Components of a High-Quality Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision

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The doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision is increasingly sought after by students, with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) reporting a 27% enrollment increase in just a 4-year span. As new programs are started and existing programs sustained, administrators and faculty may be seeking guidance in how to build a high-quality program. Yet no literature currently exists for how doctoral counseling faculty define a high-quality program. This study used a basic qualitative research design to examine faculty perceptions of high-quality doctoral programs (*N* = 15). The authors analyzed data from in-depth interviews with core faculty members at CACREP-accredited doctoral programs. Five themes emerged from the data: relationships, mission alignment, development of a counselor educator identity, inclusiveness of diversity, and Carnegie classification. The findings of this study can be important for faculty and administrators to consider when establishing and maintaining a counselor education and supervision doctoral program.

Keywords: doctoral programs, counselor education and supervision, CACREP, faculty perceptions, high-quality

Doctoral education in counselor education and supervision (CES) is surging, with both the number of programs and enrollment head count increasing over the past few years. According to the most recent annual report from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), there are currently 85 CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs (CACREP, 2019b) compared to 63 in 2014 (CACREP, 2017). This constitutes a 35% increase over a 4-year span. In addition, enrollment in CACREP-accredited doctoral programs has increased from 2,291 in 2014 to 2,917 in 2018, a 27% increase (CACREP, 2017, 2019a). The number of doctoral graduates in CES also increased by 35% between 2017 and 2019, from 355 to 479 (CACREP, 2017, 2019a). A registry does not exist for non–CACREP-accredited programs, and thus the exact number of doctoral programs in CES (i.e, CACREP- and non–CACREP-accredited programs) is unknown.

According to Hinkle et al. (2014), students' motivations to pursue a doctorate in CES include (a) to become a professor, (b) to be a respected professional with job security, (c) to become a clinical leader, and (d) to succeed for family and community amid obstacles. Student motivations appear tempered by CES departmental culture, mentoring, academics, support systems, and personal and related issues that impact their doctoral experience (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

While students enter CES programs with one set of motivations, the programs themselves have their own goals for whom they admit, how they train, and what they perceive as a desired outcome to doctoral

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training. Doctoral programs in CES are considered training grounds for shaping students' professional (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Limberg et al., 2013) and research identities (Perera-Diltz & Sauerheber, 2017). In addition, mentoring and advising relationships are viewed as important to supporting research motivation and productivity (Kuo et al., 2017).

Given students' motivations and expectations for career preparation and advancement, it would make sense that they would want to choose a doctoral program that fits their needs. In addition to matching academic needs, it can also be assumed that as consumers of doctoral education, students would want to choose a high-quality doctoral program in CES. Bersola et al. (2014) conducted a study into factors that influenced admitted doctoral students' (*N* = 540) choice of program. The students in the study were all from programs and departments located within one university. Both underrepresented minority and majority students cited program reputation, institutional reputation, faculty quality, research quality, and faculty access/availability as primary reasons for their choice of doctoral program. Participants reported these factors as more important to their choice of doctoral program than non–quality-related factors such as cost of living, housing, location, and urbanity (Bersola et al., 2014).

There are many program options for CES doctoral study, but little is known about what constitutes a high-quality program in counselor education apart from CACREP accreditation. Although the perceptions of CES doctoral graduates remain unknown, researchers have utilized data from doctoral graduates across disciplines regarding their satisfaction with their programs (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Morrison et al., 2011). Graduates identified aspects such as academic rigor, funding opportunities, mentoring in meeting program requirements, research skill training, and developing a sense of community as contributing to their satisfaction and perceptions of the doctoral programs (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Morrison et al., 2011).

Despite considerable knowledge of doctoral graduates' perceptions, little is known about faculty perspectives on these issues (Kim et al., 2015). There is evidence that faculty perceptions of doctoral program quality can differ from alumni perceptions. Morrison et al. (2011) examined program faculty and alumni perceptions of quality doctoral education in the social sciences. Both faculty and alumni considered training in research skills and diversity characteristics of the program as important to quality. However, alumni also tended to place greater emphasis on the importance of faculty support in meeting program requirements and fostering belonging, whereas program faculty placed greater emphasis on the scholarly reputation of faculty when defining doctoral program quality.

Purpose of the Present Study

Very few studies have explored program faculty perceptions of high-quality doctoral education, and no studies exist in CES specifically. As educators and mentors, faculty who teach in CES programs should be both interested and invested in enhancing educational environments that meet students' career aspirations as well as advancing the profession. Although industry standards for quality exist (e.g., CACREP standards), there is a need to better understand which components CES faculty believe comprise a high-quality doctoral program in CES. The purpose of this study was to address this gap in knowledge.

Methodology

This particular study was conducted as part of a larger comprehensive qualitative study of CES doctoral programs organized by the last author that followed the basic qualitative research design described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). In the basic qualitative research paradigm, the research team

collects, codes, and categorizes qualitative data using the constant comparative method from grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers first use open coding, followed by categorization using axial coding to identify themes in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collection continues until data reach saturation and redundancy. Unlike other qualitative traditions, this qualitative design is not employed to develop theory (i.e., grounded theory), capture the essence of a lived experience (i.e., phenomenology), nor describe cultural and environmental observations (i.e., ethnography; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, researchers using basic qualitative designs seek to collect and analyze qualitative data for the purpose of answering research questions outside other specialized qualitative focus areas. A qualitative design was selected because the authors shared an underlying philosophical belief in the constructivist position that participants' reality was socially co-constructed and that all responses should be given importance regardless of frequency (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

The basic qualitative design was selected because it best fit the purpose of this larger qualitative project. The purpose of the larger qualitative study was to identify current perceptions of doctoral-level counselor educators regarding four major issues pertinent to doctoral counselor education: (a) components of high-quality programs, (b) strategies to recruit and retain underrepresented students, (c) strategies for working with administrators, and (d) strategies for successful dissertation advising. Our study collected and analyzed in-depth interviews with doctoral-level counselor educators to answer a series of research questions that addressed the issues above pertaining to doctoral-level counselor education.

Interview questions were designed to directly answer each research question. The research questions explored in the larger project were as follows: 1) What are the components of high-quality doctoral programs in CES, and what are the most and least important components? 2) Which strategies are doctoral programs using to recruit, support, and retain underrepresented doctoral students from diverse backgrounds, and how successful are those? 3) Which strategies are helpful in gaining initial and ongoing support from administrators when seeking to start a new doctoral program in CES, and how successful are those? and 4) Which strategies help students navigate the dissertation process, and how successful are those?

This manuscript represents the first of four articles from the larger qualitative project that each addressed one of the research questions listed above. This study therefore examined the first research question and sought to identify the components of high-quality doctoral programs in CES. The interview questions directly addressed this research question and were as follows: 1) How might you define a high-quality doctoral program in CES? and 2) What do you believe to be the most and least important components?

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used for an initial identification of eligible volunteers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) from the limited number of doctoral CES programs in the United States that are CACREP accredited. At the time of writing, 85 CACREP-accredited doctoral CES programs existed (CACREP, 2019b). Information-rich cases were sought to promote visibility to the perception of CES faculty. The sampling method was thus designed to identify and recruit participants who had experiences working in doctoral-level counselor education. Inclusion criteria for the study design were as follows: Participants had to 1) be current full-time core faculty members in CES, 2) who were currently working in a doctoral-level counselor education program with CACREP accreditation. The last author created a database of CES doctoral faculty from the 85 CACREP-accredited programs and recruited faculty interest in the study

through email. Faculty initially provided demographic information during a pre-registration phase. The last author reviewed this information to select participants from the pool of eligible volunteers for entry into the study utilizing maximum variation sampling. This sampling technique was employed to gather the perspectives of counselor educators from diverse backgrounds with regard to demographic characteristics and program characteristics. Maximum variation sampling also assisted with avoiding premature saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research team believed that counselor educator perspectives may differ by background. Thus the following criteria were used for selecting participants from among the eligible volunteers: (a) racial and ethnic self-identification, (b) gender self-identification, (c) length of time working in doctoral-level counselor education programs, (d) Carnegie classification of university where the participant was currently working (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019), (e) region of the counselor education program where the participant was currently working, and (f) delivery mode of the counselor education program where the participant was currently working (e.g., in-person, online).

These six characteristics were selected because of indications in the extant literature of the influence of the above factors on CES faculty experiences and/or trends in doctoral program delivery, which may impact perceptions of what constitutes a high-quality doctoral program. Prior studies have identified the influence of racial and ethnic identity (Cartwright et al., 2018), gender identity (Hill et al., 2005), years of experience in doctoral counselor education (Lambie et al., 2014; Magnuson et al., 2009), Carnegie classification (Lambie et al., 2014), and delivery mode (Smith et al., 2015) on faculty perceptions and experiences.

Once participants responded regarding their interest in the study, the last author purposively selected participants one at a time to ensure adequate variation by these characteristics. Participant selection was predicated on meeting variability requirements between participants regarding the six criteria identified above. For example, the first and second participants were selected because of their differences in gender, years of experience, and Carnegie classification. Subsequent participant selection decisions were made on the basis of variant ethnicity and region. Overall participant characteristics interviews were conducted until data seemed to reach saturation and redundancy. Data reached saturation after 15 interviews. Faculty members who provided demographic information during pre-registration were informed that they had not been invited to participate in the interview portion of the study and were thanked for their participation during pre-registration.

A total of 15 participants were interviewed for the study. All 15 participants were from separate and unique doctoral-level CES programs, with no program represented by more than one participant. With regard to self-identified gender, the sample consisted of seven female participants (46.7%) and eight male participants (53.3%). No participants identified as non-binary or transgender. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual ($n = 14$, 93.3%), with one participant identifying as bisexual (6.7%). Eleven participants (73.3%) self-identified as Caucasian, with multiracial/multiethnic ($n = 1$, 6.7%), African American ($n = 1$, 6.7%), Asian ($n = 1$, 6.7%), and Latinx ($n = 1$, 6.7%) ethnic backgrounds also represented.

The sample was experienced, working as full-time faculty members for an average of 19.7 years (*SD* = 9.0 years) and a median of 17 years, ranging from 4 to 34 years. Participants spent most of those years working in doctoral-level CES programs (*M* = 17.3 years, *SD* = 9.2 years, *Mdn* = 16 years), ranging from 3 to 33 years. More than half of participants ($n = 9$, 60%) spent their entire careers working in doctoral-level CES programs. Eight of the participants (53.3%) currently worked at programs in the Southern region, with two participants (13.3%) each from the North Atlantic, North Central, and Western regions. One participant (6.7%) currently worked in the Rocky Mountain region. Five participants (33.3%) had

worked in multiple doctoral programs in two or more regions. Twelve participants (80%) currently worked in face-to-face or brick-and-mortar programs, and three participants (20%) currently worked in online or hybrid programs. Regarding Carnegie classification, nine participants (60%) currently worked at Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity (i.e., R1) institutions, two participants (13.3%) currently worked at Doctoral Universities – High Research Activity (i.e., R2) institutions, and four participants (26.7%) currently worked at universities with the Master's Colleges and Universities: Larger Programs designation (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019).

Positioning

The last author conducted all interviews with the selected participants. The author had etic status, in that they had not worked in a doctoral-level CES program previously. Because the author was a member of the counselor education community, etic status around the topic of doctoral-level CES was important to bracketing biases during the interview process. The interviewer followed the interview protocol included in the Appendix for all interviews to ensure that data were gathered for each research question to the highest extent possible.

Procedure

After receiving approval from their IRB, the last author created a database of doctoral-level counselor educator contacts who worked at the CES programs accredited by CACREP. The last author used the CACREP (2019b) website directory for recruitment purposes. Recruitment emails were sent to one faculty member at each of the 85 accredited programs. A total of 34 faculty responded with an interest in being interviewed (40% response rate). Of those 34 faculty, 15 were selected for interviews on the basis of maximal variation.

Interview Protocol

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked a series of demographic questions that addressed the characteristics mentioned above (i.e., self-identified race and ethnicity, gender, sexual/affective orientation, years as a faculty member, years working in doctoral-level counselor education programs, number of doctoral programs the participant had worked in, and regions of the programs in which the counselor educator had worked). Participants were asked to self-identify their demographic information at the beginning of the interview to clarify demographic information that had been previously collected during pre-registration, and to ensure that participants were able to adequately self-identify.

Following the demographic section, the interview protocol featured a series of eight in-depth interview questions that addressed the research questions of the larger qualitative study. Interview questions were developed in accordance with Patton's (2015) recommendations. Per Patton (2015), the interview questions were open-ended, as neutral as possible, avoided "why" questions, and were asked one at a time. The interview protocol was piloted with a faculty member in a doctoral-level CES program prior to the study commencing. Several double-barreled questions were split into two separate questions to ensure that only one question was asked at a time. The interview protocol followed conventions of semi-structured interviewing, with sparse follow-up questions permitted to the main interview questions to ensure understanding of participant responses (Patton, 2015).

Prior to each interview, participants reviewed and signed the informed consent agreement approved by the last author's IRB. Participants were sent the interview questions ahead of time. Each interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes. All but one interview (i.e., 14 interviews) were recorded using the Zoom online platform built-in recording feature. One interview was recorded via a Sony audio

digital recorder instead of the Zoom platform, as the interview occurred in person during a professional conference. All demographic information and recordings were assigned an alphabetical identifier (e.g., A, B, C). The last author was the sole individual who knew the identity of participants attributed to alphabetical identifiers. Participant identity was thus blinded to subsequent transcribers and coders.

Transcription

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by graduate students at the last author's university, who had no familiarity with participants. Transcribers received transcription training prior to the study and received further training and direction by the last author prior to and during the transcription process. Once each transcript had been completed in full, the last author reviewed transcripts to ensure accuracy and sent the transcripts to the interviewees to conduct a member check. After member checks had been conducted, sections of transcripts were cut and pasted into separate documents for each of four research teams to code and analyze. The research teams were organized by research question (i.e., components of high quality; recruitment, support, and retention of underrepresented students; working with administrators; successful dissertation advising). Transcribed interviews for each research team were uploaded to separate secure folders in a secure encrypted online data management software system.

Data Analysis

The last author met with members of all four research teams collectively to ensure consistency in the coding approach. The last author developed several guidance documents for the research teams to use and created instructions for coding the data, which included guidance such as each research team meeting to bracket biases and identify any a priori codes prior to initial coding of the data, following Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) guidelines. Research teams were instructed to identify emergent *in vivo* codes using verbatim line-by-line open coding when possible to avoid interpreting data too early during the coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of coding was to identify themes within and between participants. The four research teams were instructed to meet weekly over a period of several months to code and analyze data specific to their research question. Research teams coded each of the first three transcripts together as a team during weekly live coding sessions using the Zoom online platform, prior to individual team members coding the remaining transcripts separately. Codes were noted on the transcripts themselves, and then the lead team member compiled the codes into the code book. From there, the categories were developed and reviewed by all team members. Discrepancies in coding were resolved using coding consensus, with the research team documenting how they resolved any discrepancies in coding. Weekly meetings were required even when individual team members were coding separately to facilitate sharing their coding experience, clarifying questions about codes, establishing consensus on any parts of the transcript with complicated coding, and following the coding approach with consistency across coders. The last author created a coding database template that each research team was required to use, to ensure consistency in how coding was documented and categorized. These approaches were designed to improve consistency in coding within and between the four research teams. Each of the four research teams only coded and analyzed data pertinent to their assigned research question.

A coding team chair was identified for each of the four research teams to ensure that the coding and analysis approach was followed consistently and to organize the work of the team. Each research team organized codes into categories and eventually collapsed codes into themes using axial coding after all 15 transcripts had been coded. Themes also were analyzed by demographic and program characteristics of interviewees to assess the potential influence of background characteristics on responses. Each research team recorded memos during collective team meetings and during

individual coding of transcripts. The last author also created memos during collective meetings with all four research teams. The last author created memos immediately following interviews, though they refrained from sharing the memos with the research teams to avoid biasing the coding and analysis process. Several research teams used software platforms to analyze the data, and were permitted to select their own software platforms for data analysis.

Researcher Positioning for the Current Study

For this study, the first five authors comprised the coding team that examined the research question pertinent to the components of high-quality programs. The sixth and last author conducted the interviews and did not code data for the reasons cited above. Among the five coding team members, both etic and emic perspectives were represented. Two of the authors had an emic perspective, as they had previously worked at a doctoral CES program during their faculty career. Three of the authors held an etic perspective as doctoral students who had not yet worked as full-time faculty members. Coding team members were from different counselor education programs to reduce bias.

With regard to other demographic characteristics, four members of the coding team identified as Caucasian, and one member identified as African American. Three team members identified as female, and two identified as male. The team members were from a wide range of programs. One doctoral student was from a very high research-intensive university; one faculty member and two doctoral students were from a research-intensive university; and one faculty member was from a private, nonprofit online university.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was enhanced through procedures identified in the literature (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility was addressed through considering the positioning of the interviewer and research team members. Emic and etic perspectives were sought for each research team to reduce the potential for bias. The interviewer and research team each bracketed their biases prior to their involvement in the study and continued the process of bracketing throughout the study to reduce bias. One bias the researchers bracketed, for example, was their involvement and experiences as faculty and students in a CES program. All interviewees worked at separate CES programs to avoid overrepresentation of data. Research team members were also from different CES programs to reduce bias in coding and analysis. Emergent, *in vivo*, verbatim line-by-line open coding was used by each research team to avoid interpreting data too early during the coding process and thus to reduce interpretation bias. The interviewer did not participate in coding the data to minimize bias through being too close to the data. The last author also clearly identified and trained the research teams, with the goal of enhancing consistency. Member checks were used to enhance credibility, and the last author also kept an audit trail of the process. Purposive sampling and thick description was used to ensure adequate representation of perspectives and thus establish adequate transferability and dependability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Results

Through data analysis, five categories emerged to capture the components that the participants described as critical to ensuring a high-quality doctoral program: *relationships*, *mission alignment*, *development of a counselor educator identity*, *inclusiveness of diversity*, and *Carnegie classification*. Each theme is described below, with support provided for each theme via participants' quotes.

Relationships

The first major theme we identified from the data was the importance of relationships. This theme appears to be a critical component to having a high-quality program. Participants reported that supportive faculty–student and student–student relationships are important to high quality.

Faculty–Student Relationships

Participants emphasized the importance of close mentoring relationships between doctoral faculty and doctoral students. Several participants cited the quality of mentoring between faculty and students as the "most important factor" in a high-quality doctoral program. We identified several subthemes that appeared to influence the quality of faculty–student relationships. Smaller cohort sizes, close mentoring, faculty workload, and the match between the student and their dissertation chair all seemed to be important factors in faculty–student relationships. In order to support the faculty and student relationship, attention to cohort sizes and the overall size of the program is considered critical. One participant stated, "If you view your doctoral program as a cash cow, and you're bringing in a lot of students, I think you've lost something." They further clarified that advising and chairing dissertations for more than two doctoral students per year would lessen the quality of the mentoring experience. Some participants reported that consideration should be given for admitting students who value the close mentoring experience.

Faculty time and resources seem foundational to the establishment of high-quality faculty–student relationships. Faculty reported that they need time to focus on mentoring students. One participant stated that "the amount of time spent between faculty member and doctoral student" strongly influence the quality of the mentoring relationship. Consideration for faculty teaching loads and service expectations is therefore important within the context of having adequate time to devote to mentoring.

Participants also noted the importance of fit between the faculty mentor and their student mentee. High-quality mentoring relationships are predicated on the match between student goals, research interests, and experience levels with their assigned dissertation chair and/or advisor's own goals, interests, and experiences. One participant reported that "there's a lot to mentorship," elaborating that faculty members must mentor students in "how to get involved in a profession; how to develop their voice as a counselor, as a teacher, as a clinical supervisor, as a researcher; and how to manage themselves professionally."

Student–Student Relationships

In addition to cohort size, the cohort model was identified as important to facilitating supportive student-to-student relationships during the program. Participants reported that the cohort model facilitated deep, lasting, and "familial" relationships. Strong relationships with other doctoral students in the cohort were crucial during stressful periods. As one participant noted, "In addition to school, life is out there and stuff happens and people go through difficult times, with divorce and deaths and job losses and things like that. And having that support system built in is incredibly important."

Mission Alignment

The next theme encompassed the importance of doctoral programs developing and following a mission statement with clearly defined doctoral student outcomes. As one participant stated, "A high-quality doctoral program in counselor ed and supervision has a clarity of purpose and focus. The program knows what its mission is, in terms of the product they want to produce with the doctoral students." Another participant reported that "a high-quality doctoral program has a really clear mission, so the program knows who they're trying to prepare and what they do well. And

then the program works the mission." This participant elaborated that although the mission of a doctoral program could vary, high-quality programs ensure execution of the mission regardless of mission type: "So if they're preparing researchers, they work that mission. If they're really focusing on preparing people just for teaching institutions, they work the mission." This theme had several subthemes, including faculty buy-in, the importance of aligning the program's mission with the university's mission, and institutional support.

Faculty Buy-In

Several participants noted that faculty buy-in is essential to executing the mission of the program. This concept was expressed as more than general faculty alignment with the program mission. Faculty buy-in was defined as input, ownership, and commitment to the mission of the program. As one participant reported, high-quality programs have developed a culture whereby "everybody feels like they have some ownership in the doc program, and that everybody has a voice." A team approach to carrying out the program's mission and purpose requires doctoral faculty members to "realize that 'winning' as a team is providing the best training experience for students" rather than "maximizing their vita for their own promotability or transferability to another institution." Thus, high-quality programs require faculty members to align their personal goals in order to fulfill the program's mission.

Without this input, ownership, and commitment, the program is likely to "struggle" because of problematic faculty dynamics such as faculty working in isolation and program leaders (e.g., the program director) "doing all of the work." Program faculty being aligned with the mission seemed to result in a faculty team that worked together well, could grow together, and supported students in a united way. In the participants' experience, when faculty had strong relationships and worked together, the quality of student preparation and the overall program quality increased.

Some participants noted that faculty buy-in to a program mission that emphasizes the role of the doctoral program in leading the profession is important. Faculty involvement in professional leadership is thus a key component of the program's leadership mission. One participant remarked, "[We] held a sense of pride in challenging ourselves to be leaders in the counseling profession," and noted that "if we're going to have a strong program, we need to be engaged and involved as faculty."

Alignment With the University's Mission

Participants reported that the counseling department's or program's mission statement should be in alignment with the broader university. Participants described how critical it is for the department to feel a connection to the mission of the university and for the students to share that connection. Mission alignment impacts both faculty and student feelings of connectedness to the program and broader university, along with university support and the resulting resources available to students.

Institutional Support

Participants reported that the program's alignment with the university's mission is crucial to securing institutional support for the program. Funding faculty lines, reduced faculty course loads, student graduate assistantships, conference attendance, specialized accreditation, and other aspects of the program are more likely to occur when the university feels the program reflects its own mission and purpose. One participant stated that "you need to garner respect from your program administration." They elaborated that in order to "resource" the program adequately, the program needs to justify its existence through alignment with the university's mission and purpose so that the university sees value in the program even when the program is unlikely to be a "money maker." This financial support is considered crucial to operating a high-quality program. Administration buy-in

helps to ensure that faculty members have the necessary resources, which in turn ensures a quality experience. As another participant stated, "I think that capacity and resources are key."

Development of a Counselor Educator Identity

The next theme to emerge was the importance of doctoral students developing a strong identity as counselor educators. As one participant said, the mission of a high-quality program is to prepare students "to step into a role as an educator." Some participants therefore equated high-quality programs with those that intentionally prepared counselor educators. Participants described a variety of curricular and extracurricular experiences within the program that assisted doctoral students to develop a strong professional identity as counselor educators.

Curricular Experiences

Several participants emphasized the importance of having formal curricular experiences in all three areas of teaching, research, and service as part of the doctoral degree program. As one participant stated, "I think you define your program by how well prepared your students are as evidenced by their success in these areas . . . of faculty activities, which [are] teaching, scholarship, and service." A sole focus on one of these areas was considered inadequate by several participants. For example, even participants working at research-intensive institutions suggested that a sole focus and overemphasis on research at the expense of teaching and service (i.e., leadership and advocacy) may not assist students to develop broad knowledge and skills as counselor educators. In addition to training students broadly, some participants thought that curricular experiences needed to be rigorous. As one participant stated, "I assume that any high-quality doctoral program is rigorous— that you're not letting students just do personal growth."

Some participants also associated the program's accreditation status (i.e., CACREP accreditation) with assisting students to develop their professional identity. One participant listed CACREP's five core doctoral standards (i.e., counseling, leadership and advocacy, research, supervision, and teaching) as each being an essential part of the formal doctoral curriculum in counselor education: "I really believe in those five doctoral standards. I believe that those are the areas in which I expect to see scholar leaders at very high levels of competence."

Extracurricular Experiences

Participants reported providing a range of extracurricular experiences to engage students in professional identity development. Participants reported assisting students in attending conferences, sharing in publications, co-teaching classes, and providing opportunities for service. One participant stated that "doctoral study also involves writing with faculty. It involves presenting and publishing your own work. It involves being involved in program governance." Graduate assistantships are also important when they help students to "gain practical experience and meaningful experience."

These experiences were often part of the "informal curriculum" of the program and were conceptualized by participants as exceeding minimum standards and requirements. Within this theme, it was also recognized that CACREP accreditation standards should be considered the minimum standards and that students need to have experiences beyond the minimum requirements. One participant said that high-quality programs provide experiences beyond "the cookie-cutter bare minimum that CACREP requires" and gave students training that created "pathways towards something that makes you unique in this field, so that you can contribute above and beyond when you get in the classroom." Another participant said that "it's going beyond just the course work,

it's going beyond the CACREP standards, that makes a difference." Participants reported that these extracurricular experiences are components of high-quality programs because they assist students with developing a counselor educator identity.

Graduate Outcomes

Some participants also placed emphasis on the importance of graduate outcomes in determining a high-quality program. Consistent with the earlier subtheme of curricular experiences, participants felt that high-quality programs ensured that students were skilled in the three areas of research, service, and teaching: "I think if you take a look at your graduates and if, overall, they show strong evidence of success in all three of those areas, I think you have a high-quality doctoral program." Participants believed that students would lack a "rounded doctoral experience" without these experiences and would not be adequately prepared for future employment as a core faculty member.

Some participants believed that high-quality programs had graduates who were securing faculty positions after graduation. One participant explained that a high-quality doctoral program has positive outcomes related to faculty employment and tenure: "Your students excel, by evidence of being employed in high-quality programs, by getting tenure, and by evidence of quality teaching."

Inclusiveness of Diversity

The next theme encompassed the importance of diversity in doctoral counselor education. Participants reported that high-quality programs create a diverse learning community, both in terms of cultural diversity of faculty and students, as well as in diversity of experiences. They have a broad range of faculty teaching courses and allow for a spectrum of viewpoints and perspectives. Participants proposed that students' engagement with diverse faculty and students is critical to ensuring high quality.

Faculty Diversity

Several participants reported that high-quality programs have a diverse faculty. This was perceived as central to the student experience. Within this theme, diversity was inclusive of cultural identity, as well as diversity of experiences. Participants indicated that doctoral students need to learn from faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds and diverse professional experiences. According to one participant, "I do think high-quality counselor education programs in particular should not only possess the demographic qualities, but the ideologic qualities of diversity and even professional pursuit of diversity." This exposure to diversity in faculty backgrounds and experiences is vital to the growth of students, as it exposes them to different perspectives. One participant proposed that high-quality programs intentionally attend to diversity within the faculty and attempt to recruit lecturers and guest speakers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to address any gaps in faculty diversity: "If you don't have diversity in faculty, then you make sure to bring in diversity so that it's not just a bunch of White faculty preparing students in Eurocentric viewpoints."

Student Diversity

Participants also indicated that diversity in the student body is critically important to high quality. Program faculty seemed especially responsible for successfully recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. As one participant indicated, "They should bring diversity of thought, and diversity of experience, and diversity of region. People who bring something to the table beyond your master's program are critical." Faculty need to ensure, through admissions, that there is ample representation of diverse backgrounds and experiences within a cohort group. Faculty therefore also need to avoid screening out qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds during admissions.

Carnegie Classification

The final theme represented participant viewpoints regarding the role of Carnegie classification (i.e., The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education) in doctoral program delivery. Participants held a range of views related to Carnegie classification, often stemming from their own institutional work. Participants believed that high-quality programs reflected the classification of their institution, as aligning with the institutional mission was associated with institutional support (similar to the mission alignment theme). There were two dimensions within this category: institutional type and Carnegie classification, and focus areas impacted by Carnegie classification.

Institution Type and Carnegie Classification

Participants acknowledged that a variety of doctoral program types exist in CES. As one participant stated, "When you talk about a doctoral program in counseling, you can have a doctoral program in a heavy research university with a Research 1 Carnegie classification. You can also have a more practice-oriented PhD." Participants perceived that doctoral program types often reflect the type of institution where the doctoral program resides. Doctoral programs that emphasize research primarily exist at research universities, whereas doctoral programs that emphasize teaching primarily exist within teaching institutions.

Carnegie classification seemed important in determining the type of doctoral program that was offered at the institution. Participants at high and very high research-intensive universities (i.e., R2 and R1 Carnegie classifications) typically reported that their institution offered research-oriented doctoral programs, whereas participants working at doctoral/professional universities and master's-level universities reported that their institution typically offered teaching-oriented doctoral programs. Carnegie classification thus was a strong influence on the type of CES doctoral program offered at the institution. As one participant said, "I think the Carnegie classification is actually pretty critical. Because the Carnegie classification, alongside state politics, determine where the ship of the institution is heading. And the counseling program needs to mirror the ship."

Participants reported that the university's expectations for faculty promotion and tenure were influenced by institutional type and Carnegie classification. These expectations shaped faculty activities. One participant explained that "at a Research 1 university, there's a huge expectation for securing grants and publishing and refereed journal articles. At a lower level there's less pressure to do that. And then at a teaching university, there's hardly any pressure." University expectations for tenure and promotion thus shaped faculty activities, which in turn affected the program faculty's approach to training doctoral students. For example, faculty members who were more involved in research seemed more likely to value research training in the doctoral program in which they worked: "So what we are good at is preparing students to be researchers. There's a sense of trying to focus hard on helping students develop research competencies, because that is what the program faculty is focused on."

This mirroring between the institution's classification and the doctoral program type is important to securing institutional financial support in the form of faculty lines, student assistantships, and so forth. Without this mirroring, the program is at risk of lacking institutional support, which would have an impact on its quality. Thus, the quality of the program is predicated on the program's alignment with the institutional mission (as mentioned in the earlier theme of mission alignment), and the institutional mission is itself associated with the institution's Carnegie classification.

Focus Areas Impacted by Carnegie Classification

As mentioned above, the degree to which doctoral programs focus on research during the program seems to vary by university classification. Participants from research-intensive universities (i.e., R1 or R2 designation) valued research training above other elements of the curriculum. In contrast, participants from teaching institutions (i.e., Master's Colleges and Universities: Larger Programs designation) valued training in teaching and supervision and did not believe that research training should dwarf other aspects of training. Some participants proposed that research and publication should have a reduced emphasis in order for teaching and leadership to have a central focus in program delivery. Even though the emphasis on research varied by institution type, participants seemed to value the production of quality research regardless of institutional classification. Several participants reported that a high-quality doctoral program goes "above and beyond" CACREP minimum requirements in a manner that "expands counseling knowledge" and "allows for rigorous, quality research and really contributes uniquely to the profession." Several participants at different types of institutions spoke to the importance of doctoral students publishing during their time in the program and early in their careers.

Leadership training was also cited as an important component of high-quality programs across participants regardless of their institution and thus seemed to be a common theme for both research- and teaching-oriented institutions. Participants who valued leadership training during doctoral study worked in both research-intensive and teaching-focused institutions. As one participant from an R1 institution stated, "Our graduates need to be able to build programs, to run them successfully, to teach and train students in a way that they also produce the best clinicians that can go into the field." This participant added that high-quality programs therefore train students "beyond the publish-or-perish paradigm."

Discussion

This study was part of a larger qualitative project that explored the perceptions of CACREP-accredited program faculty (*N* = 15) regarding topics pertinent to doctoral education. In this study, a research team composed of the first five authors analyzed faculty descriptions of perceived components of a high-quality doctoral program. The research team identified five categories that emerged from the data: relationships, mission alignment, development of a counselor educator identity, inclusiveness of diversity, and Carnegie classification. With regard to participant characteristics, differences in responses were related to the Carnegie classification of the participant's current institution of employment. Contrary to previous research, no differences in participant perceptions were found by gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, length of time working at a doctoral program, region, or delivery mode.

Consistency and Divergence in Themes by Institutional Type and Classification

Across these themes, consistencies and divergences were found regarding how participants perceived high quality. Divergences appeared to be influenced by institutional type and Carnegie classification.

Consistency in Themes by Institutional Type and Classification

Regardless of institutional type and classification, participants broadly supported the importance of faculty–student mentoring relationships, student–student supportive relationships, having a clear mission statement that includes faculty buy-in and commitment, program and institutional mission alignment, securing university financial support for faculty lines and student assistantships among other costs, establishing a learning community with faculty and students who possess diversity in cultural background and ideological thought, helping students to develop a counselor educator identity, and producing high-quality research.

These findings are consistent with the extant literature. Studies into doctoral student experiences both in CES and across higher education have previously reported that faculty–student mentoring, student–student support systems, departmental culture, and curricula impact the quality of the student experience (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Kuo et al. (2017) found that mentoring and advising relationships were pivotal for research motivation and producing quality research during doctoral study. Similarly, Perera-Diltz and Sauerheber (2017) suggested that developing research competencies was an important component of doctoral study in counselor education. Professional identity development is another important component of doctoral training (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Limberg et al., 2013). The inclusiveness of varying aspects of diversity within the students, faculty, and curriculum is an important finding and one that is echoed within the counseling profession's code of ethics and professional standards (e.g., American Counseling Association, 2014; CACREP, 2015).

There is scant literature in CES that focuses specifically on the clarity of the mission, mission alignment with the university, and faculty buy-in to the mission. Adkison-Bradley (2013) broached the idea of faculty buy-in through the concept of visionary thinking, proposing that faculty members possessing this type of thinking are more likely to advocate or "buy in" to the program's mission and work to sustain a resource-rich and quality program.

Divergence in Themes by Institutional Type and Classification
The main divergence involved the importance of research in relation to training in teaching. Participants from research-intensive programs placed more emphasis on research training at the expense of other focus areas. When considering the importance of mission alignment with the institution's classification and mission, it seems possible that high quality can be defined somewhat differently, based on institution type. For example, a research-intensive university should have a greater emphasis on research training, as it needs to reflect the overall mission of the university (i.e., research focused). If a doctoral program at a research-intensive university does not have a strong research emphasis, it may not be of high quality because of the potential impacts to university financial support. In contrast, a teaching university (e.g., Master's Colleges and Universities: Larger Programs designation) can focus more on teaching than research training and still be of high quality because the institution does not have a research emphasis and therefore the program's mission of emphasizing teacher training is in alignment with the university's mission. From this study, it seems important that faculty members therefore consider institutional mission and the degree of institutional emphasis on research training when seeking to start or sustain a doctoral program in counselor education.

Implications for Administrators and Program Faculty
The resulting themes from this study move us closer to identifying the components that contribute to high-quality doctoral programs in CES. It appears that when programs can (a) facilitate supportive faculty–student and student–student relationships, (b) create a clear mission that faculty are committed to and that aligns with and supports the broader institution, (c) establish a diverse learning community, (d) assist students to develop a professional identity as counselor educators, (e) ensure the production of quality research, and (f) provide leadership training during doctoral study, they will be of high quality.

Results from this study highlight several key components of high-quality doctoral programs. Our findings mirror some of the essential elements of the CACREP standards. Thus, supporting and sustaining these quality elements through regular re-accreditation cycles is paramount. However, these findings could also support other areas of focus in program evalutaion. For example, administrators and faculty members should be intentional when designing a mission statement that aligns with the broader institutional mission and has a clear plan for recruiting and retaining a diverse learning

community, developing professional identity, and providing leadership opportunities. Recent research has identified program evaluation training lacking in counselor education programs for doctoral students (Sink & Lemich, 2018), suggesting a need for increased attention in this area.

Implications for Prospective Doctoral Students

For students seeking programs, they are advised to appraise whether programs provide supportive mentorship and formal and informal learning opportunities, have a curricula focus that best fits their goals especially with regard to research preparation, and prioritize both faculty and student diversity. Burkholder (2012) suggested that student persistence and retention was bolstered by faculty communicating a genuine personal interest in students. Students who perceive a humanistic atmosphere from counselor education faculty are more likely to persist in counseling programs (Burkholder, 2012). Students should therefore consider their own academic and personal interests and needs and whether the program meets these. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) also reported previously that the match between student interests and program offerings was an important predictor of doctoral student persistence.

Consideration for institution type and classification also appears important to prospective doctoral student decision making. For example, a student who wishes to develop a research identity may be best suited for a doctoral program at a research-intensive university that prioritizes research, whereas a doctoral program at a teaching institution may be a better fit for a student who has less proclivity toward research and who is seeking to develop specialized teaching competencies. Hinkle et al. (2014) previously reported that students typically sought doctoral study to become a professor or clinical leader, which seems consistent with how participants in this study identified focus areas of high-quality doctoral programs.

Lastly, faculty members should be sensitive to the needs of doctoral students as they engage in multiple roles and relationships such as co-teaching, supervising master's students, and the dissertation process (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Dickens et al., 2016; Dollarhide et al., 2013). This is especially important for students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., minority race/ethnicity and sexual/affective orientation), who are often engaged in their communities and have more roles to balance (Cartwright et al., 2018).

Limitations and Implications for Future Studies

There were several limitations to this study despite the research team's intention to perform a rigorous inquiry. The researchers' bias and reactivity, which are common threats to validity in qualitative research (Bickman & Rog, 2008), were potential influencers at several study stages. Therefore, the research team, which consisted of two counselor educators and three doctoral students with doctoral program experience, attempted to establish trustworthiness and eliminate threats to validity by bracketing biases, taking methodological notes, and using consensus coding.

Limitations may have also impacted the transferability of study findings. As with most qualitative studies, the sample was small ($N = 15$) and could even be considered small for the chosen method of inquiry according to some sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Morse, 1994). Therefore, the findings may not be fully transferable (i.e., generalizable) to other CES doctoral faculty. When using maximal variation sampling, a research team intentionally seeks to identify extreme differences in participant characteristics to avoid early redundancy (Suri, 2011). This can result in over- or underrepresentation of overall sample demographic characteristics compared to the population.

Intriguingly, the sample in this study was adequately representative of faculty and program characteristics. For example, the sample was overrepresented by faculty who self-identified as White (73.3%), which closely mirrored CACREP (2019a) data regarding faculty racial/ethnic composition across CACREP-accredited programs (73.6% White faculty). Regarding Carnegie classification, 73.3% of participants worked at research-intensive (i.e., R1 or R2) institutions. This was consistent with institutional classification of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs. As of 2019, 71.8% of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs were at R1 and R2 institutions. Another potential area of overrepresentation was participant experience as a faculty member. Participant experience ranged from 4 to 34 years, with an average of 19.7 years ($SD = 9.0$). This average seemed fairly high. Unfortunately, the exact number of years of experience of core faculty in CACREP-accredited programs is unknown, which limits analyses regarding the sample representation of years of experience relative to the overall population of doctoral-level counselor educators.

The current study examined faculty perceptions of components of high-quality doctoral programs in CES. It would be important for future studies to survey current students or recent graduates of these doctoral programs to ascertain their perspectives on these components. As consumers of this advanced degree, students may have important perspectives on this issue. In addition, the current study only interviewed faculty who worked in CACREP-accredited CES programs. As accreditation standards define curriculum, these faculty may have been largely influenced by program components that are required by the current iteration of the CACREP standards. Faculty who work in non–CACREP-accredited programs may have different perceptions about what constitutes a high-quality doctoral program in CES.

Conclusion

The number of CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs, enrolled doctoral students, and doctoral graduates have increased substantially within a fairly short (i.e., 4-year) period (CACREP, 2017, 2019a). As doctoral programs are increasingly developed and maintained, administrators and faculty may benefit from insights about how to build a program that is of high quality. By attending to high quality, a counselor education doctoral program is likely to provide a more optimal experience for the students who choose to enter the program. The findings from this study therefore may be important for administrators and faculty to consider when creating or attempting to sustain a doctoral program in CES.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. For context, please briefly describe how you self-identify and your background. This information will be aggregated; individual participant responses will not be associated with any quotes in subsequent manuscripts.

   Gender:
   Sexual/Affective Orientation:
   Race and Ethnicity:
   Years as a Faculty Member in a Counselor Education Program:
   Years as a Faculty Member in a <u>Doctoral</u> Counselor Education Program:
   Number of Doctoral Counselor Education Programs You Have Worked In:
   Regions of Doctoral Counselor Education Programs You've Worked In:

2. How might you define a "high-quality" doctoral program?

3. What do you believe to be the most important components? The least important?

4. How have you helped students to successfully navigate the dissertation process?

5. Which strategies has your program used to recruit underrepresented students from diverse backgrounds? How successful were those?

6. Which strategies has your program used to support and retain underrepresented students from diverse backgrounds? How successful were those?

7. What guidance might you provide to faculty who want to start a new doctoral program in counseling with regards to working with administrators and gaining buy-in?

8. What guidance might you provide to faculty who want to sustain an existing doctoral program in counseling with regards to working with administrators and gaining ongoing support?

9. Last question. What other pieces of information would you like to share about running a successful, high-quality doctoral program?

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