



National Career Development Association

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National Career Development Association Leadership Academy Project Summary

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Leadership Academy Class: LA V, 2010-2011

Project Title: Determining the Influences on the Professional Identity of Counseling Graduate Students

Project Description: I examined what factors (i.e., faculty, peers, practicum/internship supervisors, personal career goals) during counseling graduate school influenced students' professional identity development, practicum/internship experiences to seek, professional memberships held, conferences attended and career paths followed by using a 51-item electronic survey. Included in the survey were questions measuring counseling graduate students' perceptions of the career counseling field (items addressing career counseling professional identity behaviors, settings were career counselors work, types of issues addressed in career counseling and what would increase their likelihood of entering the career counseling profession). I sent the survey to CACREP-accredited career counseling programs and general CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

Demographic Information

$N=244$; CACREP career counseling program $n = 49$ (20% of respondents); General CACREP counseling program $n = 188$ (77% of respondents).

Of those respondents, 181 indicated they were in an MEd or EdS program (74%) and 20 indicated they were in a doctoral program (8%). Twenty-one respondents indicated they were male (9%) and 218 indicated they were female (89%). The majority of respondents were between the ages of 18-30 years old ($n = 158$, 65%) and the majority of respondents were from the Southern and Midwestern regions of the United States ($n = 168$, 70%; $n = 29$, 20% respectively). For race and ethnicity, 192 participants indicated they were White (79%), 28 respondents indicated they were Black (11%), eight indicated they were Latino/a (3%) with less than 1% each for Native American, Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern/Arabic, Biracial, Multiracial or other. The majority of respondents had taken one ($n = 52$, 21%) or two ($n = 120$, 49%) career development/career counseling courses in their graduate programs with about 26% of respondents ($n = 65$) indicating they had taken 3 or more career courses.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine profiles of the participants and their perceptions on professional identity development and counseling professional identity behaviors; Mann-Whitney U Tests to compare the perceptions of the students in CACREP-accredited career counseling & general CACREP-accredited counseling programs; exploratory factor analysis to examine

factor structure of the items describing career counseling professional identity behaviors; t-test analyses and Mann-Whitney U Tests examining the significance of career counseling professional identity behaviors; and linear regression to examine variables that are associated with career counseling professional identity behaviors.

Summary/Conclusion:

Ultimately, I compared the influences on professional identity development for counseling graduate students in CACREP-accredited career counseling programs with those in general CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the analysis.

The study confirmed that a CACREP-accredited career counseling specialization impacted students' professional identity development. Because of the differences in sample sizes between the two groups (CACREP career counseling $n = 49$; general CACREP-accredited counseling program $n = 188$), I conducted a Mann-Whitney U test which determined that both faculty and practicum/internship supervisors were statistically significant influences. Overall, faculty and practicum/internship supervisors were more influential on professional identity development for students in career counseling specializations than for students in general counseling programs. Additionally, faculty were more important to students in career counseling specializations for determining which practicum/internship experiences to seek than for students in general counseling graduate programs. Furthermore, practicum/internship supervisors were more important for students in career counseling specializations in determining which conferences to attend than for students in general counseling programs.

Survey items that assess career counseling professional activities were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to determine if these items were associated with any factor structures emergent with these items. Results indicated a single factor solution with all items significantly contributing to operationally explain behaviors related to counseling professional identity. Thus, this single factor was subsequently labeled as career counseling professional identity behaviors.

In examining these behaviors associated with a professional career counseling or career development identity (i.e., *how likely are you to seek a career counseling practicum/internship, pursue career counseling as a specialization in your graduate studies, enter the career counseling field after graduation, join a state career development association, join a national career development association, read career development journal, attend a state/regional career development workshop/conference, attend a national career development conference, present at a career development conference*), students in a CACREP-accredited career counseling specialization were more likely to endorse the listed behaviors than those in a general CACREP-accredited counseling graduate program.

Finally, overall there is limited difference in the factors influencing professional identity development when comparing students in CACREP-accredited career counseling specializations with students in general CACREP counseling graduate programs. However, three factors did emerge as significant predictors of a career counseling professional identity during the regression analysis: higher program level (doctoral students), higher number of career counseling courses taken, and enrollment in a CACREP-accredited career counseling program. To increase the likelihood of developing a career counseling identity, students should thus be in a higher program level (doctoral students were more likely to endorse a career counseling identity), take more career counseling or career development courses (the number of career counseling/development courses taken), and enroll in a career counseling specialization (CACREP-accredited career counseling program).

Results/Recommendations

The results of this study support the following recommendations to NCDA:

1. Since results indicate that faculty and practicum/internship supervisors (i.e., mentors) are influential in determining professional identity for career counseling graduate students, NCDA may benefit from:
 - a. Developing a student mentor/mentee leadership program to engage more counseling graduate students in the organization.
 - b. Promoting the organization and working with faculty and practicum/internship supervisors in CACREP-accredited career counseling programs to engage more graduate students in the organization.
2. Since the study confirmed that being in a CACREP-accredited career counseling program does impact a counseling graduate student's professional identity development and increases the likelihood of behaviors associated with a career counseling professional identity, NCDA may want to:
 - a. Consider forging a stronger partnership with both graduate counseling departments and CACREP to create more of these career counseling specialty programs.
 - b. Continue advocating for and creating a national credentialing/licensure for career counseling which may naturally increase the number of counseling programs interested in offering such career counseling specialization tracks.
 - c. Have a stronger presence at other counseling association conferences, networking and promoting the organization with faculty to increase the viability of creating more career counseling specialization programs in counseling graduate departments.
 - d. Create targeted partnerships with institutions with highly ranked /established career services offices but without a CACREP career counseling specialization in their counselor education graduate programs to build a better working relationship between the two to increase the number of graduates exposed to career training.
3. Because the number of career courses taken in graduate school increases the likelihood one will endorse career counseling identity behaviors, NCDA may want to advocate for including more career development courses into the current curriculum in other CACREP counseling graduate programs.
4. Since being in a doctoral program increases the likelihood one will endorse career counseling identity behaviors, NCDA may want to advocate for additional doctoral level career counseling specializations and coursework. Additionally, NCDA may want to consider creating engagement activities/programs specifically for doctoral-level counselors.
5. NCDA may benefit from conducting additional studies examining these initial findings to further investigate the development of professional identity for counselors and career counselors.

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