositional concerns related to the limits that non-traditional students place on themselves based on their perceptions of their ability to succeed and their lack of self-confidence (Bushey-McNeil et al., 2014). Institutional and program leadership and program faculty must be sensitive to what these students bring to their educational experience and respond productively to these concerns by providing the kind of flexibility necessary to help them develop the skills and professional dispositions needed for professional practice. This support also requires programs to be alert to the skills needed to be successful in a distance learning environment, including and especially andragogical elements within the curriculum.

Andragogy and the Distance Learner

Students in distance learning programs need flexibility, hands-on laboratory experiences, in-depth orientation to technology, greater access to instructors, competency assessment and remediation designed to refresh skills and knowledge, and opportunities for self-reflection and support (Minichiello, 2016) in order to be successful. These needs are aligned with what we understand about the learning principle called *andragogy*, which is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy Center, 2011, p. 1). According to Knowles (1973), adults learn best in situations that allow them to apply information and problem-solving techniques to experiences and situations that are relevant to their own lives. In addition, adults look for opportunities to immediately apply newly acquired knowledge (Yarbrough, 2018).

Consistent with this need, instructors in an andragogical learning environment see the learner’s experience as valuable and are willing, in the process of acting as subject matter experts, to allow the learner to guide and customize the learning process (Palmer, 2007; Salazar-Márquez, 2017). Adult learning theory should be the foundation of the online learning experience, and the online learning environment should be reflective of a partnership between subject matter expert and facilitator and the adult learner, who is a personal life expert and leader in the learning experience (Clardy, 2005). The teacher as facilitator helps the learner apply the knowledge and skills to situations relevant to the learner’s experiences and evaluates the application of that newly acquired knowledge. In distance counselor education, faculty members also enact the roles of supervisor, mentor, and gatekeeper, which adds to the complex nature of orienting students to what these roles mean and how they are related to the teaching role. Faculty members also need to consider how they enact these roles throughout the learning process in meeting the needs of distance students.

In distance counselor education programs, program faculty and administrators have discovered that student success is rooted in providing students with support throughout the program, finding ways to engage them and giving them the opportunity to benefit from their faculty and peers’ experiences and expertise, getting them connected to university support services early, and, consistent with andragogical learning principles, identifying opportunities to affirm or support them in developing their own sense of self-efficacy and sense of agency (Clardy, 2005). There are significant opportunities to incorporate these elements in the selection, development, and retention activities of the program.

Selecting and Retaining Distance Learning Students

The goal of the entire educational process in counselor education centers on offering students experiences, education, and skill development that provide a firm orientation to the profession and the expectations of the counseling profession. Each step, from admissions to graduation and even alumni relationships, should be designed to inform students’ understanding of the profession. Although programs demonstrate flexibility in the way they meet professional standards with the admissions process, the processes must reflect professional standards like those described by CACREP (2015, Standards 1.K–L and 6.A.3–4). Supporting counselor education students at a distance begins with the selection or admissions process.

Admissions Policies

Historically, graduate admissions policies have focused on undergraduate grade point average, standardized test scores, personal interviews, and personal statements (Bryant et al., 2013). However, there are criticisms of these practices in that, although they are perceived to be race-neutral and objective, they do not account for the fact that there is differential access to quality pre-college education based on race and socioeconomic status (Park et al., 2019). Traditionally, low-income

students and many students of color are denied access to the most prestigious graduate programs. Many online institutions, both public and private, are employing broad-access admissions practices for their online programs to increase access, opportunity, and fairness (Park et al., 2019).

A broad-access admissions policy differs from an open-access admissions policy. Open admissions typically means there are no requirements for admissions beyond having completed the requisite education before entering a program. Broad access generally means that requirements such as grade point average are designed to give potential students opportunity to participate in the experience, and consideration is given to factors other than academic performance. Broad access provides an opportunity for higher education to people who have been traditionally left out for a variety of reasons, such as the inability to access higher education or because less than stellar undergraduate performances have made it difficult for students to access graduate school. There are some variations to broad-access policies for many online institutions that have as their goal educating adult learners and increasing access and opportunity for people who have traditionally been excluded from higher education.

Although many online programs do not require standardized tests, such as the Graduate Record Examination or the Miller Analogies Test, and may have a lower undergraduate grade point average requirement than other institutions, a robust process for evaluating a candidate's readiness for a graduate counseling program is essential. In addition to ensuring that the admission decisions are based on the applicant's career goals, potential success in forming effective counseling relationships, and respect for cultural differences as described by the CACREP standards (CACREP, 2015, Section 1. L), programs also consider the candidate's professional and community service as an indicator of their aptitude for graduate study. As important as it is to assess students' readiness for graduate work through their previous academic performance and professional and service activities, programs also need to assess students' digital readiness or competence for the tasks required in an online program (da Silva & Behar, 2017).

Developing Digital Competence

In the online education environment, it is imperative for students to either have or quickly develop *digital competence*. Digital competence is essentially the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to effectively use the instructional technology found in a distance education environment. Students in the online environment have varying degrees of digital competence. Some students in the distance education environment are *digital natives* and others are *digital immigrants* (Salazar-Márquez, 2017). Digital natives are those who have always been a part of a highly technological world and are accustomed to accessing information quickly and easily. Their optimal functioning occurs when they are connected and receive immediate gratification. By contrast, those who are not disposed to technological mastery or have had little exposure to technology are digital immigrants and are forced to learn a new language and perpetually demonstrate this new language (as a second language), always speaking or behaving relative to their first language. For the digital immigrant, the requirements of navigating the course classroom and the university resources and creating assignments that require them to use technology can be very challenging.

Although digital natives can navigate the distance education environment with relative ease, they also can be very critical of the speed and efficiency of online systems. Digital immigrants, on the other hand, must navigate instructional content and the learning platform. As one might expect, it is much easier for a digital immigrant to communicate with a digital immigrant and a digital native to communicate with a digital native. But education is not homogenous, and there are both students and faculty who are natives and immigrants trying to partner with each other for an effective learning

experience, which can pose a challenge in developing a productive learning community. Although digital immigrants can provide useful recommendations for improving technology and the learning platforms, we encourage program faculty and administration to focus on creating and maintaining systems that are universally beneficial and can be used easily for both natives and immigrants. If an assessment of digital competence is not part of the admissions process, it should be a part of the enrollment and on-boarding process to ensure that students know how to use technology required in the program, and should be an ongoing part of the educational experience.

Orientation to the Program

Critical parts of the admissions and retention processes for counselor education students include the full disclosure of what will be expected as students move through the program and the activities designed to make sure that students are fully aware of what they will be able to do with their degree after its completion. The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management Governing Board (2009) indicates that best practices for graduate enrollment management professionals include making sure that students understand the requirements of their degree program early. This is particularly important to students in distance education programs. Distance learning students, who are still largely non-traditional students, must be informed of program expectations early so that they can decide their ability to manage the different program requirements. For many distance education students, one of the greatest challenges is planning time away from work or family for the synchronous requirements such as group counseling laboratories, residency experiences, supervision, and field experiences.

Helping Students Plan. In addition to being informed of these requirements, administrators and faculty must make sure that students understand not just the requirements but also the relevance and timing of requirements. Non-traditional students need to understand how the timing of programmatic activities impacts their development and progression in the program. One of the best ways to retain students throughout a program is to encourage them to plan appropriately so that they can appropriately manage their personal responsibilities during the times they are engaged in experiences (e.g., field experience or residency) required for the academic program.

Providing Credentialing Information. Pre-admissions orientation also should include information about the credentialing process. It is quite common for students in distance counselor education programs to reside in different states with varying regulations regarding licensing and credentialing for practice. The pre-admissions process should include sharing as much information as possible about students' opportunities to practice and their credentialing opportunities, but students also should be informed that the laws and requirements for licensure vary by state and can change during the time the student is enrolled in the academic program. Helping students invest in being responsible for monitoring licensure and credentialing laws in their state is essential. Finally, the program faculty and administration must ensure that students understand the expectations for student conduct and comportment throughout the program. Students must understand the evaluation process that will occur for specific program milestones. Throughout the program, the program should make information available about support that is designed for student success.

Faculty, Program Leaders, and University Administrators as Agents of Student Development

As with traditional brick-and-mortar counselor education programs, distance education programs are supported by two sets of institutional personnel. First, they are indirectly supported by a hierarchy of administrators, support staff, and program leadership, and secondly, students are directly supported by program faculty, who often become the primary, student-facing representatives, models, and mentors for both the institution and graduate programs. The challenge for distance counselor education

programs becomes to lessen the impact of physical distance between faculty and students by facilitating meaningful, productive, and collaborative learning experiences for students with the use of distance technology as students matriculate through the curriculum, ensuring that students feel fully supported in the process (Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011; Carlisle et al., 2017; Lock & Johnson, 2016; Milman et al., 2015; Sibley & Whitaker, 2015; Suler, 2016; Whitty, 2017). Success in this endeavor requires that institutional administration, program leadership, and faculty create and sustain a shared vision of how to train and support students consistent with institutional values, accreditation standards, best practices, and professional credentialing and licensure board requirements, which support student success beyond the graduate degree. We have found that these reciprocal relationships are essential to the process of enacting such a shared vision and, ironically, call upon counselor educators to utilize their counseling and conceptual skills, emotional intelligence, interpersonal expertise, and advocacy to inform and persuade institutional stakeholders in how best to train and prepare master's- and doctoral-level counselors and counselor educators. Essential to the process of building and sustaining a successful program is nurturing productive relationships with invested stakeholders, which is within the scope of professional preparation and the experience of counselor educators. Faculty and program leadership are well-advised to perceive themselves as program ambassadors not only to students and other external constituents (e.g., prospective students, colleagues outside of the institution, licensure boards, professional organizations, accrediting bodies, the public), but also to their internal constituents. (e.g., university and college administration, colleagues in related disciplines, other essential decision-makers).

As previously noted, numerous factors impact students' ability to be successful in distance counseling programs, including personal factors related to work and family circumstances; personal history related to success in school and self-efficacy (Kampfe et al., 2006; Wantz et al., 2003); and programmatic factors related to timeliness and efficacy of student support, online course platforms and curriculum development, technological support, and faculty engagement (Wantz et al., 2003). Although educators cannot control or predict students' personal circumstances, they can control what occurs within the program in how they respond to supporting students. The reciprocal relationships between institutional and program leadership and program faculty constitute a foundation upon which to build a successful program. We have introduced the importance of developing a shared vision between these groups and specifically wish to address both institutional and program leadership and program faculty responsibilities in three critical program areas, namely building a community of learners, faculty presence and engagement in and out of the classroom, and student retention and gatekeeping.

Building a Learning Community for Student Development

Having a sense of community and belonging is essential to students' success and retention (Berry, 2017). Many students in the online environment report feeling isolated (Berry, 2017) and are challenged to be resourceful, organized, and creative in ways they might not if they were enrolled in a traditional counselor education program. Time management, developing an intrinsic motivation to self-start, and strategically applying creativity in problem solving often become part of the skillset students develop out of necessity when working in a distance graduate program. These skills often manifest for students within their own version of cyberspace where they must rely upon themselves to persist in their graduate work. In order to combat the sense of isolation that contributes to student attrition, program faculty and administrators must work together to create a sense of community for students, which is largely accomplished using technology.

The Role of Course Development, Technology, and Program Leadership in Building a Learning Community. Technology is the primary apparatus that supports distance learning, but like any tool, it needs to be utilized with purpose, intention, and careful planning. As Snow et al. (2018) noted, numerous

commercial products have been developed to enhance student learning, including synchronous audio and video platforms (e.g., Zoom, Adobe Connect, Kaltura) and classroom platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Udemy) designed to help provide a usable space to house and disseminate the curriculum and support student learning. The key to effective use of these platforms includes developing courses designed for online learning, supporting faculty in course development and maintenance, and using technology to connect with and support the student experience. Although institutional leadership is often enthused about the potential for online learning and the use of technology to support it, faculty reactions appear to be mixed (Kolowich, 2012), and not all counselor education faculty embrace distance education as a legitimate method for training counselors (Snow et al., 2018), even though they may teach in distance programs as both core and adjunct faculty.

Increasingly in distance counselor education programs, technology is utilized that allows for more digital synchronous interactions between students and their peers and faculty. To increase student engagement, the use of videoconferencing, webcasts, and telephone conferences are often helpful with the learning process (Higley, 2013). Recognizing that interaction and engagement between students and faculty is a significant contributor to student success, faculty and program leadership look for ways in which technology can enhance those opportunities throughout the programs. Students can upload practice videos, experience virtual simulations, and participate in synchronous practice experiences through videoconferences where they directly communicate with faculty and peers. Some universities also have dedicated virtual social spaces for students to connect with each other and engage on a personal level. But invariably, these spaces are underutilized after the beginning of an academic term. Students are beginning to create their own social media sites for community building, sharing their experience of specific courses and instructors and challenges with securing sites for field experience. Although tempting to do so, university officials must guard against the desire to micromanage these experiences in order to manage public perceptions regarding their programs. Much like the conversations that go on in study groups and campus student centers everywhere, students need spaces to share their sentiments about their experience and benefit from their peers' experiences. Besides, many of the students on these sites are very quick to correct erroneous assumptions or combat negative comments with accounts of their own positive experiences. Additionally, unadulterated feedback can be useful for programs in identifying areas for improvement.

Residential Laboratories. Over the years, there has been an evolution in the perception of counselor educators' abilities to prepare counselors at a distance. As previously noted, once thought of as a suboptimal way to train counselors, distance learning is now being accepted and seen as legitimate (Snow et al., 2018). However, many distance counselor education programs have found that including a residential component to their primarily online programs positively impacts student success, student collaboration, engagement, and overall student satisfaction, as well as the strength of the learning community. In these residential laboratories, students practice skills in a synchronous environment where they get immediate feedback on their skill development and remediation if needed. They also work with peers without the constraints of those situational concerns referenced earlier, and they engage with their faculty and academic advisors. Students are able to connect with one another meaningfully and close the virtual distance by being able to interact with each other in person in real time. For distance learners, the opportunity to connect in person with a group of like-minded peers all striving for the same goal benefits them emotionally as well as academically. Most importantly, residential experiences allow faculty and program administrators to observe and conduct a more in-depth assessment of their students. These in-person residencies go a long way in building a sense of community for students (Snow et al., 2018).

Faculty as Community-Building Facilitators in the Virtual Classroom. As the primary facilitator of the classroom learning experience, the faculty contributes to community building. Faculty community building starts with an internal assessment of personal and shared professional values that drive student connection and enhance learning. Palmer (2007) described faculty developing a subject-centered posture where both faculty and students become part of a community of learners committed to engaging in “a collective inquiry into the ‘great thing’ [subject of focus]” (p. 128), which serves as the basis for optimal student development. “We know reality only by being in community with it ourselves” (Palmer, 2007, p. 100), which challenges the notion of faculty being the only experts that disseminate knowledge. As noted previously, andragogy promotes the idea that faculty members have a wealth of professional knowledge that they may use to stimulate experiences that will impact students in their growth and that the faculty seek to stimulate what students already bring both in their professional and personal life experience. Palmer (2007) noted that “good education is always more process than product” (p. 96) and that learning is sometimes a disruptive process in which students may feel temporarily dissatisfied with ideas, concepts, and processes that are unfamiliar as they get their values and biases bumped into. The job of faculty becomes being vigilant and recognizing opportunities to describe the experience through developing a balance between support and challenge that invites students to apply what they learn to their emerging professional and personal selves. Developing this kind of learning community means that faculty members must be willing to be vulnerable in the learning process just as their students are. They should resist seeing students solely as customers in their programs instead of as potential colleagues in the counseling profession. A careful examination of what counselor educators and supervisors do and the shared values that drive professional identity is essential in developing this kind of community of learners (Coppock, 2012). For faculty, this approach parallels the goal of developing cultural humility, which is a highly sought learning outcome for students (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Shaw, 2016).

Faculty members need to consider how they will personalize the virtual classroom and what areas they want to emphasize for their students. For example, forums dedicated to building connections through using photographs or small video introductions can enhance the classroom as a safe environment for students to interact. Making these introductions fun and engaging can go a long way to helping decrease the distance students may experience. Depending on the flexibility of the program for faculty to modify the classroom according to their preferences, faculty can create spaces for students to share their ideas and thoughts freely and help students discover how their ideas compare to those of their peers. Students often attempt to make only minimal and requisite connections between their ideas and their peers, but faculty can encourage a more meaningful discourse in which students’ expressed ideas are essential through modeling this themselves.

Additionally, faculty members aid students in becoming responsible community members in the classroom and professional community. The faculty models openness and acceptance of the personhood and individual perspectives of each student by offering encouraging responses that support their perspectives and challenge them to consider other points of view. By immediately attending to students’ expressions of thoughts and ideas that may be counterintuitive to the ACA ethical code or that might alienate other community members, faculty members facilitate a community where all students feel safe and included. Learning how to become professionals in a virtual community becomes an additional skillset that students develop as they engage in distance learning. This direct modeling has powerful implications for the kinds of relationships students establish with colleagues and clients within work settings they will engage in during their practicum and internship experiences.

Faculty Presence and Engagement as Conduits for Student Development

It is indisputable that faculty engagement with students in distance counselor education is essential.

Students rely on faculty to provide clear steps in a process that requires self-motivation, resourcefulness, creativity, and persistence. An important part of building a productive learning community and promoting the culture of distance learning is helping students not only to engage in the subject (i.e., assignments, learning resources, readings, projects), but also to engage each other in order to maintain the relational quality of face-to-face interactions. We encourage faculty and program leadership to see students as individuals, to foster essential relationships, and to operationalize their caring for students in all their activities (Hall et al., 2010). As Hall et al. (2010) have noted, these activities require that those involved in preparing counselors at a distance remain focused and intentional about what they do when enacting their shared vision.

The Role of Institutional and Program Leadership in Faculty Engagement. The development and maintenance of online curriculum is central to student development, and careful planning, typically within a curriculum committee, helps maintain a vibrant and responsive curriculum (Brewer & Movahedazarhouli, 2018). Course development for a distance education program, although vital, can be intimidating to faculty unfamiliar with the process who can have reservations about the efficacy of distance learning and their own ability in using technology to accomplish course goals. Sibley and Whitaker (2015) noted that faculty resistance needs to be responded to by institutional administration and program leadership with understanding and support. Wantz et al. (2003) assessed program leadership and faculty perceptions of online learning and discovered that faculty perceptions included concerns about the efficacy of online distance education, the belief that certain subject areas (i.e., practice and application of counseling skills, ability to accurately assess student mastery) might not be appropriate for a distance model, the cost-benefit balance and exertion of time and effort in creating and maintaining an online course, and the need to be compensated for this time and effort. Although this study is over 15 years old, it does give an important touchpoint concerning the perspectives of some faculty who work within residential and online programs.

For programs that rely heavily on faculty to create online curriculum, institutional and program leadership and administration will need to carefully review compensation policies and practices in programs that require faculty to integrate course development into their workload. Snow et al. (2018) verified that some faculty exhibit resistance toward distance learning, specifically faculty who themselves are teaching online courses either as adjuncts for online programs or who are being required to teach online courses as part of their full-time positions. Sibley and Whitaker (2015) noted that “since faculty participation can neither be mandated nor fabricated, institutions must make online learning attractive, accessible, and valuable to faculty” (para. 23). This starts with online instructional development teams cultivating a deep sense of respect for the expertise the counselor education faculty members possess and working to establish consultative relationships when developing the online curriculum, including helping faculty see what has been done successfully in other courses. Hall et al. (2010) described a philosophy of approaching distance learning from a humanistic framework: “The challenge was not to allow technology to limit or destroy the essence of the individuals involved in the learning process” (pp. 46–47), but for faculty to maintain the relationality with their students consistent with shared professional values that acknowledge counselor preparation as a high-touch (i.e., interpersonal, mentoring, supervising) endeavor. An important part of the successful deployment and maintenance of distance counselor education programs is in continually nurturing a values-based approach; soliciting buy-in from essential stakeholders; seeing and using technology as a tool and not a barrier to enhance connection and learning; and supporting the development of the curriculum, including scheduled revisions based on systematically collected assessment data (CACREP, 2015).

Understanding how to develop curriculum for counselor preparation programs is an essential point where online instructional development and program faculty meet. For example, according to media richness theory (Whitty, 2017), media-rich learning environments lend themselves best to subject areas that are “more ambiguous and open to interpretation” (p. 94) rather than topics that are clear and unambiguous, such as mathematical or scientific formulas. Media-rich learning is characterized by the following four criteria: the capacity for immediate feedback (i.e., clarity of the material), the capacity to transmit multiple cues (i.e., the ability to develop clear and meaningful consensus), language variety (i.e., being able to convey context to complex concepts and ideas), and the capacity of the medium to have a personal focus (i.e., making the learning personal and relevant to the perspectives and needs of the learner). Sibley and Whitaker (2015) point out that some faculty may see technology (including media) as a barrier between them and students rather than a tool to facilitate increased insight, conceptual understanding, and skill mastery, so supporting faculty in experimenting and adopting ways of interacting with technology is a logical starting place. Institutional and program leadership can help faculty become familiar with and invested in learning platforms through initial and ongoing training. Leadership also can help support faculty directly by determining what parts of the classroom can be personalized and modified (including learning activities and assignments) and which parts must remain constant for accreditation standards and learning outcomes assessment.

Additionally, institutional and program leadership are well-advised to develop processes that can monitor faculty activity within the virtual classroom that will reinforce expectations of what faculty should do weekly in the classroom (e.g., faculty must check into the classroom a minimum of four days per week, respond to 75% of student postings with substantive responses in the discussion forum, must review and grade assignments within 7 days, and must respond to student inquiries within 48 hours of receiving them) without coming across as micromanaging and punitive. Leadership may certainly achieve compliance, but they cannot demand engagement, which is based on the discretionary time, attention, effort, and energy faculty devotes to the learning endeavor based on their deeply held values and commitment to the shared vision they have for educating students.

We recommend that leadership strive for transparency in how monitoring of classroom activity is accomplished, its intent, and the use of assessment data. Without transparency, leadership takes on the risk of stoking faculty concerns about negative evaluations and ultimately the security of employment. Establishing peer monitoring through periodic course audits within a collegial, developmental, and supportive approach that is non-threatening to faculty will go a long way to sustaining faculty engagement in the classroom. Some larger distance education programs assign course stewards (i.e., a faculty member responsible for a particular course in the curriculum) who act as the first line of contact for faculty who may have questions about aspects of the course or particular assignments, or who might struggle with a student issue, and can support faculty directly through informal peer mentoring. This becomes especially important for adjunct faculty who need assistance in contextualizing the course into the larger program objectives and feeling invested in the success of program students. These kinds of structures and processes will be helpful if institutional and program leadership is committed to communicating regularly with faculty and promoting an environment of support and accountability.

Finally, institutional and program leadership can encourage a culture of openness to peer review and classroom observation that will help faculty improve their techniques and in a way that is non-threatening (Palmer, 2007). Developing and scheduling events and activities that foster professional renewal and connection between faculty can help strengthen the value of reflective practice in teaching

that is essential throughout a faculty member's career. Palmer (2007) writes the following about the tendency for faculty to remain "private" about their work in the classroom:

Involvement in a community of [andragogical] discourse is more than a voluntary option for individuals who seek support and opportunities for growth. It is a professional obligation that educational institutions should expect of those who teach—for the privatization of teaching not only keeps individuals from growing in their craft, but fosters institutional incompetence as well. By privatizing teaching, we make it hard for educational institutions to become more adept at fulfilling their mission. (p. 148)

Being able to see one's teaching style, approach, and interactions through a colleague's eyes can help faculty make appropriate adjustments and strengthen reflective practice, which is ironically what faculty expect from their students in a distance counseling program. This can model a culture of openness for the entire learning community.

Faculty Role in Student Engagement. We believe that faculty engagement with students and facilitating meaningful engagement of the subject matter in the classroom lies at the heart of student success, both within the program and in establishing a foundation for lifelong learning. Diminishing the distance in a distance counselor education program means that faculty members are eager to connect meaningfully with students, be open to their feedback about what is or is not working for them in the classroom, and take the time and effort to supply a rationale for particular assignments and activities, which includes how these learning experiences are relevant to professional growth. The value faculty offers is largely in their ability to make the curriculum come alive and to engage the student in seeing the subject matter differently than they might assume. This means that faculty members are challenged to use their time and effort strategically in developing therapeutic stories, analogies, and insights that can be utilized for a variety of professional circumstances, clinical situations, cultural encounters, and ethical dilemmas. Recognizing effort and validating students' points of view, including being sensitive to the various personal contexts, shaped by life experience, that students bring to their learning, is essential in nurturing faculty–student relationships. In their theory on group development, Bennis and Shepard (1956) held that group members, prior to engaging in productive, emotionally intimate, affirming interactions with peers, first make decisions about the authority in the room, including accepting how the leader models engagement and psychological safety. It is not inconceivable that this similar dynamic occurs within the virtual classroom as students encounter the faculty leader and make decisions about how to approach the classroom, including using their experience as a springboard into how to behave and what to expect. Student engagement in the classroom is enhanced in three specific areas of faculty engagement: timely, relevant, consistent, and targeted feedback; substantive and relevant responses in discussion forums; and prompt and direct follow-up when necessary with students.

Timely, Relevant, Consistent, and Targeted Feedback. Feedback is the life blood of student development in a counselor preparation program, and students depend on faculty to provide affirming and corrective feedback on numerous levels that is proportional to learning activities and assignments. Proportionality is demonstrated when the faculty aligns feedback with what is most important within the goals and objectives of a course. For example, a common complaint of graduate program adult learners is that faculty members may sometimes become so overly concerned about student adherence to the American Psychological Association (APA) publication style manual that they minimize the content, concepts, insights, and ideas students attempt to convey in their raw and imperfect form. When students encounter this kind of disproportionate feedback, they learn what the faculty member most values and work to meet the implicit expectations, sometimes to the detriment of

learning other and perhaps more important concepts related to the subject matter. When this occurs, students may subjugate all other considerations and simply seek to pass the course, while sacrificing learning and a love for the subject matter. The impression also might inadvertently be conveyed that authority ultimately rules which can reenact the wounds of past academic failures in students who do not view themselves as high performing.

Timely, relevant, consistent, and targeted feedback occurs when faculty members recognize and validate the effort students put into their work; respectfully describe what they see working well within student product and performance; provide a developmentally sensitive critique of the identified concern, while being careful not to overwhelm the student with a list of deficits; and offer respectful, corrective alternatives and offer to meet with the student to clarify anything that might be confusing. Timeliness is best achieved by staying on top of grading and meeting the established time parameters of when assignments will be evaluated and grades returned to the student. Feedback related to counseling or conceptual skills performance (such as in field experience) also includes faculty providing sample language that might be used in demonstrating the particular skill work that can help stimulate students in finding their own voices in how to communicate a particular thing to their clients.

Substantive and Relevant Responses in Discussion Forums. Discussion forums are often the most lively and engaging areas in a virtual classroom and where, often in distance counselor education, a significant part of the virtual teaching and learning takes place. Here students engage in articulating their insights and understanding of the subject matter and engage one another and faculty in respectful and honest interaction. Students can perceive online discussions as less threatening, particularly when verbalizing sensitive material, including values-driven points of view (Ancis, 1998), which often emerge in coursework such as ethics, social and cultural foundations, group counseling, and field experience courses. On the other hand, some students, because they perceive themselves as not being physically seen or heard, might engage in the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2016), wherein they can say things that are controversial or disrespectful based on the belief that being anonymous is the same as being undetectable. Or they may make comments that would be irresponsible in professional communications, which would obviously need to be corrected. Often these discussions are asynchronous, and students have the benefit of being able to clearly think about the subject matter, read, observe, and comprehend the learning resources (e.g., course readings and media), and prepare responses to discussion prompts to meet the requirements of the weekly assignment. Because students develop a routine within the classroom, they have been reinforced in how to respond, including deciding how much time and effort they will expend in developing their responses. In situations where students may simply default to becoming formulaic in their responses, faculty members can help students engage with the material more meaningfully through formative and summative feedback. A much more powerful way to help students engage in the discussion forum is for faculty to model what engaged responses look like and to encourage and invite students to engage more fully in their learning.

Faculty can engage creatively in the discussion forums by embedding YouTube videos, sharing links to TED talks, sharing important and relevant websites, and occasionally sharing humorous memes to help counter the effects of formulaic, routine, and mundane participation. Students can be encouraged to post a short video describing their reactions as a way of lessening the virtual distance and reminding class members of what each other looks like. Often, synchronous meetings occur through interactive video platforms where students are able to hear and see and be heard and seen by others, so encouraging connections with and between students within these learning opportunities can help prepare students to engage with the subject matter more meaningfully (Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011).

A primary benefit of online discussions is that the discussion can also be preserved in an organized fashion for retrieval by students and faculty members (the discussions can be copied and pasted and stored electronically), thus chronicling and capturing the essence of the discussion, reinforcing what students said to their peers (the expression of their own perspectives), highlighting specific and targeted feedback related to the particular topic, and preserving essential references that might be useful for follow-up. Faculty can indirectly assess the efficacy of their responses to determine the degree to which their contributions are adding value or are simply facilitative in getting students to engage in the discussions with each other. This can include the instructor copying and pasting verbatim “chat” in the chat functions of live, synchronous video interactions where students can share insights, suggestions, websites, and other resources for student follow-up and review.

Prompt and Direct Follow-Up with Students. Perhaps the most effective and often time-consuming manifestation of faculty engagement is following up with students with live chats, phone calls, video interactions (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Adobe Connect technology), or face-to-face in real time for a variety of reasons. Often, students get the message from faculty, “If you need me, please reach out to me,” which translates to email interactions to address logistic concerns in the classroom. Students assume that because they need to be resourceful and proactive in their distance program, they will need to take care of themselves, by themselves, without seeking faculty interaction or intervention. Faculty advising and mentoring in residential programs appears clear cut; a student can drop into a faculty member’s office and address a concern or have a chat about professional or personal matters. This function may be more nebulous in a distance education environment unless the faculty makes explicit how they will follow up with students and interact with them personally. Faculty can address questions or concerns and also engage students in important advising regarding professional, ethical, academic, credentialing, and licensure issues; consult about clients they may encounter (if students are in their field experience); and have dedicated focused consultation on these important matters. Helping students feel valued means that faculty give uninterrupted time and resist multitasking, which can sometimes become a default for people who are part of a distance learning community. Faculty can engage students in skills practice and can record these practice sessions for students to retrieve and review as needed. Skills practice and mastery in distance counselor education has been identified as a central function for faculty in their work with students (Fominykh et al., 2018; Shafer et al., 2004; Trepal et al., 2007) and has been identified in helping strengthen self-efficacy beliefs in students (Watson, 2012). Faculty can initiate a student outreach in cases where they might feel concern over a student’s performance or change in classroom behavior. In these ways, the faculty lessens the distance, hold students closer to areas of support, and reassures students that they are practically cared for in their graduate work.

Student Retention and Gatekeeping

Student retention and gatekeeping functions are foundational to ensuring a broad access policy and maintaining quality control of program graduates. Students who struggle with academic and personal concerns need to have direct support from program faculty and administration in times in which they feel most challenged (Kampfe et al., 2006). Counselor educators and supervisors are ethically charged as gatekeepers for the counseling profession (ACA, 2014; Bryant et al., 2013; Dougherty et al., 2015; Dufrene & Henderson, 2009; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Homrich et al., 2014) and the implementation of gatekeeping is systemic and dependent on institutional and program leadership and program faculty to execute successfully. Leadership and faculty have separate but related functions in successful gatekeeping and in student retention.

The identification of students who struggle will almost always be within the oversight of individual faculty members. As noted previously, students can enter a distance counselor education

program with academic challenges and with multiple and competing priorities as they balance family, work, and school responsibilities. CACREP (2015) requires that programs make students aware of counseling services available to them in cases where therapeutic help is warranted. Library services, writing center services, student support services, tutoring and mentoring, and disability services are often utilized to help students succeed in their academic pursuits. Academic leadership is charged with developing and maintaining systems, processes, and protocols that are activated when a student needs help and faculty members are essential in helping students access these services when needed. Faculty engagement is intricately tied to the successful utilization of these services, as students will see faculty as their “go-to” person to help sort through tricky issues and develop an action plan. Clear, two-way communication between faculty and academic leadership can assist in refining these processes and services.

Faculty Roles in Student Retention and Gatekeeping. Students in distress will often revert to actions that are driven by stress and anxiety rather than what is in their best interests, including moving away from those who can help them sort through challenging situations. As noted previously, faculty engagement helps students feel confident that the faculty cares about them not just as students, but as people. Caring and compassion is operationalized when faculty members are proactive in contacting students when there is a change in classroom performance and available when students reach out for assistance. Although it is tempting in a distance counselor education program to refer students to a particular service or give a phone number or a website address, we have found that students sometimes interpret such a referral as “passing the buck” and feel frustrated as this patented answer can be experienced as the typical response in other interactions with the university and program. Meeting students where they are in this context means that the faculty is well-enough aware of the services available that they can talk through the process of what a support contact would look like and what students might expect. This is an important part of developing productive relationships with internal constituents and nurturing contacts within the institution that will help expedite assistance when needed. In this way, faculty credibility is strengthened, and students feel cared for at times when it matters most.

Gatekeeping is a process typically enacted by faculty when there is a concern in student behavior and can be assessed at different points within students’ progress through their respective programs. Because of the highly personal nature of gatekeeping (i.e., identifying concerns and counseling with a student about his or her personal or professional behavior, values, ethics, and attitudes), some faculty may be reluctant to initiate conversations directly with students and might need additional supports from faculty, teams, or committees specially designated to address these student concerns. As previously noted, faculty members need to assess their own professional and personal values in making decisions about how they will engage students in difficult and courageous conversations regarding their professional development. Also, because of the nature of gatekeeping, the faculty is well-advised to document these student conversations in a follow-up email to the student, copied to other appropriate support people to ensure that problem identification, response, and associated actions are clear with identifiable timelines. This will help create the basis for a specific and targeted remediation plan (Dufrene & Henderson, 2009). Just as all students are individuals with specific contexts, all gatekeeping issues are not created equal. Students can present with skill deficits that require remediation in skills work where it is appropriate to assign them to a skills mentor who would help them work through skills challenges. The skills mentor would likely make reports to the gatekeeping committee regarding progress and additional supports if warranted. Students also can present with dispositional concerns that require a different response and intervention. Homrich et al. (2014) developed standards of conduct expected of counselor trainees throughout their programs that

can act as an important foundation for developing dispositional standards that can be disseminated to students in orientation meetings and used periodically throughout key assessment points where dispositional concerns might be present.

It is inaccurate to assume that while some graduate counseling students are already professionals within a mental health setting (e.g., case manager, psychiatric technicians, intake representative), they know how to conduct themselves professionally and what constitutes professional behavior (Dougherty et al., 2015; Homrich et al., 2014). Faculty members who are proactive in modeling and talking explicitly about professionalism can influence students to consider their own behavior and make needed adjustments to be more in line with shared professional values and help them become more reflective in their practice (Rosin, 2015), strengthen their resiliency (Osborn, 2004), and develop effective reflective responding skills (Dollarhide et al., 2012). Faculty modeling of professional dispositions, reflective practice, and self-care will help normalize the commitment to the shared values of the profession and mentor students who may struggle to adopt and adjust to the demands of a profession that relies on professionals to commit and practice ethical values.

Institutional Support for Gatekeeping. The relationships with chief legal counsel and the dean of students are important to program administrators and faculty being able to effectively execute their role as gatekeepers to the counseling profession. Although program leadership makes the decisions about the evaluation process for students—the remediation plans and dismissal recommendations that relate to comportment, academics, and skill development—the decisions to dismiss are usually done in consultation with colleagues from the dean of students’ office and chief legal counsel.

Deans of Students as Gatekeeping Partners. In an era of increased litigiousness, students increasingly appeal the decisions of program leadership, often to the dean of students (Johnson, 2012). It is the role of the dean of students to support the overall mission of the university and enforce the roles of the institution, but this also is the person responsible for building community and being concerned about the emotional and physical welfare of students. Counselor educators work closely with the dean of students when students have violated university or program policy and when they are trying to identify the appropriate ways to respond to conduct and comportment concerns. The relationship between the program faculty and administrators and the dean of students is critical to ensuring that appropriate interventions are put in place to protect the individual student, the greater student body, the community, and the profession.

Chief Legal Counsel as Gatekeeping Partners. Equally important is the relationship between chief legal counsel and the program faculty and administration. The role of the general legal counsel in any organization is to “oversee the legal and compliance function” (McArdle, 2012, para. 2) of the organization. In higher education, it means that counsel also is providing oversight to internal compliance with university policies and making sure that the scope of those policies is not too broadly interpreted. This is very much a risk management role in some settings (McArdle, 2012). University lawyers advise us on the interpretation and the applicability of legal documents such as policy manuals, contracts, and articulation agreements. They also participate in significant dispute mediations and formal dispute resolution (Meloy, 2014).

Counselor educators are mandated to dismiss students who are deemed unfit for the profession and students for whom it is determined that their issues of concern cannot be remediated to the degree that they will be able to provide competent services to diverse clients (ACA, 2014). In addition, counselor educators are required by the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics to participate in ongoing evaluation of those

they supervise and to provide remediation when needed (ACA, 2014). But the code also requires program leaders to dismiss from the training programs those who are unable to provide competent service. CACREP standards require that program faculty and administrators have a developmental and systematic assessment process. Administrators should work with legal counsel to ensure that no comportsment dismissal is viewed as malicious or punitive. General counsel helps stakeholders ensure that a student's rights have been protected in the process and that the dismissal process is a fair one. The challenge is to protect the university, the student, and the public (McAdams et al., 2007).

Counselor educators should receive guidance on institutional policy prior to implementation. There can be frustration on the part of counseling faculty and administrators that general counsel does not support their goals or their professional requirements. However, some of this frustration can be avoided if programs provide general counsel and other administrators with a profile of their responsibilities to the profession and the community with their training programs. It is important for counselor education administration and faculty to develop a relationship with general counsel early based on mutual alliance. Although the administration is not obligated to take the advice of general counsel in how they respond to a student situation, it is advisable to consider their guidance very carefully.

Building and Sustaining Credibility Within the University Culture

Most of the discussion around student selection, development, and retention has been focused on students, faculty, and the program. However, a program's reputation and role in the institutional mission and the program administrators' ability to communicate the value proposition of the program are critical contributors to selection, development, and retention. A full exploration of this idea is beyond the scope of this article, so these ideas will only be discussed briefly, with a charge to counselor educators, especially administrators of programs, to work together to ensure that preparation programs are able to demonstrate innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness so that the institutional and community value of these programs is clear and so that programs are able to secure sufficient resources to effectively educate, evaluate, and develop students.

One of the greatest challenges program administrators face in higher education is competing for limited resources (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). In addition, program administrators are continually challenged to demonstrate the relevance of their programs. As program administrators plan for the sustainability of their future, they must examine the changing needs of the profession to which they are responsible, the mission of the institution, the program mission, the preparation and needs of their students, the needs of the community they are serving, the availability of resources, the regulatory environment impacting professional practice, and the needs of the faculty and administrators providing oversight to the program. Considering the needs of many constituents is a very challenging proposition, but it is one made easier when there are clear guiding principles and philosophies or mission and vision for the program. Although not static, the mission and vision communicate the program's aspirations and intentions to everyone. They also serve to give a program a clear identity in the university community. Using the mission and vision of the program as a reference point serves to inform all decision-making, particularly those decisions that relate to how learners in a program should be educated and which resources are a priority.

Managing the Student-Program Relationship

The changing dynamics of the student-program relationship do not rest entirely with student attitudes. Many of our university operations and recruitment strategies, designed to achieve student enrollment targets to attract the numbers and kinds of students the institutions desire, closely resemble strategies used in business (Hanover Research, 2014). Online programs have been

particularly inclined to employ creative marketing strategies in order to convince potential learners to shift their paradigm from brick-and-mortar institutions as the only source of higher education to online institutions (OnlineUniversities.com, 2013). The unintended consequence is that this approach often fosters a customer–business relationship that can, at times, be counterproductive to the student–faculty/supervisee–supervisor relationship. In the face of critical evaluations of their professional comportment and skill development, students will oftentimes interject commentary about the price of the degree and their expectations that they will complete their academic programs primarily because of the money invested in that education.

We have found that what sometimes exacerbates this dynamic is a racially charged climate, and many students, especially students who are traditionally marginalized, are suspicious of faculty members' motives for identifying student development needs. This is a challenge for online programs where, for much of their academic program, students only have a one-dimensional (i.e., faculty member's written word) understanding of their faculty and administrators. Finally, because of this largely one-dimensional perception, it is more challenging to develop relationships with these students. Focusing on the relationship with students and being relationally oriented is essential. Faculty and administrators, in their efforts to attract, develop, and retain students, should be focused on relationship building at every opportunity, thereby creating an academic environment where students are clear about the expectations of the academic and professional practice community and understand the range of consequences for behavior that is outside those expectations.

Summary

Distance counselor education programs and counselor educators pay as much attention to students' selection, development, and retention as traditional programs, often within a context of general skepticism about the ability to adequately train counseling students at a distance. However, as distance counselor educators, we are committed to educating counselors and counselor educators in this arena because of our commitment to access and opportunity for students and the communities they serve. We believe in all the essential ways that online education is the true equalizer for non-traditional and traditionally marginalized students, and broad-access admissions policies provide us with a vehicle to increase access. Being successful in this arena requires a commitment from program faculty, program administrators, and other university administrators. It also requires us to understand the needs of the online student population and commit to systematic ways of developing the adult learner while acknowledging and employing the individual student's experiences as assets to the developmental process. Although we may employ technology to a greater degree than our colleagues in traditional education settings, we put the professional standards of quality and ethical practice, community and relationship building, and student academic and skill development as the foundation for all activities related to selection, development, and retention.

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