

# Counselor Preparation in England and Ireland: A Look at Six Programs

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*The Professional Counselor*  
Volume 1, Issue 3 | Pages 176-190  
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www.nbcc.org  
<http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org>  
doi:10.15241/jmm.1.3.176

**Academic preparation is essential to the continued fidelity and growth of the counseling profession and clinical practice. The accreditation of academic programs is essential to ensuring the apposite education and preparation of future counselors. Although the process is well documented for counselors-in-training in the United States, there is a dearth of literature describing the academic preparation of counselors in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This article describes interview findings from six counseling programs at institutions in England and Ireland: Cork Institute of Technology; the University of East Anglia; the University of Cambridge; the University of Limerick; The University of Manchester; and West Suffolk College. It also discusses common and differentiating themes with counselor training in the U.S.**

*Keywords:* accreditation, international, counselors-in-training, England, Ireland

Academic preparation lies at the heart of the counseling profession and is a vital ingredient to professional practice. Most people identifying themselves as professional counselors possess a minimum of a master's degree in counseling, and as a result of the varied roles and settings in which they work, the academic training for such professionals is broad-based in common domains. Most counseling graduate programs typically offer coursework reflective of a core curriculum, field placement, and a specialty area (Neukrug, 2007).

Program accreditation also influences preparation. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) represent two accrediting bodies in the counseling profession. The most recent *CACREP Standards* were developed "to ensure that students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills to practice effectively" (CACREP, 2009, p. 2). Eight core areas of curriculum are required of all CACREP-accredited programs: Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice; Social and Cultural Diversity; Human Growth and Development; Career Development; Helping Relationships; Group Work; Assessment; and Research and Program Evaluation. Furthermore, as Neukrug (2007) pointed out, many master's-level counseling programs include a specialty area recognized by CACREP.

At the same time, international issues in counseling have drawn considerable interest in the past two decades. Pedersen and Leong (1997) outlined the global need for counseling as a result of urbanization and modernization throughout the world. The twelfth edition of *Counselor Preparation* was the first in the series to offer a chapter about counselor training outside of the U.S. (Schweiger, Henderson, & Clawson, 2008). More recent articles have examined counseling issues in such nations as Turkey (Stockton & Güneri, 2011), Mexico (Portal, Suck, & Hinkle, 2010), and Italy (Remley, Bacchini, & Krieg, 2010). The pace of the counseling profession internationally is rapid, prompting a need "to expand the knowledge basis of counseling as a profession internationally" (Stockton, Garbelman, Kaladow, & Terry, 2008, p. 78).

Despite the interest in international issues, the literature specific to the United Kingdom and Ireland—particularly related to counselor preparation—is somewhat limited. According to Syme (1994), counseling in Britain dates back to the 1940s. Initially such training was limited to priests, youth workers, and volunteers of the National Marriage Guidance Council. University counseling courses started in the 1950s. Growth among counselors working independently (i.e., counseling privately) was observed in the 1960s, and this trend in part resulted in the creation of the Standing Conference for the Advancement of Counselling in 1970.

In regard to the development of school counseling in England, Shertzer and Jackson (1969) noted that four counselor training facilities existed in the country at that time, producing about 100 counselors per year. In discussing various differential factors between the two countries, they pointed out that school counseling in the U.S. had benefited from federal government support, while in England the national government had taken a more neutral stance. Not long thereafter, Hague (1976) indicated that British professionals viewed the development of the profession as lagging behind

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that of the U.S. It also was during this decade that counselors from the U.S. had a “profound influence” on developments in the UK (Syme, 1994, p. 10). Awareness of counseling grew during the 1980s, a period in which counselors worked in the voluntary and private sectors as well as most universities and even larger companies (Syme).

Citing the 1993 edition of the *Counselling and Psychotherapy Resources Directory* that was published by the British Association of Counselling, Syme (1994) reported that approximately 600 counselors were listed in the London area, while far fewer were found in other areas of the UK. Around this period of time, counseling in independent practice had become “an attractive career,” though “an ever-present danger of standards being eroded in some areas of Britain where demand exceeds supply” existed (p. 15).

Dryden, Mearns, and Thorne (2000) also offered an extensive perspective of counseling in the UK dating to the World War II era. The British Association of Counselling (BAC), which emerged in 1976 and included members from the Association for Student Counselling and the Association for Pastoral Care and Counselling, played a pivotal role in the early development of the counseling profession. (The BAC has subsequently become the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy). Important contributions came from the educational system and voluntary sector. Dryden et al. summarized the historical foundations: “It is not perhaps altogether fanciful to see the history of counseling in Britain as the story of a collaborative response by widely differing people from different sectors of the community to human suffering engendered by social change and shifting value systems” (p. 471). In the early stages of development, counseling was not viewed as a profession, but rather as something that individuals performed with little or no training that was subsumed by another profession (Dryden et al.).

Dryden et al. (2000) noted that the BAC had begun to accredit counseling programs in 1988. Furthermore, it also had developed an expanded and detailed code of ethics that included supervision and training and had created guidelines for programs seeking accreditation. Altogether the profession had become “significant” in that it now was making noteworthy “demands on the budgets of the social and health services” (p. 476). They further speculated that the greatest inroads in counseling were made in the workplace, particularly regarding job-related stress. As counseling entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Britain, it had reached a “critical but dynamic point” in its development, as it was aiming to “maintain its humanity in its attitudes to both clients and practitioners” (p. 477).

## Accreditation

Various accreditation bodies exist in this region. Among the UK programs, two foremost organizations are the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and the United Kingdom and European Association for Psychotherapeutic Counselling (UKEAPC).

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), formerly named the British Association for Counselling, was formed in 1977 and arose from the Standing Conference for the Advancement of Counselling (BACP, 2011). Its name was modified in September 2000 in acknowledgement of counselors’ and psychotherapists’ desire to belong to a unified profession that met the common interests of both groups (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010). BACP’s mission is to “enable access to ethical and effective psychological therapy by setting and monitoring of standards” (*Welcome from BACP*, 2011). BACP accredits individual practitioners, counseling services, and training courses. Nearly 9000 counselors and psychotherapists are accredited by BACP (Counsellor/Psychotherapist accreditation scheme, 2010).

To become accredited, individuals must meet eight criteria, which include the completion of a BACP-accredited training course and a minimum of three years of practice prior to the application. Candidates must have had 450 supervised hours within the past 3–6 years, 150 of which came after their academic training, along with a minimum of 1.5 hours of supervision/month during this period. (An alternative route is provided and included in the *BACP Standard for Accreditation*.) Other criteria address continuing professional development; self-awareness; and knowledge and understanding of theories along with practice and supervision (BACP, 2009).

BACP began the recognition of training course standards in 1988, and over 120 courses have been recognized or accredited. Courses must include a mix of elements that include knowledge-based learning; competencies in therapy; self-awareness; professional development; skills work; and placements regarding practice (BACP, 2009).

BACP's most recent framework in ethics, the *Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy* (BACP, 2010), replaced earlier ethical codes. Aimed at guiding practice in counseling and psychotherapy for BACP members, the Framework also was produced to "inform the practice of closely related roles that are delivered in association with counselling and psychotherapy or as part of the infrastructure to deliver these services" (p. 02). The Framework features sections on values and ethical principles in counseling and psychotherapy. It also is highlighted by a section related to the personal moral qualities of counselors, who are encouraged to possess such characteristics as resilience, humility, wisdom, empathy, and courage.

The United Kingdom and European Association for Psychotherapeutic Counselling (UKEAPC) is an organization that "regulates and monitors the standards of training and quality of delivery of its Member Training Organizations" (UKEAPC Home page, 2011). It was founded in 1996 and underwent a modification in its name in 2010 to include member organizations in Europe (UKEAPC Name Change, 2010). Member organizations can include universities and training programs in the private sector and it is designed for programs at the post-graduate level or the equivalent thereof (Home Page, 2011).

UKEAPC defines psychotherapeutic counseling as a "form of counselling in depth which adopts a relational-developmental focus with the goal of fostering the client's personal growth and development, in the context of their life and current circumstances" (UKEAPC What is Therapeutic Counselling?, 2011). It also involves the counselor's use of self; competence in interventions, assessment, and diagnosis; an understanding of efficacy within the psychotherapeutic relationship; competence in abilities to guide clients toward their existential potential; ability to work with other healthcare professionals; and a commitment to ongoing professional development (UKEAPC).

Trainees in psychotherapeutic counseling programs must meet certain criteria to be considered for acceptance into UKEAPC. In addition to possessing a personality that can maintain stability in a psychotherapeutic relationship, candidates also should be living a life consistent with personal ethics; possess experience in responsible roles in working with people; and have an educational background to enable her/him to cope with academic demands at the postgraduate/graduate level (UKEAPC Training Standards, 2011).

Graduate training programs meeting UKEAPC standards are a minimum of three years in duration along with 450 hours devoted to skills and theory and 300 hours dedicated to supervised work with clients. Four components are deemed to be necessary: personal therapy; clinical practice; supervised practice; and a comprehension of theories. A trainee must have at least 40 hours/year of personal therapy, equating to 120 hours by the conclusion of the program. A final evaluation that assesses theoretical comprehension and clinical competence must also be given. Training programs are responsible for publishing the code of ethics/professional practice to which it adheres; this code must be consistent with the corresponding codes of UKEAPC (UKEAPC Training Standards, 2011).

Programs also must include the following curricular items: theory, practice, and range of approaches of psychotherapeutic counseling; relevant studies in human development, sexuality, ethics, research, and human sciences; social and cultural influences in psychotherapeutic counseling; the provision of a placement in mental health; supervised psychotherapeutic counseling practice; identification/management of the trainee's involvement in personal psychotherapeutic counseling; the ability to refer to other professionals when deemed necessary; legal issues; research skills; and a written product that displays a trainee's ability to communicate professionally. Full member organizations also must have a professional development policy consistent with UKEAPC (UKEAPC Training Standards, 2011).

In regard to Ireland, guidance was made "a universal entitlement in post primary schools" in Ireland through the adoption of the Education Act (1998). Additional professionals are given to each school by the Department of Education and Skills for the purpose of guidance. They range from eight hours in smaller schools with an enrollment of less than 200 students to approximately two full-time posts in larger schools with an enrollment of 1,000 students or more (National Centre for Guidance in Education, 2011).

The National Centre for Guidance and Education (NCGE), an agency of the Irish Department of Education and Science, aims to "support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance" (National Centre for Guidance in Education, 2011). The Centre provides support

for guidance professionals in the school setting, such as guidance counselors and practitioners in second and third level schools and in adult education. It fosters such support through an array of activities, including though not limited to the development of guidance resources, the dissemination of information on good guidance practice, and offering support for innovative projects in guidance (National Centre for Guidance in Education, 2011). Training in Whole School Guidance Planning also is administered through professional development workshops (NCGE, Whole School Guidance, 2011).

Established in 1968, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) in Ireland represents over 1200 professionals in second-level schools as well as third level colleges, guidance services in adult settings, and private practice. IGC serves as a liaison and an advocate in its work with government, institutions of higher education, and other organizations (*Welcome to the IGC*, 2011). It also offers a Code of Ethics (*Coras Eitice—Code of Ethics*, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to examine counselor preparation at selected institutions of higher education in England and Ireland from a comparative standpoint to that in the United States. In my search of the literature, no recent journal article has addressed this topic. The rationale behind this study is not only to enlighten U.S. counselor educators in learning more about another system of preparation, but also to aid them in their own programmatic considerations regarding such areas as philosophy, training emphases, and student involvement. One of the critical fundamental questions in the interviews echoed Stockton et al.'s (2008) discussion of international counselor training: "What are the critical variables that shape these programs?" (p. 84).

## Data Collection

This research project was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board prior to the collection of data, which took place during the author's sabbatical in the spring semester of 2011. Institutions offering graduate training in counseling were asked to participate based on, for the most part, a convenience factor. Three of them were in proximity to the base of my sabbatical, the University of Cambridge. The two programs in Ireland were also sought due to their propinquity. This sample was clearly not exhaustive and was not intended to be meant as comprehensive in any way. However, it is interesting to note that the institutions included in this study do vary in both size and type of institution.

Possible participation was initially sought in one of two ways: After identifying a faculty member or course director from a website search, I emailed the respective counselor educator, outlined my proposed study, and asked for participation. In other instances, I spoke to the course director directly. The informed consent was shared or sent for their review, and a copy of the completed consent was given to participants at the actual interview. All interviews were done in person and were informal in structure. Drafts of each course summary in the data section were sent to one of the interviewees at each institution for feedback on the clarity and accuracy of the content as well as overall approval.

Interviewees in the study were Dr. Judy Moore, Director of the Centre for Counselling Studies, University of East Anglia (England); Dr. Steve Shaw, Course Director (Access Course) (Counselling), West Suffolk College (England); Dr. Lucy Hearne, Programme Director, University of Limerick (Ireland); Mr. Tom Geary, Lecturer, Programme Director, University of Limerick (Ireland); Dr. Terry Hanley, Director of MA (January intake), University of Manchester (England); Dr. Colleen McLaughlin, Course Director (MEd), University of Cambridge (England); and Mr. Gus Murray, Lecturer in Counselling, Cork Institute of Technology (Ireland).

## Terminology

In understanding the approach to counselor training in this region, I found some differing language that is reflected in parts of this article. First, for the most part, a "course" would not mean an individual class, as it might be used in the U.S., but rather a course of study or program. Second, instead of "faculty/faculty members" or "department," I tended to hear "course team" or "members of staff" to describe the equivalent. Third, "course members" was often used in place of "students." Fourth, instead of being headed by a "department chair," a faculty member with the title of "course director" oversaw each individual program. Finally, "accreditation" was used to mean both course of study approval by an outside body as well as approval of an individual's educational work (i.e., certification). In other words, a trainee in England could seek accreditation by, for instance, the BACP.

## Data

This section offers an overview of the respective courses included in the study and represents data taken from the interviews as well as from course/university materials and/or websites. Each course summary is designed to reflect pertinent facets of the courses, including the curriculum and any unique elements. A background of the institution also is featured.

### University of Limerick (UL)

Located five kilometers from Limerick City, the University of Limerick has an enrollment of approximately 11,600 students (University of Limerick, 2010). Designed around IGC guidelines, its Graduate Diploma in Guidance Counselling program is part-time in enrollment and two full years in duration. Its primary objective is to train practicing teachers and other related professionals to become Guidance Counsellors, and the program's qualification is recognized by the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland for the aim of gaining an appointment as a Guidance Counsellor at a second-level school (i.e., high school). It is also recognized by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, Ireland. To be considered for admission, an individual must have an undergraduate degree and/or an approved teaching qualification or an acceptable level of experience and interest in the area. Applicants also are interviewed prior to the admission decision (University of Limerick, n.d.-b).

**Interviews and course materials.** Started 12 years ago, the Graduate Diploma in Guidance Counselling at the University of Limerick is housed in the Department of Education and Professional Studies. Faculty members include other UL faculty who primarily teach in other academic areas as well as 6–8 part-time lecturers. The diploma program is offered in 2–3 “outreach centres” throughout Ireland, each of which has a link-in coordinator who liaises with the programme directors and students. Other key personnel include process educators, who aid in teaching theories and skills development; placement tutors, who are retired guidance counselors who serve as supervisors during students' placements; and mentors, who share their expertise with students on a voluntary basis during the students' placements. Approximately 18–20 trainees are accepted in a cohort in each of the centres. The diploma program has 325 graduates to date with another 80 trainees to be graduating in January, 2012 (T. Geary & L. Hearne, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

The program is comprised of 10 taught modules, a research project, and a placement in an educational setting. On average, students' classroom time for the initial three semesters is six hours/week. A portion of the program is offered on two intensive residential weekend sessions. This portion is done in the first and third semesters and emphasizes experiential group work as a way to enhance trainees' skills. In the third semester, the classtime is decreased to about three hours/week to enable students to complete their research projects (University of Limerick, n.d.-b; T. Geary & L. Hearne, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

Courses in “Counselling Theory and Practice” are taken in both the first and second years. Additional courses in the initial year include those in the areas of human development, career development, group processes, research methods, and assessment. The second year features placements in both educational and industrial settings, the latter of which is brief (five days) and intended to give exposure to alternative guidance counseling settings. Placements are marked on a pass/fail basis. The final year also includes a research project and coursework in guidance in adult/continuing education, educational issues, professional practice, and the psychology of work (University of Limerick, n.d.-b; T. Geary & L. Hearne, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

The University of Limerick program has been described as “a course with psychological emphasis...focusing on the psychological aspects of guidance counseling” and where “the standard and focus on the personal counselling dimension is emphasized” (Geary & Liston, 2009, p. 7). Consistent with this approach, students are required to pursue their own personal therapy. This experience occurs in each first academic year and must be at least 10 sessions in length. Trainees pay for their own therapy and have to submit a letter from the professional confirming the trainee's attendance (T. Geary & L. Hearne, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

Trainees at UL pursue competency in the various modules through coursework, including a two-week summer school session at the end of the first academic year. Successful completion of a module, each of which has two units, is reflected in evaluative rubrics. They also have two tutorials per semester in which a programme director meets with a

group of students to offer a brief presentation on a topic such as writing skills or to discuss trainees' concerns in relation to their course work. The minor dissertation in the second year requires students to investigate a topic as a practitioner-researcher. Trainees develop the research proposal through the course on research methods taken in the summer school session in the first year. The topic must be related to guidance counseling, and the completed project is submitted at the end of September in their second year for a graduation the subsequent January (T. Geary & L. Hearne, personal communication, April 4, 2011). Finally, elements of the program have been presented at three recent conferences in Finland (Geary & Liston, 2009), the UK (Liston & Geary, 2009), and Canada (Liston & Geary, 2010), and a qualitative/quantitative assessment of UL graduates' career paths, professional roles, and professional development needs has been planned (Geary & Liston, 2009).

Finally, a Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling was started Fall 2011 (L. Hearne, personal communication, 27 May 2011; University of Limerick, n.d.-c). Focusing on personal, social, educational, and vocational issues through contemporary perspectives, the post-graduate degree program is designed to "advance graduates of initial guidance counselling programmes" and to "build on their knowledge, skills and competencies in the field" (University of Limerick, n.d.-a). The 12-month, part-time programme will be offered only at the main campus for the time being. Five modules and a dissertation will be required and work-related experiences and supervision also will be integral parts of the course of study. Coursework will cover advanced research methods; advanced counseling theory and practice; two practica (the first of which is on critical perspectives in the field and the second of which is on a case study); and guidance planning.

### **Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)**

CIT has approximately 12,000 students, about half of whom are enrolled full-time, across four separate campuses. The main campus is located in Bishopstown, west of Cork City (Facts and Figures, n.d.). It features a part-time Counselling and Psychotherapy program that leads to a BA (Honours) degree (Cork Institute of Technology, 2011). A part of this degree can include two certifications: Students completing the first year earn a Counselling Skills Certificate in Counselling Skills, herein referred to as the "initial Certificate." Similarly, individuals earn a Higher Certificate in Arts in Counselling Skills upon finishing the second year. Both years involve part-time enrollment. The BA (Honours) degree is four years in length and is accomplished through successful completion of the third and fourth years (CIT, Counselling Skills Certificate, 2011).

**Interview and course materials.** The initial Certificate program is described as "an introductory training in Counselling for use in their existing work or life situations" (CIT, Counselling Skills Certificate, 2011). Individuals must be at least 25 years old and submit two written references and also are assessed through an interview. In addition, the importance of dual relationships is outlined on the website for the Certificate:

...Due to the personal and experiential nature of the course, it is generally not possible to have staff or students with significant existing personal or professional relationships in the same course group. Where possible, every effort is made to overcome this difficulty by placing them in separate groups. Oftentimes this solution is not possible and in these instances, the dual relationship may prevent the applicant from being offered a place on the course at that time (CIT, Counselling Skills Certificate, 2011).

Five courses are offered each semester. Students enroll in coursework on family systems theory and application, counseling skills, mindfulness, and experiential group process in their initial semester. Trainees in the final half of the certification program take courses on person-centered counseling theory and application; developmental theory; and a second course in both counseling skills and experiential group process. Successful completion is based on an evaluation of written, practical, and experiential assignments (CIT Program outcomes, 2011). By earning this Certificate, graduates should be enabled to practice counseling skills within their "existing roles." Furthermore, the website clearly states that the Certificate is not a professional qualification within Counselling and "does not qualify the holder to practice as a professional counsellor" (CIT, Counselling Skills, 2011).

The Higher Certificate is predicated upon completion of the initial Certificate and has similar admissions requirements (CIT, Counselling Skills, 2011). The goal is to build upon the foundation in the initial Certificate so that individuals can use the skills in existing employment or volunteer work. It also serves as an entry into the BA Honours degree in the subsequent third and fourth years (CIT, Counselling Skills, 2011). Eight modules are outlined and described in detail in a rubric format and are based on various knowledge, skills and competencies (CIT, Higher Certificate, 2011). Content in

the Higher Certificate is highlighted by continued work in group process and counseling skills. However, another feature that differentiates the Higher Certificate from the Certificate is an emphasis on theory and application of ego states and life scripts (CIT, Higher Certificate, 2011). Though completion does not permit individuals to practice as a professional counselor, it does enable them to practice a full range of counselling skills within an existing role (CIT, Counselling Skills, 2011).

The Certificate program was developed in 1991. At any given time, about 140 students are enrolled in the various segments of the CIT training: approximately 60 in the first year, 36 in the second year, and 24 in the third and fourth years. Trainees are not guaranteed admission among the various levels. In other words, completion of the initial Certificate does not translate into an automatic admission into the Higher Certificate (year 2). Though the minimum age of 25 is set as admissions criterion for both Certificate programs, the average age of admitted students is generally closer to 35, as life experience and maturity are valued in terms of the development of therapeutic relationships by the trainees. A written self-appraisal and two interviews (group and individual) are also a part of the admissions process. In addition, it was noted that many students enter the CIT program having first been in other professions (G. Murray, personal communication, April 5, 2011).

Years 3 and 4 of the BA (Honours) degree support the practice of counseling with the final year stressing the integration of modalities. Staff members coordinate and often identify the trainees' placements, which often take place at universities, high schools, primary schools, community projects, and alternative centers. Students are supervised individually and accumulate a minimum of 100 placement hours over the four years (G. Murray, personal communication, April 5, 2011). By their graduation, students must have completed a minimum of 100 hours of personal counseling (G. Murray, personal communication, October 10, 2011). The CIT program also has about 15 instructors, most of whom are part-time, that assist with the training (G. Murray, personal communication, April 5, 2011). A Master's degree was also instituted in Fall 2011 (G. Murray, personal communication, October 10, 2011).

Most graduates of the BA (Honours) degree progress in their work area as a result of their advanced training, as they may get a promotion or secure a more counseling-related position in their workplace. Private practice is another possible route for graduates. Additional hours are needed after graduation for individuals to meet accreditation standards (G. Murray, personal communication, April 5, 2011).

### University of Cambridge

During the 2009–2010 academic year, the University of Cambridge had a full-time equivalent student load of approximately 17,600, of whom about 5,800 students are classified as full-time post-graduate status (*Facts and Figures January 2011*, 2011). The University's Faculty of Education offers a full-time Master's of Philosophy (MPhil) and a part-time Master's in Education (MEd) in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapeutic Counselling. It is not possible for individuals to gain accreditation through the MPhil program (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, n.d.). Counselor training at Cambridge started in 1985 in the Institute of Education now one of three organizations that make up the Faculty. The MEd program currently has 56 students and a team of five counselor educators. With its focus on working with youth, the MEd program stresses therapy through play and the arts, such as storytelling, drawing, and sand play (McLaughlin & Holliday, 2010).

**Interview and course materials.** The training route consists of three parts: a) a 60-hour introductory course; b) a 180-hour advanced diploma program; and c) a three-year master's degree program. The introductory course requires one 4000-word assignment and can be taken through its Faculty of Education or another equivalent program. The advanced diploma program is one year in duration and requires three assignments, two of which are 4000 words in length and the last of which is 8000 words in length. Both the introductory course and advanced diploma are requirements for admission into the master's degree program. Trainees in the advanced diploma attend classes one day/week for three terms, each of which is 10 weeks in length for the diploma and eight weeks for the master's degree. The BACP accreditation route begins with the advanced diploma program and concludes with the completion of the MEd degree (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010).

Frequent interviews are integral to the courses. Admissions to both the diploma and MEd courses require, in part, a personal interview with members of the course team. It serves as an assessment of such qualities as their commitment to personal development, their commitment to the course, personal motivation and robustness, demonstration of self-reflection, and how their prior experiences relate to the course. Course members also undergo feedback interviews with

tutors. These events occur three times during the diploma course and six times during the MEd course (C. McLaughlin, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

The MEd course of study is grounded in four themes: the therapeutic relationship and therapeutic processes; professional issues in therapy with children; understanding child and adolescent development; and the development of the social and emotional well-being of children (Child and Adolescent Psychotherapeutic Counselling, n.d.). The first two years of the MEd degree course are 238 hours in length, and three required assignments are due each year, two of which are 6000 words in length. Trainees attend classes for five hours on one day/week for three terms for the first two years. Two mornings of classes are also required each term where the focus is solely on practical work. All trainees are mandated to complete a thesis of 18,000–20,000 words in length, and this project takes place in their final year of study (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010).

Supervised counseling practice can begin after January of the MEd degree course. Supervision sessions must occur at least once every two weeks and should take place when no more than six counseling sessions have been completed by the student. Approved supervisors must be used, and they submit a report about the trainee's counseling abilities each July. Trainees must keep logs of their work and have them signed by their supervisors. Altogether 450 hours of supervised practice are required (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010).

In addition, trainees must undergo their own personal therapy during the course of study. Students are expected to find their own counselor, who must be accredited by a professional association such as BACP or UKEAPC, and be approved by the course director. They also must pay for the therapy themselves. It is mandatory for the duration of the training, including periods when classes are not in session. A minimum of 35 sessions is anticipated. Trainees are expected to be in long-term counseling involving "in-depth work concerning childhood" and "where the practitioner uses the transference, or actively works with the psychotherapeutic relationship dialogically" (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010, p. 5).

Students must submit a report from their counselor, indicating that they have attended and participated in the therapeutic process and whether any serious concerns about their well-being as a future therapist are apparent. Termination in the personal therapy must be documented along with the starting and ending dates and the number of sessions attended. Course members also are required to participate in weekly personal development groups, which are facilitated by someone external to the University. These groups are 24 sessions in total length, which comprises three eight-week terms. In a similar vein, course directors also seek the input of a training supervisor, an external consultant per se who is not associated with the University, regarding course issues (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010; C. McLaughlin, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

Graduates of the course of study have found employment in schools, the NHS, and in the voluntary sector (McLaughlin & Holliday, 2010). Alumni must conduct an annual audit of their professional development to maintain their registration with UKEAPC. The Faculty also operates the Cambridge Forum for Children's Emotional Well-Being, a continuing professional development program and professional network for graduates and other area psychotherapeutic professionals (University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 2010; C. McLaughlin, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

### **University of East Anglia**

The University of East Anglia (UEA) was started in 1963, admitting 87 students (History, 2011). It has an enrollment of over 14,000 students (Our Campus, 2011) and is located in Norwich, a city located about 115 miles northeast of London (Getting to UEA, 2011). It offers a one-year, full-time Postgraduate Diploma in counseling that is accredited by BACP and "is designed to equip successful students to practise professionally as counsellors" (PG Diploma Counselling, 2011, para. 1). Intensive five-day trainings are conducted during the first and final week of the program, and counseling placements and supervision are involved in the program. Students who complete the Postgraduate Diploma may continue to the master's program (MA) in Counseling (UEA Post Graduate Prospectus, n.d.). Both the Postgraduate Diploma and MA courses of study are housed in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning. Students can complete the Master's degree in six months, if attending full-time, and in one year, if enrolled part-time. UEA also offers a Post-Graduate Certificate in Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy, the only such program in the UK (University of East Anglia School of Education and Lifelong Learning).



**Interview and course handbook.** The UEA course of study is person-centered in its orientation and the topics of spirituality and focusing are important elements of the training. Primary admission criteria for the Postgraduate Diploma are previous significant counseling experience or the possession of a counseling certificate, which is a 60-credit course emphasizing basic helping skills. Most applicants from the UK possess the latter item. If meeting initial criteria, applicants are interviewed by tutors of the program. Nineteen students were admitted into this program for the 2011–2012 academic year (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011).

A University policy prohibits graduate student employment for more than 12 hours per week, and tutors strongly recommend that trainees do not engage in work outside of the program. Given the intensive nature of the diploma program, personal therapy is no longer required, though an estimated half of the students do pursue counseling on their own (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011).

Extensive group participation is integrated into the UEA diploma course. First, self-selected study groups are formed at the outset of the academic year; these groups meet weekly (University of East Anglia, 2010). Second, trainees must participate in “community meetings” twice per week where, along with two tutors who serve solely as facilitators, they are allowed to freely explore their lives or themselves in a supportive environment. Meetings range from 75–120 minutes in length (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011).

Third, trainees also are required to attend personal development groups composed of 9–10 trainees and held at the end of the teaching week (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011). The goal of this group is to aid trainees in becoming aware of their vulnerabilities as well as their strengths. The co-facilitator, a person-centered counselor, has no other relationship with the course of study. Fourth, a supervision group is offered in addition to individual supervision. This group is described as “often a very creative place to explore and develop counselling practice” that gives trainees an opportunity to link theory with practice (University of East Anglia, 2010, p. 31). Fifth, they also are obligated to participate in a focusing group and a focusing partnership. This segment of the course enables trainees to work on their core conditions related to their own personal experiences. The partnerships allow trainees to practice focusing and listening skills with other cohort members in a structured approach. The listener in the partnership allows the trainee “a space in the week simply to be and express yourself, and to experience the value of being deeply listened to, without interruption” (p. 32). Participation in these groups meets the BACP requirements for personal development (University of East Anglia).

Six written assignments are a core part of the postgraduate Diploma program (University of East Anglia, 2010), which is often referred to as “Unit I.” They are composed of in-depth analyses of videotapes with peers, essays on and comparison of person-centered therapy with another approach, and a case study (University of East Anglia). Two significant assignments involve in-depth analyses of trainees’ audiotaped work with clients as an assessment of their own self-reflection on their practice and their approach and competence in person-centered counseling. These assignments do not include the 100 placement hours accompanied by weekly supervision and are graded on a pass/fail basis (J. Moore, personal communication, March 25, 2011 and April 21, 2011).

The process of self-assessment is described as “one of the most testing aspects” of the course where, from a person-centered approach, “it is a time when tensions between congruence and acceptance can be felt” (University of East Anglia, 2010, p. 20). This process is the foundation of the culminating project, the trainee’s 8000-word, self-assessment project that comes at the conclusion of the diploma course. Evaluation of this capstone project and the earlier assignments is done via a “mixed assessment process” that combines the person-centered approach and an atmosphere of “constant exploration and examination” along with University and BACP requirements (University of East Anglia, p. 4). The University’s Exam Board also does a thorough review of trainees’ assignments in determining whether a passing grade is issued at the trainee’s completion of course requirements, and this finally determines the pass/fail grade (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011).

All trainees in the diploma course are offered a core placement in the University Counselling Service and may also have one at a site outside of the University. At the conclusion of the MA trainees must also complete a 20,000-word dissertation (University of East Anglia, 2010). Guided by an academic supervisor, trainees may choose the type of project to be pursued. Many of them select a qualitative exploration related to their interests. Upon graduation, many people may do volunteer counseling work before securing employment, which is often part-time and subsequently found in a drug/

alcohol agency, a youth counseling agency, voluntary or statutory agencies, in an educational context or private practice (J. Moore, personal communication, 25 March 2011).

### **West Suffolk College**

West Suffolk College (WSC) is a rural further education college with a main campus in Out Risbygate, adjacent to Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. In 2009–2010, WSC boasted an enrollment of approximately 17,900 students, about 2,500 of whom were enrolled full-time. Courses are offered at over 100 sites throughout the county at its Local Learning Centres (West Suffolk College, 2010).

The two degree (Foundation and BA Honors) courses of study offer coursework reflective of mostly Humanistic, Psychodynamic, and Cognitive-Behavioral orientations and allow students to work toward BACP accreditation. As pointed out in the course website, “Students are encouraged to respect the frame and ethos of their core integrative training approach, but also to develop their own individual style and philosophy of counselling” (University Campus Suffolk, 2010). Coursework covers both works with children and young adults (University Campus Suffolk, 2010).

**Interview and course handbook.** The “team” (instructors) consists of course directors for both the Access course and the Foundation and BA Honors courses along with four tutors that are not full-time WSC employees. Students progress toward completion of the BA Honors degree by first completing the Access course and the Foundation (FdA Counselling) degree course. As described in the *Course Handbook*, the Foundation Degrees are “vocational in nature” and “differ from the traditional BA (Honours) degree by placing a much greater emphasis on work-based learning and the acquisition of transferable, vocational and intellectual skills” (p. 3).

Open to everyone, an Access course is generally designed for those individuals who have not been enrolled in an educational program and enables them to raise their academic skills and abilities. The full-time Access course in Counselling requires 450 hours of student contact time with tutors and is done over 45 weeks with class time averaging 1.5 days per week. Students also attend one weekend of residential work. The application process consists of a writing sample, a screen test assessing literacy and numeracy skills, and a group interview. In the admissions workshop, commitment to the course is heavily emphasized, a point reinforced by past students offering a presentation to applicants. Approximately 20 students are accepted annually (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011). Course time is consumed mostly by theoretical work presented by tutors in the morning segments. Afternoon sessions include skills practice and required participation in an experiential, here-and-now group facilitated by two tutors. During one weekend in the year, the one-hour group meets for an extended weekend session from a Friday night through a Sunday morning (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011).

Ten modules highlight the Access course: Study Skills; Basic Counseling Skills; Emotional Intelligence 1 and 2; Emotional Development; Metaphor, Images, and Dreams; The Professional Relationship; Theories and Concepts; Supervision; and Advanced Counseling Skills. Each module has a corresponding rubric and assignments to assess trainees’ competencies (University Campus Suffolk, 2008/09a). A grade is given for each module as well as for the overall course of study (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011).

Completion of the Access course does not qualify a trainee for BACP accreditation, as the course hours do not meet BACP standards in terms of course hours. However, completion does allow for admission to the Foundation degree, the next step in the progression which began two years ago. About 75% of those finishing the Access course choose to continue to the Foundation degree, which involves an examination of theory in greater depth and includes work by Jung, Klein, and Freud. Trainees are responsible for finding their placements and organizing the corresponding supervision. Given the difficulty encountered by students, the team is considering the creation of a counseling agency at the College (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011).

Both the Foundation (FdA) and BA Honors degrees are administered through the School of Healthcare & Early Years (University Campus Suffolk, 2008/09b) and are of two semesters in duration with each semester being 12 weeks in length (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011). The FdA program is designed to be vocational and includes work experience (placements). It differs from the BA Honors degree in that the FdA program places its emphasis on “work-based learning and the acquisition of transferable, vocational, and intellectual skills” (University Campus Suffolk, p. 5). Upon completion, trainees can apply for BACP accreditation.

In the Foundation program, personal tutors are assigned to each student at the outset of the program. Whenever possible, the student has the same tutor throughout the duration of enrollment. The tutor is designed to be a source of support and a person to offer “advice where needed” (University Campus Suffolk, 2008/09b, p. 3). Students are expected to meet with their tutors once or twice per semester. In addition, the delivery of the modules is done by the Course Committee, which meets four times per academic year. The Committee also views students’ comments as vital feedback in their deliberations.

In the BA Honors program, trainees study five new modules, including the philosophy of counselling; mental health (study of personality disorders); group counseling; counseling children; and a dissertation on their integrative approach to counseling. Upon graduation, people tend to enter private practice; find a position at such places as a drug/alcohol or women’s center, or a community counseling service; or a general practitioner’s office. Some students completing the BA Honors degree have also gained subsequent employment in a school setting (S. Shaw, personal communication, 30 March 2011).

### **University of Manchester**

The University of Manchester has an enrollment of nearly 39,500 students, of which approximately 11,000 are graduate students (Facts and Figures, 2011). It offers a 180-credit MA degree in Counselling, a course of study housed in the University’s School of Education in Educational Support & Inclusion (The University of Manchester, 2010). The degree can be earned through part-time enrollment over a period of 36 months (The University of Manchester, 2011). Individuals of many different career backgrounds often enroll in the course:

The course is intended for people for whom counselling is a legitimate and generally recognized part of their work role, either paid or voluntary [sic]. Normally course members come from a range of professional backgrounds, e.g. teaching; social work; the medical professions, the pastoral ministry and from community voluntary organizations. (Counselling MA Selection criteria, n.d.)

**Interview and other course materials.** Evaluated on their personal and intellectual fit for counseling training, applicants are required to have a first (i.e., undergraduate) degree or a certificate in counseling, often gained through 90–120 hours of study done at a further education college over a year. However, in some instances professional counseling experience, relevant life experience, and/or suitable training may be considered in place of the degree requirement (The University of Manchester, 2011). In addition to the application forms, individuals must submit references and be interviewed in both a group and individual format as part of the admissions process (Counselling MA Entry requirements, n.d.; T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011). About 30 individuals are admitted annually. They begin the course of study in September of each year with placement hours commonly beginning in their second semester (T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

The initial two years of the course of study have been BACP-accredited since 1993 and require attendance at 60 weekly sessions, a summer school component, and four weekend segments. In the first two years of study, students attend classes from 12pm–8pm one day per week. In the third year, class time decreases to 4–8pm, also one day per week. An introductory weekend is featured at the outset of the course of study to help students in the formation of relationships and to provide a further orientation to the course. All classes are offered in an in-person format. The course is comprised of six teaching modules, which include counseling theories, reflective practice, lifespan/social context, and a supervised project in research. Students also must have 150 practice sessions in their placements as well as monthly supervision and personal therapy. The program is integrative in nature and utilizes Egan’s three-stage model as a foundation for integrating theory and practice (T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011; The University of Manchester, School of Education, 2009–2012; The University of Manchester, School of Education, 2011).

Personal therapy is not required of students during the MA course of study, though it is deemed to be potentially highly beneficial prior to beginning their studies and often recommended throughout. Personal reflection also is encouraged throughout the course of study. To this end, students are required to attend a personal development group once a week over the initial two years in the program. These groups are assigned for the first two years. In the final year, students self-select their groups. They are facilitated by a professional external to the course of study or by one of the core staff on the counseling team not involved in leading input for that year group (T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

Most students in the cohort continue to the third year and earn the MA degree, thereby heightening their professional credibility. This final year of studies enables students to complete the research project in an area related to students' interests. It is not designed to provide additional training in counseling, though students are permitted to attain their placement hours in a period of three years (T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

Rather this component of the course seeks to aid students in their academic development in four ways: by providing an introduction to research methods; by helping them to realize the connection between research and practice; by aiding them in the creation of a base of knowledge in current developments in the profession; and by assisting them in building links among theory, research, and practice. Students also are encouraged to attend the annual research conference held each July. The capstone project of the third year is a 15,000-word project in which students implement practitioner-based research on a topic reflective of their professional interest. The proposal for the project is required as part of the third-year coursework. Students then have about nine months to collect data and write the thesis. If successful, they graduate in the following December (The University of Manchester, 2010; T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

Graduates of the MA course often take various directions. They may earn a promotion in their present position as a result of their graduate training, as most students in the MA course are employed during their part-time studies. Some individuals find employment as a result of their practice placement. Still others may volunteer at a counseling setting post-graduation and eventually be hired by that same agency (T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

The University also features a professional doctorate degree and a Ph.D. degree in Counselling Studies. Very few graduates of the MA degree immediately pursue either doctoral program, as it is not viewed as a linear progression in their education. The Ph.D. program emphasizes such areas as training evaluation; supervision; counseling and culture; and professional, legal, and ethical issues. The professional doctorate is geared toward qualified (accredited), experienced practitioners who desire to study issues in additional depth (The University of Manchester, 2010; T. Hanley, personal communication, April 11, 2011).

## Discussion

Four points emerged from the interviews and examinations of the courses of counseling study. Each point is set in comparison to the structure and academic delivery of counseling programs in the U.S. They are not intended to be framed as comparison points of superiority or inferiority in any way. Rather they are meant to be communicated as merely contrasts in approach and in design.

- 1) *The master's degree wasn't the focal point.* To become a professional counselor in the U.S., one must initially obtain both a baccalaureate degree and a graduate degree, the latter of which is in counseling (Schweiger, Henderson, & Clawson, 2008). However, the degree system is different in these programs in that the master's degree was generally not a critical prerequisite for entry into the profession. Rather the course of study had a different name and came prior to the master's degree. As seen in both programs in Ireland, the creation of the master's degree studies in regard to counseling is a more recent development.
- 2) *Research is required.* A significant research project was a capstone requirement in some of the courses studied in this project, as course members were required to design and implement a lengthy research project in the final year of their studies. Students themselves often decided the topic of the study within certain parameters. Given the depth of the project, it appeared to be the equivalent of a master's degree thesis.

A similar, though perhaps not as extensive, learning experience is expected of trainees of CACREP-accredited programs in the U.S. In the CACREP framework, accredited programs must offer a component on "Research and Program Evaluation." In this core curriculum area, trainees are to be offered "studies that provide an understanding of research methods, statistical analysis, needs assessment, and program evaluation" (CACREP, 2009, p. 15). Elements of this curricular area include the importance of research in the counseling profession; various research methods; statistical methods; principles of needs assessment and program evaluation; using research in regard to practice; and strategies regarding cultures and ethics in interpretation and reports of research and program evaluation (CACREP, 2009).

- 3) *Personal therapy is strongly encouraged and sometimes required.* In his discussion of factors of an effective helper, Neukrug (2007) cited seven studies, summarizing that a majority of therapists have sought their own personal therapy. They added, “It is heartening to see that therapists seem to want to work on their own issues” (p. 20).

Several textbooks by U.S. authors espouse the same message to trainees: Personal counseling aids the training process and the development, personal and professional, of the student. Kottler and Shepard (2008) addressed one possible benefit of the process: working through conflicts and problems that can impede one’s ability to be therapeutic. They maintained, “In the process of challenging yourself, there is no vehicle more appropriate than experiencing counseling as a client” (p. 473).

The degree to which personal counseling is encouraged for trainees varies in graduate counseling programs in the U.S. However, among some of the six courses of studies, it was clear that personal counseling was viewed as paramount in the training process. In requiring personal counseling, the respective courses of study were making a strong statement in the importance of knowing oneself and of self-reflection. Furthermore, trainees were sometimes expected to participate in what would be considered to be longer-term therapy at their own expense. The two critical factors—the duration of the counseling and the cost involved—are noteworthy, as they reflect the deep level of commitment and benefits seen in the mandate. A possible future study on this realm could investigate the perceived impact of the counseling on the trainees’ development.

- 4) *A previous career prior to the pursuit of a counseling degree is often the norm.* In other words, the possession of professional experience was valued with the inference that entering students possessed more maturity. A theme that appeared throughout the courses of study was the notion of counseling representing a second career for many course members, a topic receiving relatively little attention in the U.S. literature. The BACP echoes the notion of second careers:

Counselling is often taken up as a second career. As a result people are frequently working and training at the same time. For this reason, most courses are part-time, usually in the evening or day release.

The desire to become a counsellor develops frequently from some aspect of a person’s original career.

These careers have the welfare of others at heart; for example, nursing, teaching, social and support work.

This work naturally benefits from training in counselling skills but may lead to a change to a career as a counsellor. (*Careers in Counseling*, 2010, para. 1–2)

The notion of entering the counseling profession as a second career is not a foreign concept in the U.S., though literature on this specific topic is extremely limited. Anecdotally, Randy McPhearson, the School Counselor of the Year as chosen by the American School Counselor Association in 2011, entered the field after being a higher education administrator and an executive recruiter (O’Grady, 2011).

## Conclusion

The identified themes are not meant to be conclusive, particularly given the relatively small number of courses of study involved in this article. If more courses of study were included, it is conceivable that different observations would have emerged. Nonetheless, the observations are noteworthy and present both similarities and contrasts to the general approaches of counselor education programs in the U.S. In some respects, the themes are not surprising, given the strong foundation of the counseling profession in Ireland and England. Stockton et al. (2008) offered a consistent point: “In nations where counseling is perceived as an independent profession, it is not surprising to see a strong emphasis on graduate-level training that often emphasizes skills, theory, and the identity of the profession” (p. 85).

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