

Georgia Professional School Counselors

Professional School Counselor Graduates in Georgia: Findings Regarding Numbers

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Abstract

As key players in the school, professional school counselors have many roles and tasks however not all are trained with the same curriculum. In the state of Georgia, school counselor training is becoming more similar than different because all university system programs are mandated by the Board of Regents (BOR) to become accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (*Regent's Principles*, 2004). This article discusses the number of professional school counselor graduates in the state of Georgia and the immediate southeastern area of the United States.

Professional School Counselor Graduates in Georgia: Findings Regarding Their Numbers

School counseling programs are a necessary component of schools and now more than ever, it is easier for professional school counselors (PSCs) to identify and solidify their roles and tasks. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) to ensure training meets current school

demands. Additionally, the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003) was developed to create a model framework that provides K-12 professional school counselors an appropriate structure to guide their programs with interventions and services for students. Before the ASCA National Model was implemented, the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) became a national perspective. TSCI "became the impetus for seeking and developing the fundamental changes needed to bring the work of school counselors into alignment with the mission of schools for the 21st Century (Martin, 2002, p. 148).

A shared factor in the ASCA National Model, the National Standards, and TSCI is the educational focus which connects school counseling programs to the total school program. In this capacity PSCs along with others are working to fulfill the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation. Professional school counselors are involved in the national standards-based movement and as such, are expected to be accountable for providing comprehensive, developmental programs (Curry & Lambie, 2007).

Georgia is a state focused on school improvement and school counseling programs are highly involved. A few years ago, the Board of Regents (BOR) for the University

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System of Georgia decreed that all school counseling programs in the state would be accredited by the largest and most prestigious accrediting body in the nation for counseling programs. This is explicitly explained in the *Regents' Principles and Actions for the Preparation of Educators for the Schools* (2004) section IIB (10) where it states training programs are to "seek and maintain national accreditation for school counseling programs through the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)" (p. 7). CACREP has set the standard for the training of school counselors in the United States and while many programs may aspire to gain this accreditation, not all are supported at the state level similar to Georgia.

The purpose of this article is to share data from a review

of reported graduates of school counseling programs throughout the state by American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (both CACREP and non-CACREP accredited). While the comparison data is somewhat outdated, it is the only data that specifically denotes graduates as reported on annual reports by individual colleges and universities. Other reports and manuals (see Clawson, Henderson, Schweiger, & Collins, 2004; Hollis, 1997; Hollis & Dodson, 2000; Hollis & Wantz, 1990, 1994) that note information about counselor education programs, including school counseling programs, report estimates about various aspects of programs and are not published on a regular basis. Additionally the article discusses the BOR mandate for school counseling programs to become CACREP accredited.

Table 1

Universities with School Counseling Programs in Georgia

University Name	CACREP Status
Albany State University	No
Augusta State University	Yes (2006)
Clark Atlanta University	No
Columbus State University	Yes (1997)
Fort Valley State University	No
Georgia Southern University	No
Georgia State University	Yes (1980)
University of West Georgia	Yes (2001)
University of Georgia	Yes (1987)
Valdosta State University	Yes (2008)

Note: The year indicated in parenthesis is the initial year of CACREP accreditation.
Georgia Southern University has a CACREP application in progress.

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School Counselor Training Standards

In addition to training school counseling candidates (SCCs) in the areas of academic success, career preparation, and social emotional development, PSCs in the 21st Century must be trained to meet multiple demands. These include being advocates for social justice (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; House & Martin, 1999; Phillips, Sears, Snow, & Jackson, 2005), bridging the gap and helping with the education of low income children (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007), developing diversity training for school personnel (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001), and using and understanding data that effectively demonstrates changes in student behavior and in academics (Stone & Dahir, 2007). PSCs must be thoroughly educated to effectively meet these demands.

School counseling programs are involved with many systems within the school including students, parents/caregivers, faculty and administration, community and other stakeholders. PSCs are expected to develop and evaluate a comprehensive program that meets many demands but particularly those of their students in the areas of academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development. With all that PSCs are expected to do and are accountable for within the school, system, and state, the need for strong counselor education training programs is imperative.

National and State Standards

Training standards within the counseling profession have been outlined by CACREP since 1981. With the National Standards for School Counseling Programs, the ASCA National Model, credentialing through various boards including the National Board for Counselor Certification (NBCC) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), it might seem that school counselor candidates (SCCs) are trained with the same knowledge, skills, and strategies for their future careers. But can we indeed assume that all SCCs are trained in a like manner with equal skills? Can we expect that all SCCs are educated with similar curricula? Do all SCCs perform the same tasks at their sites in the same manner? In the state of Georgia when the BOR mandate for CACREP accreditation is completed (*Regent's Principles, 2004*), the difference in answers to these questions should be negligible. The importance of graduating well-trained PSCs is further heightened when one looks at the large number of professional school counselors needed in Georgia.

Inducting Professional School Counselors

Coupled with Georgia's efforts to standardize training, another mandate by the BOR is the induction of professional school counselors into the career in a professional and systematic manner (*Regent's Principles, 2004*). This focus on induction originated with TSCI. The new vision of school counseling on increased academic achievement "acknowledged the role of counselors as change agents and advocates for the removal of barriers that impede student success". Appropriate support and guidance within the profession for these transformed professional school counselors who are eager to apply their knowledge and skills is critical as they enter the field yet the challenge to many novice PSCs is instituting this new focus into an environment not always fully supporting these transforming principles (Jackson, et al., 2002, p. 177). Additionally counselor education programs are challenged to induct PSCs into the profession when sometimes the number of school counselor graduates is much larger than faculty members are equipped to handle. Thus, it is especially important that counselor education programs work with PSCs in the field to help with this induction.

Challenges to CACREP Accredited Programs

There is a dearth of literature related to graduates of CACREP versus non-CACREP accredited programs and much of it is outdated. Bobby and Kandor (1992) note one of the purposes of CACREP accreditation is to promote quality. Their study investigated barriers programs identified that kept them from seeking CACREP accreditation. Their findings included barriers of the 600 clock-hour internship and the student-to-faculty ratios set by CACREP. Other identified concerns were the 48 semester hour program (72 hour quarter), the requirement of a minimum of 2 full-time faculty members (currently 3 full-time faculty members) in an individual program, and the 20-1 (now 10-1) advisor/advisee ratio. Although few accredited programs reported any major difficulty meeting the above criteria, sometimes financial and faculty support for the accreditation process can be challenging to acquire.

Akos and Scarborough (2004) examined internships for preservice counselors, which CACREP considers, along with practica, to be the most demanding experiences in a counselor education program. Both CACREP accredited and non-CACREP programs were investigated. Using a qualitative analysis of internship program syllabi, Akos

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and Scarborough found vast disparities in expectations for interns during these clinical experiences yet within CACREP internships, programs creatively handle these experiences in individual manners all the while adhering to the standards.

Within the review of the literature, no investigations were located specifically addressing the number of school counseling graduates from CACREP and non-CACREP accredited programs. Thus this study was instituted.

Method

The collection of data for this study was based on a review, analysis, and compilation of information found in various directories of members from 1995 to 2002 published by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). Part of each directory is an analysis of the productivity at AACTE member institutions. These member institutions and colleges submit an annual report through the AACTE/NCATE Professional Education Data System and information is presented for teachers, administrators, and school counselors. The data is about 2 years old when published in each directory so information found in the 2002 directory is actually reporting data from 2000. After the 2002 directory information for counseling is not identified specifically but is grouped under "advanced" programs. Information about school counseling graduates (or completers as used by AACTE), was available only through the 2002 directory.

Results

Using this database from AACTE, every college or university reporting school counseling graduates (completers) was identified. The identification of accreditation status by CACREP was then established for each reporting institution. Those that were accredited by CACREP were identified with the year accreditation was granted. In the analysis of data, only graduates who completed the school counseling program during or after the year accredited were considered CACREP graduates. Thus, an institution may have both graduates from a CACREP program and graduates from a non-CACREP program. Only institutions with school counseling programs in the state of Georgia are reported within this article.

Georgia School Counseling Programs

Currently there are 10 universities that have school counseling programs in the state of Georgia (Table 1). Not including on-line programs, there is one private institution (Clark Atlanta University) with a school counseling program. Only six (6) universities currently have CACREP accreditation while others are in various stages of progress. For example, Georgia Southern University has its application in progress (CACREP, 2008b). Georgia State University was the first program to acquire CACREP status in 1981 while the University of Georgia followed in 1987. It was not until a decade later in 1997 that Columbus State University acquired CACREP status. The University of West Georgia became accredited in 2001 and Augusta State University acquired CACREP status in 2006 (CACREP, 2008a). More recently, Valdosta State University was awarded accreditation in 2008 (T. Cunningham, personal communication, August 8, 2008). Those universities which do not have an application in progress for CACREP accreditation status at this time in Georgia include Albany State University, Clark Atlanta University, and Fort Valley State University.

The total graduates of school counseling programs in the state of Georgia approximates 2,276 for the years 1995-2000 (AACTE, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) and individual program numbers for these reporting years range from 33 graduates at Albany State University to a high of 620 from the University of West Georgia (UWG)(Table 2). This high number of graduates from UWG occurred prior to the university receiving CACREP accreditation. While this data is not the most current (it is the only data available), it gives an idea about graduates.

Top Ten Graduating Programs in the Southern ACES Region

As a comparison, looking at the Southern Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) region, the top 10 producing universities with school counseling graduates from both CACREP accredited programs and programs that are not CACREP accredited for these (1995-2000) years include: Western Kentucky University (non-CACREP), University of West Georgia (CACREP), University of South Carolina (CACREP), Prairie View A&M University (non-CACREP), Eastern Kentucky University (CACREP), Georgia Southern University (non-CACREP), University of Georgia (CACREP), University of South Florida (non-CACREP), Morehead

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Table 2

School Counselor Graduates by Number in Programs in Georgia (1995-2000)

University	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	Total
Albany State University	4	14	-	14	1	-	0	-	33
Augusta State University	12	11	24	10	29	24	16	19	145
Clark Atlanta University	-	-	-	32	-	21	36	1	90
Columbus State University	3	10	18	9	8	8	8	1	65
Fort Valley State University	25	16	-	50	31	8	5	11	146
Georgia Southern University	35	52	74	46	38	88	48	46	427
Georgia State University	72	11	44	31	44	22	53	72	349
University of West Georgia	13	38	53	94	96	116	112	98	620
University of Georgia	64	69	31	35	66	33	59	44	401
Subtotal	228	221	244	321	313	320	337	292	2276

Note: These numbers represent the totals as reported to AACTE in a given year. They may not reflect actual numbers for each year as a university may collapse data and report numbers at different time frames.

Table 3

**SACES Top Producing School Counseling Programs
Top Ten Universities (1995-2002)**

University Name	N	X
Western Kentucky University	931	116
University of West Georgia	620	78
University of South Carolina	602	75
Prairie View A&M University	517	65
Eastern Kentucky University	449	56
Georgia Southern University	427	53
University of Georgia	401	50
University of South Florida	375	47
Morehead State University	367	46
Georgia State University	349	44

NOTE: These numbers represent the totals as reported to AACTE in a given year. They may not reflect actual numbers for each year as a university may collapse data and report numbers at different time frames.

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State University (non-CACREP), and Georgia State University (CACREP) (see Table 3 for numbers of graduates) (CACREP, 2008a; AACTE 1995-2002) Five of these top producers have attained CACREP status while the other five programs are not/were not accredited at the time.

Discussion

The mandate by the BOR of the University System of Georgia (*Regent's Principals*, 2004) calling for all school counseling programs to attain CACREP accreditation in the near future works to strengthen school counseling programs in the state of Georgia and positions the state to be a national model. Additionally, the BOR is clearly foresighted about the importance of programs that teach the same type of curriculum. Similarities in curricula allow school counselors throughout the state and southern region to develop similar comprehensive programs that help P-12 students in the areas of academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development.

It is interesting to note that the various items Bobby and Kandor (1992) noted as keeping programs from seeking CACREP accreditation are those that tend to make programs outstanding due to the curriculum standards, the low number of advisees, and the clinical supervision. Accreditation standards also allow graduates to develop exceptional comprehensive guidance programs because they have learned to align their programs to academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development. The 600 clock-hour internship plus a 100 clock-hour Practicum gives graduates a minimum of 700 clock-hours of work in a school under the direct supervision of a site supervisor. This 2-semester (or longer) clinical experience was considered the most critical experience of counseling programs (Akos & Scarborough, 2004). It is expected that programs throughout the state with similar curricula will graduate professional school counselors who are capable of developing similar comprehensive school counseling programs. The student-to-faculty ratios, advisor/advisee ratio along with the minimum of two full-time faculty acts to keep classes small and offers the opportunity to get school counseling candidates' needs met while in the program. While accredited programs found little difficulty meeting CACREP standards in the Akos and Scarborough study, programs that are not accredited do not realize the impact these standards set.

With 10 school counseling programs at institutions in the state of Georgia, six of these with CACREP

accreditation and others focused on achieving this premier accreditation, school counseling programs in the state will improve their training. Adhering to CACREP standards will benefit P-12 students in the state of Georgia because similar curricula will ensure school counselors throughout the state develop similar comprehensive programs. Thus, the areas of academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development as mandated by ASCA and BOR to meet the counseling needs of P-12 students in the state of Georgia are accomplished.

Georgia also has two school counseling programs that were awarded TSCI grants (University of Georgia and University of West Georgia) and graduates of these programs are helping to transform school counseling programs within their districts. Other university training programs in Georgia have also adopted the TSCI arenas into their work. The ASCA National Model and Standards for School Counseling Programs have been incorporated into many training programs as well as in the comprehensive guidance programs in individual schools and systems. It appears the state of Georgia's PSC graduates are working to better meet the needs of our children and training programs are involved in making changes. By mandating that programs become CACREP accredited, the Georgia BOR (*Regent's Principals*, 2004) is working to ensure that future professional school counselors are highly-trained and prepared to face the multiple demands in schools today.

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