

Calling and Gatekeeping in Counselor Training

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Many counselor trainees are motivated by a sense of calling, some with religious impetus emanating from a faith tradition and others from a secular origin. The Christian tradition offers rich resources on discernment of calling. This article specifies how faculty might utilize these to assist students in exploring whether the counseling profession is a suitable vocation. Particular attention is given to gatekeeping with poorly performing students who persist in training programs because of perceived calling.

Keywords: counselor training, gatekeeping, calling, vocation

For over 20 centuries, theologians, scholars, and clergy have encouraged Christians in discerning their vocational callings (Placher, 2005). Feenstra and Brouwer (2008) explain the Christian concept of vocation as "...discovering one's identity, understanding the world, and discerning one's purpose in relation to God's will" (p. 83). For the religiously devout, discernment of divine callings is a serious matter. It has been described as a spiritual developmental task of adulthood, the accomplishment of which brings deep meaning and purpose to the individual (Fowler, 2000). Calling has also been identified as a strong motivator among counselor trainees, with some students citing religious impetus emanating from a specific faith tradition and others from a secular or more broadly defined spiritual origin (Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014). Following is a discussion of (a) a theological explication of Christian calling and career choice, (b) graduate training as a context for discernment of calling, and (c) how faculty might utilize resources from the Christian faith tradition in mentoring and gatekeeping students who express calling as a motivation for their pursuit of the counseling profession.

Theology of Vocational Calling

Buechner's (1993) often quoted definition of vocation starts with the self: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (p. 95). Indeed, many writers cite internal processes as important in the discernment of calling. Neafsey (2004), for example,

states, "[i]t is evident that an authentic sense of vocation—a genuine hearing of the voice of God or the Spirit—must be rooted in or flowing from the deeper currents of feeling and desire within the human person" (p. 171). Similarly, Johnson (2002) suggests the call of God begins with a cognitive process, an idea in one's mind, which "emerges and gets your attention," then becomes "energized by feelings," and finally "specific enough for prayer and powerful enough to challenge our volition" (p. 21, 22). McKim (1996) defines the theological term *call* or *calling* as follows: "(Gr. *kalein*, 'to call'; Lat. *vocatio*, 'vocation') God's summons to salvation or to a particular work of service, implying a divine selection" (p. 36). Thus, the called one will have an internal sense of being invited (or directed) to something. Some have dramatic experiences of this summons. For others, it begins with internal interests, passions, and longings often evoked in response to the needs of the world. In her analysis of Christian students' calling narratives, Scott (2007) observed that calling was often described as inner conviction: "words like 'purpose,' 'passion,' 'longing,' 'convicted,' and 'compelled' peppered the responses to questions about meaning of calling" (p. 268).

While these internal processes are viewed as initial indicators of calling, most Christian writers caution against relying on these alone and in fact, imply that serious distortion can result without *external* confirmation of calling (Hardy, 1990). Across faith traditions, calling to ministry has long been viewed as having both internal promptings and external affirmation, and many denominations require novitiate-type periods where the person must consider his or her calling within the community context (Farnham, Gill,

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McLean, & Ward, 1991; Schuurman, 2004). Likewise, external confirmation is equally important for non-ordained vocations (Johnson, 2002).

Citing examples of seemingly unqualified candidates from the Scriptures, Hardy (1990) addresses the question of whether God's calling is always a matter of doing what one is most qualified to do:

God does sometimes call people to do that for which they are outstandingly unqualified; and sometimes he calls people to do what they are entirely disinclined to do. But when he does that, it is because he is about to give a special demonstration of his power. That is, he is about to perform a miracle—which is, by definition, a departure from the normal course of affairs. As a rule people are to do that for which they are qualified...it is not as if our abilities, concerns, and interests are just there, as an accident of nature...these are his gifts, and for that very reason they can serve as indicators of his will for our lives. In coming to know ourselves and our situation, we come to know God's will. (p. 92-93)

Abilities are seen as gifts from God in the Bible. The parable of talents instructs that there is both diversity of gifting and responsibility to use those differing gifts wisely (Mt. 25:14-30, New Revised Standard Version). Wisdom with regard to career choice means using our talents in service that is fitting to the nature of those talents. Indeed, research in positive psychology confirms there is intense joy in finding work which so meshes with one's personal capacities that the person experiences flow—becoming so lost in the enjoyment of the activity for its own sake that the passage of time is unnoticed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Perhaps this is at least partially what Buechner (1993) meant in the “deep gladness” part of his definition of vocation (p. 95).

Graduate Training as a Context for Discerning Calling

In the past two decades, Christian vocation has been the focus of numerous books (Brouwer, 2006; Guinness, 2003; Hardy, 1990; Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 1989; Palmer, 2000; Schultze, 2005; Schuurman, 2004). Late adolescence to young adulthood is seen as a crucial period for students' identity development and formation of life trajectories, as interests, abilities, and values emerge and are tested out in selection of college major and/or initial occupational choices (Super, 1990). Accordingly, concepts of calling and vocation are increasingly emphasized in higher education with

undergraduate students (Miller, 2007). For example, in 1999, the Lily Endowment launched the *Programs for Theological Exploration of Vocation* (PTEV), which offered resources to liberal arts institutions. Research and educational grants were awarded, and two complementary anthologies were compiled to facilitate reflection on vocation with college students (Placher, 2005; Schwehn & Bass, 2006). In addition, a website was developed (www.ptev.org), which offered study guides for these books and other free digital resources. A total of 88 colleges and universities were funded by Lily with PTEV grants, and in 2008, the Council of Independent Colleges sought to develop a nation-wide network for the theological exploration of vocation on (undergraduate) campus communities; the vision was realized in fall of 2009 with the launch of the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE), which is comprised of 168 colleges and universities (Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Training, 2016).

For those pursuing advanced degrees, graduate school continues to be a formative time; yet, in stark contrast to efforts with undergraduates noted above, there is little research exploring vocation and calling with graduate students. There are theoretical articles on how particular professions can or should be viewed as spiritual callings (e.g., Hall, 2004 on academic psychology; Schwehn, 2002 on teaching; and Trulear, 2007 on social work); however, these seem to be aimed at professionals already working in these fields. Aside from students pursuing ministry preparation, little literature exists on how graduate students who have chosen a “secular” profession might come to apprehend how their profession might be part of a divine calling for their lives.

A survey of graduate counseling and psychology students at one university revealed “God” or “God's calling” among the top influences in their career choices (Chung, Wicklund, Palmer, & White, 2005). While the academic context of the aforementioned research is a faith-based institution, a recent panel discussion of counselor educators at diverse institutions reported a preponderance of their students having missional motivations; for some students, the perceived calling has a religious source and others a secular one (Palmer, 2015). The discussants noted, for example, that religiously devout counselor trainees might believe they are following God's will for their lives, while non-religious trainees might believe they are following a path in accord with deeply held ideals like commitment to community service or social justice. The latter is in keeping with a non-religious definition of calling found in career literature: “...a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain” (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1005). Moreover, Dik and

Duffy (2009) assert that calling can be perceived in any area of work, provided the work holds "...other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (p. 427). Indeed, Domene (2015) found that students intending to pursue human service careers (such as counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, and teaching) were significantly higher in both perceiving and seeking calling in their work than students pursuing careers in other occupations.

While no faith tradition reduces God's calling merely to career choice, Christian writings through the centuries offer rich resources for discernment of calling. These resources provide guidance and have implications for career selection. For example, Plantinga (2002) characterizes work as one of many sub-vocations (along with worship, leisure, volunteering, marriage, parenting, etc.) with the main vocation as serving the kingdom of God. Regarding undergraduate education, he states, "[t]he full value of your education is that it will help you find and prepare for your vocation—which is...much bigger than any particular occupation" (p. 115). In graduate education, the student is expending considerable resources, often at great sacrifice, to train for a specific occupation. It, too, should be a time of for deep reflection on vocation.

Furthermore, an awareness of divine calling in one's work has been found to motivate strong commitment to its tasks and endorse additional positive career development outcomes. For example, Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) found the presence of calling to be strongly correlated with self-clarity, career decidedness, and choice comfort in large, ethnically diverse sample of college students. Calling was found moderately related to career commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in a sample of university employees representing diverse occupations (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011). Further, two qualitative studies revealed calling as facilitating Christian women's positive coping with interrole conflicts between parenting and career demands (Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts, & Ostman, 2005). According to Schuurman (2004), God has situated professionals in their respective vocations for particular purposes, cultivating their unique gifts and capacities for service to the community. Moreover, the pursuit of an advanced degree might be a providentially "situated" context, and the process of the graduate training can yield confirmation (or not) of how practicing in the profession might be part of a student's calling.

The literature on Christian calling can help counselor educators to assist their students in discerning whether that profession might be part of her or his vocation or mission, regardless of whether the sense of calling stems from a religious or secular foundation. Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) stated calling has

"captivated public attention," as they noted frequent references to calling on the internet, including on job search websites (p. 1002). These authors also reported an increase in scholarly investigation on this topic and contributed to the research by developing a scale to measure this construct. Duffy and Dik (2013) likewise noted the prevalence of calling across diverse samples of students and employees; in their review of 40 studies conducted on calling since 2007, these researchers conclude a sizeable number of American college students and adults are motivated by a sense of calling. Thus, calling has become a relevant construct in career motivations for religious and non-religious alike, as it seems to be a way many people "seek and derive meaning from work" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1002). In evaluative and mentoring roles, faculty have the responsibility to help their students recognize the suitability of their career choices, and in doing so they might also have opportunity to assist students in discovering particular callings.

Vocational Interests and Aptitudes

Prospective students often are attracted to the counseling profession because of their passion for helping others, a passion some see as evidence of divine calling or personal mission. However, some graduate students appear to erroneously connect job interest/passion with job aptitude. For example, Gale (1998) reports that many people, when hearing career inventory results, disparage the instrument: "Oh, I took one of those and it told me to be a forest ranger because I *like* to work outdoors" or "It told me to be a psychiatrist because I *liked* to work with people" (Gale, 1998, p. 13). Yet, what they most likely were administered was a career-interest inventory and not a career-aptitude test (Gale, 1998).

This conflation is long-standing. Decades ago, Kerr and Willis (1966) lamented, "many people equate interest and aptitude, perhaps due to the American axiom that if a person is interested and perseverant, any goal can be reached regardless of his physical or mental abilities" (as cited in Lam et al., 1993, p. 155). In a more recent work on discerning vocation, Palmer (2000) expands this, describing how the expectation of success based only on interest and effort reflects an American cultural myth (of a limitless self and universe). Unfortunately, some career exploration books in popular press directly reinforce this illusion. Sher and Smith (1994) imply this in the very title of their book: *I could do anything . . . if I only knew what it was*.

On the contrary, the professional literature on career counseling has proposed the "person-environment fit" theory (Carson et al., 1999), stating researchers explore the match between the worker and

his or her job demands. These involve complex correlations between matrices of abilities, values, personality, and interests on the one hand and job requirements and conditions on the other (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Lam and colleagues (1993) found moderate to high correlations between interest and aptitudes in some disciplines (science, mathematics, and the arts), but curiously, interests in social service and business formed the least substantial and consistent relationships.

Bizot and Goldman (1993) found significant correlations between aptitudes—job correspondence and both employee satisfaction and satisfactoriness (appraisal by supervisors on how satisfactorily employees perform the work). This is as one would expect—people whose skills match the job demands are likely to perform well in those jobs and to enjoy their work. These same researchers found that interest-job correspondence did not correlate significantly with either employee satisfaction or satisfactoriness at initial measurement; however, it did correlate significantly with performance satisfactoriness at follow-up. What this means is that there is a murky relationship between one's job interests and actual ability to perform in a specific job, as well as the likely satisfaction one will find in that job.

This literature demonstrates that some people are more suited for certain jobs than others, and that the fit between the person and the occupation involves more than mere interest. In his seminal work that launched the field of career counseling, Parsons (1909) described vocational choice as a process of (a) knowing oneself, including “aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources limitations, and their causes,” (b) knowing various occupations, including “requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, the demands of the workplace, compensations, opportunities and prospects” and (c) exercising “true reasoning” to bring the two together (p. 5). Thus, knowing oneself is equally important to career selection as it is to discernment of calling. And the self-knowledge needed exceeds mere interests and passions. Aptitudes are crucial to finding optimal occupational fit. Similarly, discernment of vocation (whatever its ultimate context: volunteering, family, occupation, ministry, etc.), requires deep understanding of one's gifts.

Implications for Intervening with Poorly Performing Trainees

Across faith traditions, discernment of calling requires attention inward to promptings of the Caller, which activates one's aspirations and fitting motivations (Neafsey, 2006). It also requires outward

confirmation (evidence of gifting for the calling's tasks, which are observable in the season of life when there are available opportunities to glorify God and serve others in the calling) (Johnson, 2002). Wisdom in occupational selection requires a strong match between the worker's interests, work values, needs, and abilities, and the occupation's skill requirements and reinforcers (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). When all of these are observed, mentoring is easy—one can joyfully confirm the match between the student's gifts and the demands of the profession, and affirm her or his sense of calling. When some of these factors are missing, however, the mentoring task is much more difficult, and faculty gatekeeping responsibilities gain prominence.

Gatekeeping, Mentoring, or Both?

Gatekeeping has been defined broadly as “...evaluation of student suitability for professional practice” (Brear, Dorrian, & Luscri, 2008, p. 93), and more specifically as the processes by which counselor educators intervene to prevent poorly prepared students from entering the counseling profession (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Ten percent of master's level trainees in both secular and Christian clinical practitioner training programs were identified by faculty as poorly suited for the field, yet both samples of faculty indicated they only intervened with about half to remediate or dismiss from the training program (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Palmer, White, & Chung, 2008). In the study of Christian faculty (Palmer et al., 2008), four significant variables were associated with faculty intervention: (a) faculty rank, (b) degree of formalized gatekeeping procedures, (c) institutional support, and (d) faculty perceptions of gatekeeping as related to spiritual gifting. Faculty who perceived gatekeeping itself as connected to gifting and their gatekeeping role as a means of helping students discern their individual gifts were more likely to intervene with poorly performing students than faculty who did not deem their gatekeeping functions as relating to gifts and their discernment.

Ten percent of trainees in both of the aforementioned samples of training programs were identified by faculty as poorly suited for the field, which is concerning (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Palmer et al., 2008). However, that faculty in both studies reported intervening with only half of these students demonstrates that many educators do not have the courage, tools, or support necessary to effectively mentor students (Forrest et al., 2013). It means faculty allow ill-equipped practitioners to enter the field. In doing so, they miss opportunities to help students know themselves more deeply and thus discern suitability of their callings.

Unfortunately, perceived calling may actually be an impediment in the training process. In two different investigations (a longitudinal study with high school students pursuing music careers and a cross-sectional study of undergraduate and graduate business students), Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012) found that students with strong sense of calling (religious or not) were more likely to ignore negative feedback on suitability for chosen career paths. The authors note that there are significant costs that students might incur after training when they are unable to find or retain employment due to the high-performance demands of professions for which they are not well-suited. This is equally concerning for counselor training; mentors might need particular understanding of how to address calling with poorly performing students to enhance their receptivity to feedback.

For the student who, for whatever combination of reasons (e.g., skills, attitudes, emotional stability, season of life, etc.), is poorly suited to the counselor training program, the faculty's responsibility goes beyond gatekeeping. It is also a responsibility to the student to mentor that person toward a path that is in keeping with her or his gifts (Ladany, Friedlander, & Nelson, 2016). In postsecondary education, faculty are concerned not only with the transmission of knowledge and skills but also with student formation. This development involves mentors taking time to know students beyond the classroom, helping them discern talents, barriers, and wise decision making, while modeling that "who we are is more important than what we do" (Holmes, 2001, p. 117). While Holmes (2001) is speaking of the traditional, liberal arts (undergraduate) education, even more imperative is the mentoring role for faculty in graduate professional programs whose jobs are to apprentice their students in an applied discipline. When it becomes clear the apprentice cannot obtain the skills of the profession, it is the mentor's responsibility to not only protect the profession but also to tactfully tell the apprentice the truth about her or his suitability for that profession. This honesty is an important first step to help the student explore an alternate path that is more fitting. Guinness (2003) observes that becoming aware of a poor vocational fit, though painful, can actually be a release, a step toward one's true identity. Therefore, faculty gatekeeping can thus be thought as freeing students, rather than constraining them.

Reframing Failure

For the student who perceives a calling, but who cannot acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or other characteristics required for the profession, failure in the training program can precipitate a crisis of faith. Reframing is a technique cognitive and family systems

therapists use to change the meaning of events to reduce negative affect and increase positive problem solving (Robbins, Alexander, Newell, & Turner, 1996). It is thought that the reframed perception might lead to a solution of the problem because the emotional interference has been removed, or because the manner in which the person was previously attempting to solve the problem was actually maintaining the problem (Conoley & Garber, 1985). This might describe the phenomenon of the graduate student whose performance is clearly deficient in the counselor training program but persists because he or she feels called. In this case, the perceived call might interfere with the student's ability to accurately assess whether he or she could actually live out that calling in competent counseling practice.

Faculty might need to use reframing to help students redefine their failure in the program as an opportunity to discern direction from what Palmer (2000) calls "the way closing:"

...when I consistently refuse to take no for an answer, I miss the vital clues to my identity that arise when [the] way closes . . . if I try to do something noble that has nothing to do with who I am, I may look good to others and to myself for a while. But the fact that I am exceeding my limits will eventually have consequences. I will distort myself, the other, and our relationship—and may end up doing more damage than if I had never set out to do this particular "good." (p. 43 & 47)

Certainly, great sensitivity and tact would be needed from the faculty member working with a poorly performing graduate student. Just as in counseling, it would require a sound alliance between the student and the faculty mentor to effectively reframe deficient performance as "the way closing." It is no small thing to advise a student to discontinue in a graduate program (Ladany et al., 2016). Even when the evidence indicates the program is not a good fit for the student, it is still not an easy conversation to initiate, especially when the student does not recognize the mismatch between program demands and personal qualities or abilities. Yet, the ending of one pursuit can free the person to a new one, perhaps to one that is better suited to the unique talents and gifts.

In her provocative essay, McEntyre (2005) describes how the virtue of perseverance can actually become a trap, wherein the person is driven to continue, believing in the "I've-invested-too-much-to-stop-now" principle (p. 39). She relates this specifically to the educational process and argues that although advising students to persevere in the face of hardship in school is often appropriate, sometimes it is not: "heroic

determination is one thing; mindless doggedness is another...urging someone to complete a process that is neither life giving nor fruitful may be a misguided kindness” (p. 40). Many faculty have witnessed this “mindless doggedness” when the way obviously seems to be closing, but students cannot or will not see it. Instead, students continue plugging away at course work, on academic probation one semester, then off the next, spending time, energy, and money pursuing a degree in a field whose content and skills they cannot master. In these cases, the kindest response might be to reframe the call as a “wrong number” and encourage the student to listen for a new call (Rayburn, 1997).

The “Call of the Moment”

In other cases, the difficulties in performance might be due to situational circumstances, which, once resolved, can free the student to proceed satisfactorily in the program (Ladany et al., 2016). Here, the mentor might need to help the student pay attention to all that he or she is managing simultaneously while pursuing graduate school:

The trick is to understand one’s calling—and not to understand the idea of calling simply in terms of ‘what to do with my life,’ but to ask periodically what is ‘the call of the moment.’ What is this phase or chapter of my life about? (McEntyre, 2005, p. 41).

The metaphor of life’s seasons can be a means of grace to a struggling student. At times, students must be urged to ask “is this the season in which I can do graduate school?” Some have bravely answered “no,” left the program and returned later, ready for the rigors of graduate education. Again, this might require the advisor to use the reframing tool—to help the student shift thinking from “I’m dropping out of school” (i.e., quitting) to “I’m taking time off to tend to my life” (i.e., prioritizing what is most important now). It is most desirable if the decision to withdraw from the training program is mutual (Russell, DuPree, Beggs, Peterson, & Anderson, 2007). Faculty can sometimes help a student consider this if the leave is framed as temporary.

An important theme in theological writings on calling is the idea of multiple calls: the summons comes over and over again. In commenting on John Donne’s preaching, Shaw (1981) observes, “God may, to speak precisely, call us but once, but such is his mercy that the call is repeated in our hearing through human voices and nature’s operations. We are thus given not one but numerous opportunities to respond” (p. 58). Johnson (2002) describes this as living “call to call,” a pattern of transition that is inherent in vocation (p. 134). One is

not called once and forever to specific tasks in ministry, in one’s family, or one’s work. Rather, the shape of one’s vocation changes over time. Thus, we should not ask “what am I called to” as a once and done enterprise. Schultze (2005) asserts “the mystery of vocation is more like an unfolding relationship than a carefully planned trip...an ongoing journey, not a one-time blast of revelation or a straight trajectory” (p. 13-14). Since human beings live in time, it follows that God’s call comes not just once, but rather is on on-going conversation over an entire lifetime (Lewis, 1989).

Defining or Re-defining Calling

Mentors might need to expand students’ understanding of calling—broadening the focus on a specific occupation to overall area of passion and gifting; that is, those unique interests and talents that Hardy (1990) describes as “indicators of the divine intent” (p. 83). Perhaps the student lacks the interpersonal skills needed for counseling practice but has the analytic and writing skills for research (Wester & Borders, 2013). Sometimes, mentors can help open up students to previously unknown possibilities. Faculty might also need to redefine calling as more than an internal impression, teaching the student that external evidence is part of discerning of a call (Hardy, 1990). Since competence is multidimensional, this should entail educating students more explicitly on the demands of the field for which they are training and examining the student’s track record in demonstrating requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and qualities needed for that field—to help the student see if there is a match (Overholser & Fine, 1990).

Students, as well as the general public, often do not understand the distinct training, credentialing, and scope of practice for various mental health professions (Fall, Levitov, Jennings, & Eberts, 2000; Gale & Austin, 2003; Jones, Vela, Vang, & Walden, 2006; McDonald, Wantz, & Firmin, 2014). College students reported their perceptions of professional counselors emerged from the media, word of mouth, and personal experiences—sources which might lack accurate detail or erroneously portray the profession (Firmin, Wantz, Firmin, & Johnson, 2012). Therefore, the mentoring process for graduate trainees might require exploring with the student her or his unique gifts, interests, and values as well as also educating the student about the particular demands for competence in the given profession (Ladany et al., 2016; Overholser & Fine, 1990). In doing so, the faculty advisor explores both sides of the person-environment equation to help the student discern degree of fit.

Christian writers overwhelmingly stress accurate self-awareness as crucial to discerning calling, and that this awareness comes by listening. Buechner (1983)

urges “listen to your life” (p. 87), and by this he means to reflect deeply on the totality of one’s experiences for God’s voice. In doing so, one gains greater self-knowledge and subsequently, greater clarity of calling. Palmer (2000) explains,

That insight [listening] is hidden in the word *vocation* itself, which is rooted in the Latin for “voice.” Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am...The deepest vocational question is not “What ought I to do with my life?” It is more elementary and demanding “Who am I? What is my nature?” (p. 4, 15)

The existential question, “Who am I?” is fundamental to discerning calling. This search for identity encompasses needs, longings, passions, interests, and values to be sure, but also examination of aptitudes, abilities, and (Christians believe) God-given spiritual gifts (Edwards, 1988). Mentors can urge students to this careful listening, as discerning who we are means “we must be willing to hear the appealing and the unappealing, the familiar and the unfamiliar. If we become selective, we may turn a deaf ear to God” (Farnham et al., 1991, p. 31).

Institutional Support for Gatekeeping

The fact that calling is discerned in the context of community means not only that students need faculty feedback to help them discern person-environment fit, but also that faculty need personal and institutional support for their roles in the gatekeeping/mentoring process (Robiner, Fuhrman, & Risvedt, 1993; Strom-Gottfried, 2000). Faculty are not immune to bias, distortion, and blind spots—regarding themselves or their students, nor are they immune from the fear of fallout for intervening with poorly performing students. Both non-tenured and tenured faculty members reported similar concerns about the influence of lawsuit fears on their own and their colleagues’ motivation to screen deficient students (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). However, non-tenured faculty members reported greater concerns about institutional pressures and the threat of receiving poor teaching evaluations than did their tenured colleagues.

Similarly, in a study of faculty at Christian institutions, perception of inadequate administrative support was negatively correlated with their intervention with poorly performing students, whereas the presence of formalized gatekeeping policies and procedures facilitated intervention (Palmer et al., 2008). More specifically, faculty need to see themselves as

part of the external community that confirms (or disconfirms) students’ internal sense of calling, and they need support from one another and their institution to fully serve that mentoring function with their students—especially with deficient students (Baldo, Softas-Nail, & Shaw, 1997; Bemak, Epp, & Keys, 1999; Darr, Moore, & Snyder, 2003; Enochs & Etzbach, 2004).

Conclusion

Tisdale (2004) describes her own journey in discerning her call as a clinician and urges professionals to reflect on their work as a calling. Graduate school is a unique opportunity to “do in order to know” (Johnson, 2002, p. 103) and to use the “true reasoning” that Parsons (1909, p. 5) recommended for choosing a vocation. Sayers (1947) believes work reflects the creativity generously given by the Creator, and thus she argues “the only Christian work is good work well done” (p. 58). If she is correct, then excellence in performance can be viewed as confirmation of divine calling. Brouwer (2006) describes this high-quality performance with a phrase used in the acting profession: getting “off book” is when one knows the role so well, it is internalized, and therefore the actor is free to improvise. Thus, far from being ungracious or thwarting God’s calling, faculty must assess whether students have the raw capacity to achieve being “off book” and become truly excellent in the profession (Borders, 2014; Sperry, 2010). If so, they can be confident in affirming that person’s calling or mission.

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