

# Counselor Education Curriculum and Online Counseling

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*Research has demonstrated that the online counseling field is a growing industry. It has now become a viable career choice for beginning counselors entering the field, yet it remains to be covered in traditional counselor education programs. Current instructional modalities are explored and recommendations are made on how these can be incorporated into a distance education counseling program.*

Online counseling is recognized by many names, such as web counseling, virtual counseling, e-therapy, e-counseling, Internet counseling, telemental health, and cyber-counseling (Centore & Milacci, 2008). A recent search engine inquiry by Haberstroh, Parr, Bradley, Morgan-Fleming and Gee (2008) pulled up more than 66 million websites pertaining to the counseling field. It has also been reported that websites designed for online counseling services increased by 55% in a 1-year period (Haberstroh et al., 2008). Not only is online counseling popular, but it is also profitable (Amig, 2001). It is estimated that in 2004, consumer spending for online health services reached \$800 million (Amig, 2001). As the possibility of online counseling as a viable career choice continues to grow, counseling students' interest in online counseling should be further explored so that students interested in online counseling can receive the educational support that they need.

Research showed a large number of student's seeking counseling degrees online (Jaschik, 2006; Jonassen, 2004). However, the traditional instructional program for counseling preparation does not educate students in specific techniques for online counseling, despite the fact that online counseling is a growing field (Centore & Milacci, 2008; Haberstroh et al., 2008). While the counseling curriculum lacks content about the field of online counseling, cyber-counseling certificate programs have been developed out of demand to instruct those interested in this field (Murphy, MacFadden, & Mitchell, 2008). These certificate programs are open to individuals from all disciplines and with all educa-

tion levels (Murphy et al., 2008). The growth of online counseling is attributed to various factors including convenience and lower cost for consumers (Finn & Bruce, 2008). In addition, several studies have demonstrated equivalent reported efficacy levels of client satisfaction with online counseling compared to face-to-face counseling (Richardson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2009). Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim, and Shapira (2008) reported clients to have an effect size (ES) of .88 with their satisfaction for online counseling for PTSD, which was higher than the face-to-face level of satisfaction. As this may well be an area that current counselors in training students will work in, their perceptions of the efficacy level of online counseling should be examined.

From the growth of online counseling websites, it was apparent that there is an interest and demand for this new method of counseling (Chester & Glass, 2006). For those in the field, it is clear that professional counseling organizations have taken a negative stance on Internet counseling because of the many legal and ethical implications (Holmes, 2008). Reservations about proper ethical use of online counseling from the American Counseling Association (ACA), the Clinical Social Work Federation, the American Psychological Association (APA), American Mental Health Counselors Association and the International Society for Mental Health Online have all been expressed about the use of Internet counseling (Finn & Bruce, 2008). However, the voices of counseling students have never been heard in regard to their opinion of working in the online environment. Despite the reluctance of professional organizations to

accept this practice, it has flourished and become popular with both clients and clinicians. So popular in fact, that “the mental health profession is unprepared that within a few years there may be as many people seeking professional counseling over the Internet as there are looking for it face-to-face” (Alleman, 2002, p. 199).

This poses a dilemma because most graduate counseling programs do not currently train counseling students to work in this modality. It is clear, however, that online counseling techniques need to be introduced through the counseling curriculum, to ensure that the “mental health of the next generation will not fall into the hands of unqualified and unlicensed” professionals (Amani, 2007, p. 5).

### GAPS IN RESEARCH

As the field of online counseling is growing, it can be surmised that we should be preparing counselors to work in this new profession (Alleman, 2002; Haberstroh et al., 2008). McLeod (2007) suggested that newly trained counselors should be the focus because they need to develop specific skills for working online during their education and training. However, since this is such a new field, little research has been gathered. According to Lewis and Coursol (2007), how online counseling is addressed in the curriculum and counselor perspectives on this topic “will have a significant impact on how it will evolve in the future” (p. 147). Up to this date, a review of the literature did not undercover the perceptions of online counseling students toward the online counseling profession. However, similar studies from different disciplines were examined. Finn and Bruce (2008) made the case that little research has been done in the online counseling industry including the fact that “even less is known about the therapists who choose to make their services available online. No study has investigated their qualifications, motivation, satisfaction, effectiveness, and concerns” (p. 283).

Online counseling is a rapidly growing field and many counseling students may be interested in pursuing this as a career option (Centore & Milacci, 2008; Haberstroh et al., 2008). Educators need to understand the needs of students fully and adapt the curriculum to cater to them. Currently, the traditional counseling instructional program does not provide education within the curriculum about online counseling, nor are specific techniques to be used in online counseling addressed (Amani, 2007). This may well be an area that current counseling students’ will work in, so their perceptions of the efficacy level of online counseling should be further

explored. If students express a desire to work as online counselors, this aspect may need to be incorporated into counseling training programs. As Manzanares (2004) pointed out, “Counselor education programs must continually monitor the varying needs of students” to be considered relevant (p. 5).

### PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

#### *Background*

Ekong (2006) studied students enrolled in online counseling programs and believed that this type of education is “here to stay” because these students are mature students with multiple responsibilities (p. 1). This population of students in particular has had an increased presence in online education in the past few years. While in the past the counseling field may not have been associated with the field of technology, the rise of online counseling has been challenging that assumption. An affiliate of the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC; 2010) is even offering a credential as a Distance Certified Counselor, which demonstrates the demand for counselors in practice wishing to use technology as a medium for their work. Specific cyber-counseling certificate programs are being developed to meet some of the demand from interested counselors. These programs contain information about cyber-counseling theory, skills, technology, ethical issues, marketing, and instructions on operating an online counseling business (Murphy et al., 2008). However, up to this point most university counseling programs have not offered curriculum that addresses online counseling. Abney and Cleborne (2004) argued this is because within the field, there is a debate on the application and use of technology. This apparent resistance centers on the methods used in developing a client-counselor relationship because traditional techniques relied on experiential learning, using nonverbal aspects of communication (Quinn, Hohensil, & Fortune, 2002). Online counseling, thus, challenges the foundation upon which the counseling field was built upon. Centore and Miliacci (2008) suggested that there is a division in this field and that many professional organizations are unwilling to accept this practice such as the Clinical Social Work Federation, which states that it is “opposed to the practice of internet based treatment” (p. 271).

Because of this nonacceptance, counseling educators are hesitant to embrace this new technology. As Layne and Hohensil (2005) argued, “The future of technology in the counseling profession may be viewed

as threatening to some; others will see it as a refreshing opportunity for growth” (p. 225). However, students entering the counseling profession are more aware of the applications of technology to their field and also want technology incorporated into their training. Because of the increase in students’ seeking an online graduate degree in counseling, there should also be an increase in the instructional methods aimed at meeting the needs of this group of students. Regan and Youn (2008) demonstrated that there was the growing uses of distance education programs not only for passive-information courses such as research, policy, and history but also for classes that teach clinical skills, such as counseling. Not only do the instructional methods have to be conducted online, they should also be tailored to the unique aspects of this helping profession.

### COUNSELING MODALITIES

As mentioned above there are several modalities that an online counselor can select to interact with their clients. These may be used individually, but most often they are used in conjunction with each other and their use is based on the preferences of both the counselor and client. Allowing the client to select the method of communication may empower the client. One of the methods of conducting online counseling is through telephone counseling. Research has suggested that the majority of telephone counseling clients are satisfied with the service (Akmehmet, 2008).

E-mail is also used as a counseling modality. The therapeutic use of e-mail involves continued communication by counselor and client with an express therapeutic content in paragraph form. The main concern noted in the research is whether or not true emotion such as warmth and compassion can be communicated through written text (Collie, Murphy, & Mitchell, 2004). However, research by Akmehmet (2008) suggested that a high level of warmth and compassion can be communicated through e-mail since online counselors responded that they prefer e-mail communication because thoughts are often deeper and more meaningful. In this study a parallel was drawn between e-mail communication and journaling. Further results from Akmehmet (2008) in his qualitative research on practicing online counselors found that “e-mail, since it does not need synchronous scheduling, is very much preferred by clients and themselves. E-mail added a very different rhythm to the counseling relationship, allowing for long e-mails followed by long replies the next day” (p. 240). Additionally, it gives those involved time to organize their thoughts.

Chat and video counseling are similar; however, video counseling uses a web camera to display either a still or live picture during the counseling session. In both of these modalities, there is the give and take of a traditional counseling session with communication being exchanged between the client and counselor through typed messages or by audio. Interviews by online counselors conducted by Akmehmet (2008) demonstrate that through chat there can be a level of disconnect and shallow communication since each response is relatively brief. This method of communication does allow the user to be “on the spot” and ask questions in real time.

### PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

While it is clearly acknowledged that online therapy is a popular subset of counseling practice, little up to this point has been uncovered about perceptions and attitudes of counseling students toward this service. Finn (2002) developed the E-therapy Attitude Scale to understand the attitudes of social workers towards online counseling. This scale was administered to 30 undergraduate social-work students. Results reflected that attitudes toward e-therapy were negative, with 52.1% agreeing that “counseling and therapy cannot be effectively done online” (p. 412). Rochlen, Beretvas, and Zack (2004) developed a similar scale called the Online Face-to-Face Counseling Attitudes Scale to compare attitudes toward these two modalities of treatment. The results were similar in that an overwhelming number of the participants reported a higher level of comfort with face-to-face counseling versus online counseling (Rochlen et al., 2004). Rochelen et al. (2004) believed that participants may favor face-to-face counseling more due to their level of familiarity and knowledge with this model of service and recommended education in online counseling may increase the attitudes of students. Bell (2008) reported that counselors in general may not have the technical skills or knowledge to engage in online counseling and should seek the advice of a qualified computer professional when designing online clinical interventions. However, while these technologies may appear unfamiliar to counselors other studies have suggested otherwise. At first the technology requirements for online counseling may seem novel to counselors but many of the modes of communication such as e-mail, chat features, and online support groups are actually familiar (Oravec, 2000). This study further explored how the use of videoconference programs that are commonly available on most personal computers can be used in online counseling to provide nonverbal cues similar to

face-to-face interaction (Oravec, 2000).

A qualitative study conducted by Akmehmet (2008), seeking the perceptions of current online counselors, demonstrated that the differences between online and face-to-face counseling may not be significant according to the professionals within his study. In his work, a common theme uncovered was that online counselors believe that the “technology receded into the background” and that it did not significantly alter their role as a counselor (p. 240). While all participants were aware of the limitations due to lack of visual cues, the overwhelming attitude was that it was not “a different job,” but the same job in an adapted and modified version (Akmehmet, 2008, p. 240). It appears that from this study that online counselor’s themselves view the online medium as a different tool to reach their audience, rather than a separate process of counseling.

Despite that there is no evidence that there are significant clinical outcomes with online versus face-to-face counseling services, the attitude of the general public appears to be negative towards online counseling (Akmehmet, 2008; Shaw & Shaw, 2006). This may be based in part because professional counseling organizations are not stepping up to support this modality. The lack of public support may demonstrate to the public that online counseling is inferior to face-to-face counseling in some manner. An additional reason for a general negative view of online counseling is the idea that online counseling is competition for face-to-face counseling. It is Layne and Hohenshil’s (2005) opinion that “although one could lament many factors that threaten counseling services, in general, technology provides us with the opportunity to continue new and innovative ways to deliver our services to traditional groups as well as those that are underserved” (p. 225).

### **CURRENT INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS**

Surprisingly, this author was only able to locate a handful of these current practices and finds that it is best practice to discuss each instructional technology technique used so that the reader has a broad depth to reference. Each technology located was selected since the specific articles are able to explain the various techniques in use. Each article selected was analyzed for the description of the instructional method, its uses and the pros and cons of its use.

### **EDUCATION PREFERENCE**

It should be noted, however, that while little information was gathered on potential instructional technol-

ogy methods developed for counseling education students, there is a demand for this type of education. Hays and Robinson (2000) demonstrated a positive reaction among students using computer-assisted instruction within a counseling program. Manzanares (2004) corroborated this research. Manzanares surveyed graduate counseling students to determine their attitudes toward utilizing online modalities within their counseling preparation program. Results demonstrated a high desire for web-based instruction with 79.9% of students reporting an attitude scale of 35 or higher (Manzanares, 2004). Findings established that there were no significant differences in attitudes toward technology integration based on student’s learning style, age, gender or ethnicity (Manzanares, 2004).

### **TEACHING HOW TO COMMUNICATE EMOTION**

While the Internet is a wonderful tool to allow students to interact with each other and their instructor, it does have its limitations which are widely known. The Internet is based on an anonymous principle with little to no emotional interaction between participants. Communication can be hindered because of this as well as the quality of relationship building. In face-to-face counseling one of the first skills beginning counselors learn is rapport building skills. However, with online courses, students do not have the ability to read emotions, nonverbal behaviors, or have the quality interaction that a face-to-face session may have. These factors all lead to a barrier in teaching these relationship skills to counseling students.

Walther and Parks (2002) recognized this as a potential barrier and advocated that some ways to replace the missing cues are to use emoticons, which are visual symbols such as smiling or frowning faces. Trepal et al. (2006) also recognized this barrier in instruction and believed students can learn to express their nonverbal behaviors to their clients through the online medium in this manner. It is with these emoticons that one can demonstrate intent. Trepal et al. (2006) suggested that instructors learn common online abbreviations such as “LOL,” which means to laugh out loud, to express their feelings to students. McFadden’s (2007) research is in agreement and suggests that there is a wealth of emotion occurring in an online classroom. In McFadden’s study the most common cited emotions are frustration, disconnected, disappointed, overwhelmed, uncomfortable, fear, hurt, and nervousness (McFadden, 2007). It is obvious that these emotions tend to be negative emotions, yet the expression of them is deemed as equally

important to the student's growth. McFadden also agreed with the prior literature that instructors can use emoticons to demonstrate feelings. McFadden further elaborated that in addition the use of capitalization, textual form, ellipses, question marks, and exclamations marks can further demonstrate emotional intent. However, the critique from the literature is that while threaded discussion boards can demonstrate a level of emotion, they "lack the dynamic interactions of rich, real-life data that students experience in a clinical setting" (Shibusawa, VanEsselstyn, & Oppenheim, 2006 p. 23). While the literature overwhelmingly expressed that the use of these emoticons to show feelings is a good first step, it is also a simplistic method to convey complex emotions that we may face in a counseling session. Counseling student's attitudes towards counseling without the benefit of verbal communication is an issue that needs to be further examined within the present study.

### ROLE PLAY TECHNIQUES

While Trepal (2006) and his colleagues attempted to teach students in online counseling courses a better way to communicate with emotion online, other researchers point to the benefit of allowing students to "see" these emotions in action and take this concept of developing rapport with client's one step further. Regan and Yong (2008) believed that allowing students to watch a video clip online of a role play situation in which the counselor in the video demonstrated clinical skill-building techniques fared as well as those students who engaged in face-to-face role play activity. In fact the mean scores of both groups was found not to be significantly different ( $p = .47$ ) (Regan & Yong, 2008). This may seem surprising because in the past it has always been assumed that hands-on experience was more effective in teaching clinical relationship building skills than simply observing these skills in action.

The Regan and Yong (2008) study lent credence to the ability for online instructors to establish comparable results in teaching their virtual students' clinical skills. However, there were quite a few limitations of this study, including the small sample size and the instrument used to measure clinical skills was a self-assessment. It can be perceived that students may self-assess their ability to develop rapport as more proficient than it actually is. A similar study used the same method of allowing students to view role play scenarios showed similar results, however these role play videos were in the context of a multimedia, virtual program currently being used in couples counseling courses. According to Shibusawa et

al. (2006), "Third Space allows students to select and view digital videos either in portions or in their entirety" (p. 24). This program enabled students to view role play scenarios of counseling situations and provide feedback on the techniques that they saw used in the videos. Students engaged in this process of reviewing role play scenarios for the duration of the 8-week course were then asked to fill out a questionnaire of the usefulness of this instructional method. Overwhelmingly, the students enjoyed the ability to replay small clips of the video and analyze the counseling techniques. The facilitators in this study also thought that this study was a success because they could teach advanced clinical skills by selecting videos that highlighted specific skills or theoretical concepts (Shibusawa et al., 2006).

### MODELING TECHNIQUES

In contrast other sources, stress that counselor's in online training programs cannot learn through these passive means but must use instructional technology methods that provide "real world" counseling experiences. This can and should come in the format of modeling clinical skills in a chat room. This instructional technique allows instructors to provide a chat on a mock counseling session. Students then gain knowledge from reading this chat and then model this same behavior in a chat of their own. Results from a study that utilized this method showed that students demonstrated "therapeutic success with relatively minimal exposure to instructor modeling" (Ekong, 2006, p. 9). Modeling has long been a technique used in classrooms with success, so discovering how this common instructional technique translates into the online world is important in fostering the development of clinical skills and relatively easy to implement.

A review of the literature also under covered the same principle of modeling being applied to more innovative and novel methods of teaching counseling students rapport building skills. Baker, Parks-Savage, and Rehfuss (2009) described Whyville® as a multiuser virtual environment in which students can interact in a group setting using an avatar as a representative of themselves. While the participants in this study were adolescents, this study is worth noting since it may be generalized to use with counseling students. In order for this intervention to be successful instructors using this intervention need to present the content, demonstrate skills, allow students to practice skills, give feedback, and then process results (Baker et al., 2009). While the application varies in this technique, the basic principle

of modeling as used by Ekong (2006) is still applied. However, in this application students are provided a real-life virtual experience, which may enhance their learning because they are learning in a group model, which allows for collaboration. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the realistic element of this virtual world can enhance student's attention and desire to learn the material (Baker et al., 2009). One downside to this intervention would be that its use for counselors in training has not been demonstrated, only its use for students to develop social skills. Since this new approach appears initially effective, further research should be done on its application in the counseling field.

### GROUP TECHNIQUES

The literature advocates that traditional in-class techniques can be modified to the online forum (Yeh et al., 2008). Online Support Groups (OSGs) are one way that teachers have allowed students to work together, with the presumption that students can learn from each other. While some students enrolled in online counseling programs can feel isolated, the use of OSGs may be a way to bridge this gap within their education. These OSGs have been used in the online format by assigning students groups to work within an asynchronous manner. Results of this intervention are mixed because it appeared that the level of satisfaction was based on the quality of the group, not the quality of instruction (Yeh et al., 2008). Another technique in the literature taken from the traditional classroom and modified for counseling students in the online format is that of reflective journaling or e-journaling. Haberstroh, Parr, Gee and Trepal (2006) attempted to determine how "e-journaling recursively influenced interpersonal processes in a training group for counselors" since this practice is often used for counselors to self-reflect on their values and beliefs (p. 329). The results showed that merging e-journaling with counseling was successful. Not only did student's report enjoying this experience, but the results also show that "e-journaling encouraged them to integrate both the experiential and didactic components of their training" (Haberstroh et al., 2006, p. 336).

### VIRTUAL TECHNIQUES

In comparison to the above teaching interventions, there has even been a study that encourages the use of virtual counseling as a method to teach counselors in training how to conduct a counseling session. This intervention can be seen as the ultimate step in using technology to teach student's counseling skills (Haberstroh,

et al., 2008). Through a secured website counseling students in this study could provide virtual one-on-one counseling to a client over the Internet. All communication between the counselor in training and the client was done through live text communication. While this study replicated a "real" counseling session conducted online, the students in this study had numerous concerns including technology barriers, clinical concerns, and the inability to use visual cues (Haberstroh et al., 2008). The slower pace of communication was a distraction to some of the students while the researchers suggested just the opposite, in that it was helpful to allow the beginning counselors to contemplate their interventions (Haberstroh et al., 2008). While it was acknowledged that this tool has been used in preparing counselors in training, there was no discussion on how the development of student's counseling skills improved through the use of this tool. In general, it seems that this tool would be good practice for beginning counselors in online or traditional programs, however; research does not yet show the benefits of such an intervention. It could be assumed that for those counselors interested in practicing online upon graduation that this tool would be an appropriate first step in allowing them online practice, although one wonders if those seeking to work as traditional, face-to-face counselors would benefit from its use. Further investigation on web cam and virtual counseling should also be considered because these are another method that counselors can practice online and it seems that it would be a good fit for counselors in training as well. This researcher was unable to locate any documentation about the use of web cam counseling taking place in counseling programs.

### MENTORING TECHNIQUES

While the literature shows the relatively smooth transition from classroom activities to the online forum, traditional face-to-face interventions are also making their presence in the online environment. Mentoring relationships have long been known to provide a wealth of benefits for the mentees; therefore their use in the counseling field is commonplace. E-mentoring is a new twist to this old practice where mentors and mentees are assigned completely online and develop a relationship through e-mail. One study that investigated the results of e-mentoring selected a blended-model approach in which both traditional, face-to-face mentoring practices and e-mentoring practices were used (Shpigelman, Weiss & Reiter, 2009). While the results suggested that participants preferred the face-to-face mentoring con-

ducted in this study, the results do not suggest that e-mentoring is an unsuccessful practice. Both the mentors and the mentees in the study ranked that they enjoyed the e-mentoring experience, although they believed that they could develop deeper relationships through face-to-face mentoring (Shpigelman et al., 2009).

Another study by Rhodes, Spencer, Saito and Sipe (2006) measured the efficacy of e-mentoring by itself and demonstrated similar results. The participants also agreed in this study that their experience was favorable, yet would have liked to make deeper connections with their mentors (Rhodes et al., 2006). These parallel results are surprising since this study was comparable in structure; however, this study was more in-depth since 242 participants were studied over a 2-year period (Rhodes et al., 2006). Based on the literature on e-mentoring it seems that further research should be conducted to determine what conditions can create the type of deep relationships the mentees are seeking.

## **SUPERVISION**

One of the last steps that a counselor in training needs to go through in order to obtain licensure as a professional counselor is that of supervision. If counselors in training can obtain their counseling degree entirely online, then the supervision process also needs to occur in a virtual context. While the literature in this area is sparse, there are some suggestions on how this supervisor-supervisee relationship can occur. Suggestions include that this relationship can occur through e-mail, video-conferencing, IM, and through the use of a chat room (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). In a study of counseling students Clingerman and Bernard (2004) believed that e-mail communication may be a benefit of the supervisor-supervisee relationship because it “allows time and psychological space to respond and it may serve to assist students who are relatively passive in group supervision or who find the intensity of individual supervision to be a barrier to growth” (p. 94). The literature did not uncover an actual usage of this practice but did imply that various ethical issues could develop through the use of this modality. This form of supervision appears to still be in its infancy since at the time of this writing the ACA does not have any guidelines to computer-based supervision techniques (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). Furthermore, there are not any recommendations by this organization on the training that a supervisor engaging in computer-based supervision should have.

## **PROPOSED CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS**

The existing literature suggests that the use of technology in counseling is here to stay both in the counseling field and in our culture and society at large. According to Abney and Cleborne (2004), “Computers have simply become so ubiquitous, and have acquired so much cultural momentum that we could probably not prevent them from continuing to find their way into the field of counseling, even if we tried” (p. 19). Madara (1999) expects that “as the technology continues to change rapidly, we can expect people and groups to utilize the most practical and economical forms of online technology and services” (pp. 38-39). Therefore, the question proposed may not be if technology will be used in counseling in the future or not, but what can we do to provide education to those seeking this as a career option. The relevance of the current study is apparent because it extends beyond the current research in the field to incorporate the perceptions and perspectives of those that will soon be entering the counseling field. Understanding their perceptions will aid in predicting the future use of technology and how educators can prepare students to embark in the field.

The first implication for curriculum review is that there is a significant interest expressed in online counseling. Mora, Nevid, and Chaplin (2008) conducted a study that attempted to measure the attitudes of mental-health providers toward e-therapy. Results reflected low levels of interest in using online therapy, even if they received appropriate training. The mental-health providers also did not express much interest in receiving training (Mora et al., 2008). Finn (2002) demonstrated that only one third of graduate social-work students saw online therapy as “a good adjunct to in-person services” (p. 422).

## **UPDATING COUNSELOR EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

Online counseling has been around for decades and is not a new phenomenon. In fact, mental-health services have been provided since at least 1982 online through the use of online self-help groups (Kanani & Regehr, 2003). The modern predecessor to online counseling was conducted over a decade ago in 1995 when the first fee-based therapy was established on the web (Skinner & Zack, 2004). While technology is advancing and new techniques are employed, such as video chat, the idea of online therapy is not novel. This possess the question that if this is not a new phenomenon in our field, they why are our graduate students not learning about this? Why is this not included in the curriculum?

Studies conducted with mental-health professionals in the field suggest that 60% are “somewhat, very or extremely interested in having additional information about online counseling presented to them” (Wells, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Becker-Blease, 2007 p. 456). With this level of interest and the historical review of online counseling it seems essential that this be included in the standard online counseling curriculum for students to explore as a potential career opportunity. Even if a student chooses not to pursue this path, online counseling cannot be ignored in our profession due to the prevalence and popularity of this modality.

The final implication for curriculum designers is that there is clearly a lack of educational material within current counseling education courses. In a standard program there is no focus on online counseling in the discussions, courses, or material. This also parallels the literature since less than 1% of active counselors report having had information presented to them about online counseling (Abney & Cleborne, 2004; Wells et al, 2007). It seems a clear deficit has been identified, since this younger generation of prospective counselors appears to be eager to learn more, while their instructors appear to be lagging behind in providing them with the needed and desired education.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Counseling education students currently have had no formal educational material about this topic within their counselor education program. The recommendation is that further studies be conducted to investigate this identified need. Counseling program administrators, curriculum directors, and course developers should note this apparent desire of current graduate counseling students to ascertain knowledge about online counseling. The current counseling programs should be updated to reflect the changes in the counseling field and the need of students.

## Author Biography

Laura Pipoly earned her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Hiram College. She then graduated summa cum laude with her master’s degree from Youngstown State University in education with a specialization in both school counseling and community counseling. She is a licensed Professional Counselor (PC) and a certified K-12 school counselor. Laura completed her doctorate degree from Nova Southeastern University with a dual concentration in instructional technology and distance education (ITDE) and special education.

Laura enjoys teaching courses for Grand Canyon University and being part of the faculty mentor team. She also teaches for University of Phoenix and received an Excellence in Publishing Award in December 2012. In addition to teaching she has also worked as a writing consultant, school counselor, case manager, psychotherapist, behavior specialist, and mobile therapist. Most recently she wrote the book foreword to *Meeting the Challenge of Bipolar Disorder: Self Help Strategies that Work* and served as an author/consultant in developing a CE course recognized by the Standards Committee of the Texas Certification board of Addiction titled *Applying the Prevention Code of Ethics*. Laura is proud to be a military spouse and mother of two. Her interests include further presentation and publication opportunities.

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