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US School Counselor State Licensure Requirements for Program Evaluation

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Abstract

Using qualitative content analysis (Cohen et al., 2007), we examined the expectations of states in the United States regarding program evaluation content for school counselor licensure. Results show that 43 states maintain some form of program evaluation expectations for licensure, up from the 19 identified by Trevisan (2000). Twenty-eight states require licensure tests that purportedly align with CACREP, ASCA, or maintain a state developed licensure test that measures program evaluation content. Twenty-one states mention alignment of their curriculum with CACREP, ASCA, or both. The program evaluation expectations are ambiguous and unconnected to best program evaluation practices articulated by the evaluation field. We offer recommendations to build the evaluation capacity of the school counseling profession in the United States that include refinements in graduate education of school counselors, in-service training for practicing school counselors, and revision of licensing and program expectations to include standards of best practice in program evaluation.

Keywords: program evaluation, school counseling, licensure, accreditation

Educational and societal challenges facing K-12 schools today have created an opportunity for school counselors to showcase their professional skills. Growing student populations, the press for higher achievement outcomes, and social challenges faced by students, are factors that can impede the teaching and learning processes in schools. The school counseling profession in the United States (US) has laid the groundwork for elevating the role of school counselors by the introduction of comprehensive developmental program models that are designed to effectively address some of these challenges. As these more formalized programs continue to be implemented in schools across the US, school counselors are positioned to become key players in K-12 education reform efforts.

As school counselors in the US make their case for full partnership with teachers in schools, program evaluation shows great promise for the school counseling profession (Martin et al., 2009; Sink, 2009; Trevisan, 2000). The importance of program evaluation in school counseling has been recognized for many years (Fairchild, 1993; Fairchild & Zins, 1986; Hosie, 1994; Lombana, 1985; Schmidt, 1995). All three traditional comprehensive developmental models (Comprehensive Developmental Guidance, Developmental Guidance and Counseling, and Results-Based Guidance) have developed and reinforced the idea that the school counseling program should include a strong program evaluation component to provide systematic information to improve the program and document impact (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988; Johnson & Johnson 1991; Myrick, 1987). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012, 2019) includes a program assessment component that highlights the importance of program evaluation-related activities to facilitate evidence-based programs (Dimmitt et al., 2007; Zyromski & Mariani, 2016) and accountability (Sink, 2009). By conducting program evaluations, school counselors can actively work to improve their programs using feedback from key stakeholders. They can then communicate the importance of their work to school administrators and become more accountable for program quality and improvements. Thus, program evaluation provides important benefits to school counselors in the political and policy environment of U.S. K-12 schools. However, many factors have hindered the integration of program evaluation into professional school counseling practice. This includes lack of training, mistrust and fear of the evaluation process, limited time and resources, and difficulty in measuring school counseling outcomes (Astramovich et al., 2005; Martin & Carey, 2014; Sink, 2009; Trevisan, 2000).

In the US, individual states rather than the federal government have primary authority in developing and implementing educational policy. Many scholars, researchers, and policymakers have suggested that state-level policy and leadership could help create an environment that will allow school counselors to provide evidence-based programs that are better integrated into schools (e.g., Gysbers, 2006; Martin & Carey, 2009; Trevisan, 2000). State-level leadership could also advance the school counseling field by embracing program evaluation as a core professional task of the school counselor. For example, Martin and Carey (2012) identified the benefits of state-level investment in program evaluation capacity building. Even within very different states, program evaluation elevated the standing and legitimacy of practicing school counselors within their respective educational systems. Once program evaluation strategies are articulated and adopted statewide, school counseling graduate professional programs should be required to offer coursework and other educational experiences to develop pre-service school counseling students' program evaluation competencies. Further, each state has the authority to establish licensure requirements for school counselors, and as Trevisan (2000) stated, "exercises some control and responsibility for ensuring professional competence" (p. 84). A key mechanism for state leaders to promote professional expectations for school counselors is the adoption of accreditation expectations, such as the standards promoted by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP; 2016) or the professional standards articulated by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2019). Both sets of standards include program evaluation competencies. School counseling graduate programs must then comply with these expectations through coursework and field experiences to ensure that graduates meet professional competencies.

CACREP Standards

Many states now use CACREP standards as the foundation for their licensure standards. Paisley and Borders (1995) argued that CACREP is the one national accrediting body that best represents the professional knowledge and skills needed by school counselors; thus, it ensures that school counseling graduate professional programs provide appropriate education and training experiences to meet professional expectations. CACREP influences the school counselor education curriculum in two important ways. First, masters and doctoral level training programs that wish to attain CACREP accreditation must align their curricula with CACREP standards. Second, state licensing boards also use CACREP standards as the foundation for content requirements. In states that align the government's licensing with CACREP, even training programs that are not CACREP-accredited must align curricula with CACREP standards in order to comply with state policy and standards.

Twenty years ago, Trevisan (2000) investigated the extent to which state certification or licensure standards required program evaluation competencies for school counseling students. He found that 19 states and Washington D.C. maintained some form of program evaluation expectations for school counselors. At that time only two states, Colorado and Washington, maintained CACREP expectations for licensure. Our study builds on this work to determine the current status of state licensure requirements for school counselors in terms of program evaluation; whether or not improvements have been made since the original study; and ascertain what could be initiated to move the school counseling field toward professional competence in the area of program evaluation.

The relevant CACREP standard at the time of Trevisan's study (2000), Objective Seven, Research and Program Evaluation, was stated as follows:

Studies in this area include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Basic types of research methods to include qualitative and quantitative research designs.
2. Basic parametric and nonparametric statistics.
3. Principles, practices, and applications of needs assessment and program evaluation.
4. Uses of computers for data management and analysis.
5. Ethical and legal considerations. (CACREP, 1996; p. 62)

Also, during this time, CACREP (1996) maintained specific knowledge and skills for school counselors in terms of program development, implementation and evaluation. These were:

Studies in this area include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Use of surveys, interviews, and needs assessments.
2. Design, implementation, and evaluation of a comprehensive, developmental school program.
3. Implementation and evaluation of specific strategies designed to meet program goals and objectives.
4. Preparation of a counseling schedule reflecting appropriate time commitments and priorities in a developmental school counseling program. (p. 85)

Trevisan (2000) argued that Objective Seven (CACREP, 1996) equates research with program evaluation and results in the omission of critical content that is unique to program evaluation.

To comply with the CACREP expectation, many school counseling programs offer a research methods course that complies with the spirit of the CACREP standard on research and program evaluation. However, research courses often provide little or no coverage of program evaluation content. This may be a key reason why professional school counselors often do not conduct program evaluation (e.g., Astramovich et al. 2005; Martin & Carey, 2014; Sink, 2009; Trevisan, 2000). Trevisan (2000) recommended that the *Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint

Committee, 1994), then in its second edition, be integrated into CACREP standards to better specify core program evaluation content. He urged program evaluation specialists to work with CACREP officials to develop these changes.

The current CACREP standards have been revised to foster a "unified counseling identity" (CACREP, 2016, p. 3). There are six sections to the standards, with Section 2 devoted to professional identity. Like the 1996 CACREP standards, the 2016 CACREP standards are articulated by area (addiction counseling; career counseling; clinical mental health counseling; clinical rehabilitation counseling; college counseling and student affairs; marriage, couple, and family counseling; and school counseling). Section 5 of the standards provides specialty expectations.

In the 2016 CACREP standards, research and program evaluation expectations are listed together for both counseling professional identity standards and school counseling specialty standards, which is similar to the 1996 CACREP standards. Although pre-service school counseling students may be exposed to program evaluation-related skills within other school counseling specialization courses or program requirements (Brott, 2006; Sabens & Zyromski, 2009), the consistent combining of research and program evaluation together is concerning. For example, it is common for only one required course to cover both research and program evaluation within CACREP accredited master's programs. From a planning and logistics standpoint, there is not enough time to cover both topics adequately in a single course. Furthermore, many counseling students report that they do not enjoy conducting research (Bauman, 2004) or are fearful of learning about statistics, research method, and the research process (Schneider, 2009; Steele & Rawls, 2015). This may hinder learning and engagement in program evaluation. While there are obvious resource limitations to offering program evaluation as a stand-alone course or suggesting that CACREP create specific program evaluation standards, the consistent coupling of research and program evaluation within the CACREP standards is an area of concern.

ASCA National Model

Over the past 20 years since the Trevisan study, CACREP standards and school counselor training norms related to research and program evaluation have remained relatively consistent. In contrast, over the same time, there have been several major developments in the school counseling field. Most notable is the emergence of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003), which can arguably be viewed as the fields' highest priority initiative over the last 15 years. The ASCA National Model maintains a programmatic structure, curriculum, responsive program components, and a strong role for program evaluation (ASCA, 2012). The framework for the ASCA National Model maintains four components that include Accountability, the component most relevant to program evaluation. A key question posed in the ASCA National Model standards is, "How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?" (p. 99). Documenting this difference through program evaluation lies at the heart of the expectations of the ASCA National Model.

The third edition of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) includes program evaluation-related activities in both its Management and Accountability components. The Management component contains elements related to planning and monitoring program activities and can be considered to be related to formative aspects of program evaluation. The Accountability component contains elements related to measuring program impact and reporting results and can be considered to be related to summative aspects of program evaluation.

Just recently, the fourth edition of the ASCA National Model was released (ASCA, 2019). An examination of the web-page materials and videos on the ASCA website show that while there are some cosmetic changes for clarity (e.g., revision of labels and combining forms) the essential features of program evaluation standards found in the third edition, are present in the fourth edition. Thus, knowledge and skills in program evaluation remains an essential feature for school counselors implementing the ASCA National Model.

The ASCA School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, n.d.) describe the competencies that school counselors need to implement the ASCA National Model school counseling program. The ASCA National Model indicates that school counselors must be able to effectively engage in program evaluation activities to improve their program and services and to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. For example, school counselors need to be able to (a) use formal and informal program evaluation methods to improve the school counseling program; (b) evaluate curriculum-based, small group and closing-the-gap activities; (c) use evaluation results obtained for program improvement; and (d) share the program evaluation results with administrators and the school community. Furthermore, the current ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) indicated that school counselors are ethically obliged to engage in program evaluation to maximize the benefits amiable to them through the comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

Since Trevisan's study in 2000, accountability has played a major role in the literature on school counseling (see Sink, 2009; White, 2007). Accountability is a complex nexus of professional activity with significant implications for training, practice, research, evaluation, and political positioning of school counselors around the country. Program evaluation in school counseling is linked to many important movements (e.g., the ASCA National Model and the accountability movement), and use. Frankly, better understanding of program evaluation is needed. Utilization of program evaluation is crucial to advancing nearly all school counseling endeavors nationwide.

Research Questions

Given the datedness of information on state standards related to program evaluation, professional developments related to program evaluation, and the enhanced role of program evaluation to support K-12 school counseling programs, we think it is important to take another look at state school counselor licensure expectations for program evaluation in the US. Our research questions are similar to Trevisan's (2000) a done so as a means to check on progress at the state level for ensuring program evaluation competencies for school counselors. Note that at the time of the Trevisan (2000) study, CACREP standards were looked upon as the prevailing standards for school counseling graduate programs and consequently, signaled competencies for school counselors entering the workforce. In addition, the Gysber's Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling (CDGC) model also dominated the thinking about the structure of school counseling programs and the kinds of services that should be provided. There were expectations for school counselors in support of CDGC programs.

Since the time of the Trevisan (2000) study, the ASCA National Model was developed and has experienced several revisions. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012; 2019) is now the prevailing model for school counseling programs across the country; encompasses all competing school counseling program models that have been preferred over the last 25 years or so (Trevisan & Carey, 2020); and details competencies for school counselors to support the ASCA National Model. Thus, the questions for the current study reflect these national changes and are as follows:

1. How many states require program evaluation for school guidance and counseling certification?
2. What is the nature and scope of the program evaluation requirements?
3. Are the program evaluation requirements sufficiently defined to assure that students receive proper training to develop and maintain ASCA National Model programs?

Method

Design

This research employed a qualitative content analysis method (Cohen et al., 2007) that was also used in a related study of state school counseling licensure examinations (Carey et al., 2018). Categories were constructed using inductive coding of the source materials informed by definitions of program evaluation and research derived from Dimmitt et al.'s (2007) model of evidence-based practice. The main formative credibility strategy involved two researchers reviewing the same text and creating codes. Discussions were based upon agreement or disagreement of code creation or text categorization. Disagreements were resolved before moving on to the next source material. Summative credibility strategies involved members of the research team that did not create codes auditing the codes

and categorizations. Finally, any disagreements were resolved via discussion involving the whole research team until consensus was reached.

Materials and Data Collection Measures

To obtain current state school counselor licensure information, we consulted the web-based guide, Counselor-License: A State by State Counselor Guide at https://counselor-license.com/careers/guidance-and-career. This website is managed and continuously updated by Counselor-License.Com, a company whose mission is to make up-to-date information on counselor licensure and certification requirements available to prospective applicants. The website includes both synopsized licensure requirements for all 50 states and the District of Columbia and links to state government websites that describe licensure and certification requirements.

Procedure

We reviewed the online guide for state licensure requirements for school counselors. We then accessed additional links to state government websites in order to identify state school counselor program evaluation requirements or to determine that there were no state program evaluation requirements.

In identifying evaluation requirements, we used the following definitions of program evaluation and research that were adapted by Carey and colleagues (2018) from Dimmitt et al.'s (2007) model of evidence-based practice:

Program evaluation: Knowledge and expertise in program evaluation approaches including involving stakeholders (e.g. needs assessment and stakeholder surveys), development of evaluation instruments, quantitative and qualitative evaluation approaches, reporting evaluation results, evaluation soft skills and evaluation ethics.

Research: Knowledge of research to guide empirically supported practice and expertise in quantitative and/or qualitative research methods.

We extracted details on the standards, licensure test, and or coursework requirements for each state from the Counselor.Licence.Com guide webpage and the associated state government links and created a database of state licensure requirements. As in the Trevisan (2000) and Carey et al. (2018) studies, two researchers independently reviewed all items in the database to assess inter-rater reliability. As noted above, a few minor discrepancies were identified. These were resolved through discussion and eventual agreement between raters—resulting in 100% agreement.

Data Analysis

We adopted a systematic approach to review and document the available information. Note that the guide also contains

expectations for Washington D.C., which are included in this analysis. First, we documented licensure test requirements. When a state's webpages stated that a licensure test was required, we determined whether the test aligned with ASCA or CACREP. If a state used a licensure test that aligned with CACREP or ASCA, we assumed that program evaluation expectations stated in the respective standards were also expected by the state. If the licensure test was not aligned with CACREP or ASCA, we investigated whether these tests included items that measure program evaluation content.

Second, we documented state level educational requirements in two ways: (a) stated alignment with CACREP or ASCA and (b) coursework. Often, this information was available in branched links to state government websites rather than the main Counselor-Licence.Com webpage. We documented whether there was explicit mention of aligning program curriculum with ASCA, CACREP, or both. If curriculum documents stated alignment to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), we assumed that the state's program evaluation expectations aligned with the Accountability domain of the ASCA National Model. Likewise, if the curriculum stated alignment with CACREP, we assumed that the state's program evaluation expectations aligned with Section 4 of CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2016)). We also documented whether program evaluation, research or both were mentioned in relation to content or competencies.

Findings and Discussion

Question 1: How many states require program evaluation for school guidance and counseling certification?

Results show that 43 states (including Washington, D.C.) require program evaluation in their school counseling licensure education requirements, which for some states, includes a licensure test. Of these 43, 13 states require program evaluation in both their licensure test and educational requirements. Twenty-eight states require licensure tests that align with CACREP, ASCA, or maintain a state developed licensure test that measures program evaluation content. Twenty-one states explicitly mention alignment of their curriculum with CACREP, ASCA, or both. Twelve states mention research, program evaluation, or both in their coursework or competencies requirements. Table 1 provides a breakdown of results.

Question 2: What is the nature and scope of the program evaluation requirements?

Twenty-five states require the Professional School Counselor Examination, which aligns with the ASCA National Model (Educational Testing Service, 2016). Of these 25, two states also accept the National Counselor Examination, which aligns with CACREP standards

(National Board for Certified Counselors, n.d.). Three states have developed their own required licensure test. Available documentation indicates that all three tests measure program evaluation content.

Results show that fourteen states' curriculum aligned with CACREP, five states curriculum aligned with ASCA, and two states incorporated both CACREP and ASCA in their curriculum (21 total, as mentioned under Question 1 above). In some states, there were permissible exceptions. For instance, in Alabama, candidates who complete non-CACREP programs are required to have two years of education experience to receive their license. In Montana, programs that are not CACREP-accredited must be housed in regionally accredited institutions, and applicants must submit a recommendation from a program official. However, in Maryland, CACREP accreditation is only one of three pathways to obtain the license, and the state webpage and associated links did not indicate whether program evaluation expectations in alternative routes were present.

Detailed information pertaining to coursework and competencies could be found for only 12 states. Of the twelve, eight states included both research and program evaluation. Washington D.C. and Virginia did not distinguish between research and program evaluation. Iowa required only program evaluation. Massachusetts only required research. For states that specify content expectations listed on their websites for obtaining licensure as a school counselor, the program evaluation expectations were brief, with varied descriptions. For example, Virginia requires research and evaluation with no additional information or distinction between research and evaluation. Missouri requires program evaluation, research methods and statistical analysis. Tennessee requires that school counselors be able to evaluate programs and interventions using conventional research designs, including evaluation of CDGC programs. Additional evaluation content topics found in the state web pages include needs assessment, evaluation of CDGC program, use of evaluation for program improvement, evaluation of activities/interventions, understanding of evaluation, and data-based decision-making.

The move from CDGC to ASCA National Model programs nationally (Trevisan & Carey, 2020), has not produced more clarity with respect to the nature and scope of the program evaluation requirements. The same ambiguity found in the Trevisan (2000) study with respect to the state level program evaluation requirements, was also found in this study with respect to expectations to support ASCA National Model programs. In fact, few states maintain program evaluation requirements that match CACREP or ASCA stated expectations, including those states that maintain that they espouse CACREP and or ASCA expectations. In sum, we are not confident that these expectations will properly support the ASCA National Model.

Table 1
Breakdown of Program Evaluation Requirements

Nature of Requirements	No. of States (including Washington, DC)
Overall	
Examination and Education	13
Only examination	15
Only education	15
Examination Requirements	
CACREP Aligned Test[a]	2
ASCA Aligned Test	25
State Developed Test	3
Educational Requirements	
Curricula Alignment	
CACREP	14
ASCA	5
Both ASCA & CACREP	2
Coursework & Competencies	
Both Research and Program Evaluation	8
Research and Program Evaluation Not Distinguished	2
Only Research	1
Only Program Evaluation	1

Note. [a] States that accept a CACREP aligned test also accept an ASCA aligned test and have been double-counted in the total for ASCA aligned tests.

Question 3: Are the program evaluation requirements sufficiently defined to assure students receive proper training to develop and maintain comprehensive developmental guidance programs?

Educational requirements (content, coursework, or competencies) were not indicated for 23 states. Of these 23 states, 15 states required a licensure test that aligned with CACREP or ASCA or incorporated program evaluation as a component. Moreover, detailed information pertaining to coursework or competencies could be identified for only four of the 21 states that indicated alignment of curriculum with ASCA or CACREP or both. Based on the data collected, we conclude that for a majority of the states that purport to maintain program evaluation requirements, that these requirements are not sufficiently or explicitly defined to assure that students receive proper training to develop and evaluate comprehensive developmental guidance programs.

The use of state tests as part of the licensure requirements is a relatively recent addition since the time of the Trevisan (2000) study. While not anticipated for this study, the increased role of tests as part of licensure requirements is not surprising, given the widespread use of licensure tests in other fields, at both the state and national level. In initial follow up research to the present study, Carey et al. (2018) conducted a content analysis of all the school counseling licensure tests. They focused on program evaluation and research competencies based on publicly available documents concerning test objectives. The authors found

that while both program evaluation and research are currently assessed, they are assessed in a cursory manner, with multiple-choice items that predominantly measure basic knowledge. Given the small number of items that purport to assess program evaluation and research, there is very little broad content coverage for either domain. The authors urged publishers of these tests to make individual items available to researchers so that they can assess whether test results can be used to inform decisions about an individual students' competence in program evaluation and research. Moreover, the authors recommend clear articulation of program evaluation and research competencies to highlight the differences between the two domains. In sum, the authors found that the required state tests cannot ensure that licensure applicants possess the necessary skills to conduct program evaluation. This finding is particularly problematic for the 15 states that require a licensure test but that do not have explicit educational requirements that articulate necessary program evaluation content. Further, the state tests may be confounding program evaluation and research in the same way that state and national school counselor program expectations have done for many years (Astramovich et al. 2005; Martin & Carey, 2014; Sink, 2009; Trevisan, 2000).

Given the continued ambiguity and lack of detail with respect to state expectations for program evaluation knowledge and skills for school counselors there is also potential for misalignment between the states' expressed curriculum expectations and the required licensure test. For

example, 25 states require a licensure test that aligns with the ASCA National Model (2012, 2019), but only five states incorporate the model in their curriculum. In addition, although 14 states incorporate the CACREP standards in their curriculum, only two states provide the option of taking a CACREP aligned licensure test. Further research is needed to elucidate the nature and scope of these tests with respect to program evaluation expectations, whether the content tested is similar to the content requirements, and whether the items address essential school counselor program evaluation knowledge and skills.

Like the findings from the Trevisan (2000) study is the potential confounding of research with evaluation in the way some state expectations are stated. This includes states that require CACREP standards. Although Iowa, New Jersey, and Massachusetts clearly specify either program evaluation or research, all other states for which information was found require program evaluation and research without further differentiation. Carey et al. (2018) found that states with licensure tests that measure program evaluation also test for research knowledge and skills. However, almost half of the states that require a licensure examination including program evaluation do not have specific research or program evaluation competency expectations listed in their content standards for licensure.

The findings indicate that few states have sufficiently detailed expectations to signal specific course content in program evaluation. Coupled with continued confounding of research and program evaluation, school counseling faculty have little instructional support to fully appreciate and understand how program evaluation could or should be integrated into the curriculum. it is likely that most school counseling faculty members will continue to teach research methods with little coverage of program evaluation, thinking that this approach meets the spirit of CACREP or ASCA standards, as has historically been the case (Astramovich et al. 2005; Martin & Carey, 2014; Sink, 2009; Trevisan, 2000). Graduate programs in school counseling may be unintentionally limiting the potential of future school counseling practitioners to embrace program evaluation and perform program evaluation tasks and activities with professional competence.

Study Limitations

Similar to other studies that have used websites as the primary source of data (e.g., Sink & Lemich, 2018), we acknowledge that the data may be inaccurate, dated, lack specificity, or missing. Branching strategies that took us from one website or link to another, are fraught with inherent flaws as there is no way to verify the validity of the connection between one website or link to another; that is, whether or not the website or link referred to is responsive to and coordinated with the referring website or link. Thus, our findings are limited and perhaps inaccurate, simply given the nature of locating, identifying, and extracting data from web-based materials.

In this study, we assumed that the state-by-state information on school counselor licensure is up-to-date, accurate, and complete. It is possible that a state could be in the process of changing expectations for program evaluation or that change already occurred without a website update. In fact, during the write-up of this paper, an examination of three states' webpages showed that state licensure requirements for school counselors had changed from what we observed approximately four months earlier. In addition, since the time of data collection a few months ago by Carey et al. (2018) that found 26 states maintaining licensure tests, we found 28 states now with licensure tests. It is possible that other states may have changed requirements as well.

We assumed that state licensure tests that were either linked to CACREP or developed based on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) assessed program evaluation. This assumption seemed reasonable to us, given that both CACREP and ASCA maintain program evaluation expectations for school counselors. Without examination of the actual test items however, we do not know how well this assumption holds and if so, how broadly the test items represent the domain of program evaluation (Carey et al. 2018).

It should also be noted that the results of the present study related to state curriculum standards do not necessarily reflect actual instruction practice and quality in counselor education programs. If a state does not have effective mechanisms in place to ensure that curriculum standards in program evaluation are reflected appropriately in program standards, program evaluation instruction may not actually achieve the instructional goals underlying such standards. Further research identifying effective state mechanisms for articulating standards with instructional relevance and ensuring compliance with standards is clearly warranted.

We acknowledge that state expectations may be communicated in different ways (Trevisan, 2000). A state website, as one means of communicating expectations, may provide only partial information in terms of program evaluation, as previously mentioned. The collection of data in this study provides a somewhat incomplete picture of the connections between state level expectations and licensing tests, and what actually occurs in graduate classrooms for pre-service school counselors.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Work with ASCA, CACREP, and state agencies to develop sound program evaluation standards for professional school counselors.

Similar to Trevisan's (2000) findings, CACREP standards continue to combine research and program evaluation expectations, confounding the two topics. We recommend that counselor educators and other professionals interested in school counselor program evaluation competencies work with CACREP to better delineate program evaluation with a distinct set of expectations. We also recommend that

counselor educators and interested professionals work with ASCA. Although the current state of ASCA program evaluation expectations is more detailed and focused on school counseling programs than are the CACREP standards, the ASCA expectations lack clarity. Data analysis, program results, and evaluation and improvement comprise three sections of the Accountability expectations (ASCA, 2012). These sections are associated with a variety of reports that comprise the ASCA National Model program. Little rationale is provided for the connection and organization of these reports. Moreover, all expectations are housed within the Accountability domain, signaling that all program evaluation is conducted for stakeholders outside the school counseling program. More clarity and organization of the ASCA expectations are needed before program evaluation can be productively employed by school counselors. Thus, those interested in the program evaluation knowledge and skills of practicing school counselors are urged to work with ASCA to better fashion program evaluation expectations.

Currently, some states lack any program evaluation expectations except those that may be in the required state licensure examination. Other states specify broad content that does adequately clarify the expectations for program evaluation. Some states maintain CACREP expectations or promote the ASCA National Model in their content yet require a state licensure test unconnected to the aforementioned standards that purportedly maintains items that measure aspects of program evaluation. In other states, CACREP standards are incorporated into the curriculum while candidates are expected to pass a licensure test that indicates alignment with the ASCA National Model.

The program evaluation expectations across states are uncoordinated, inconsistent, lack cohesion, and do not provide adequate information for counselor education faculty to develop and implement responsive program evaluation education and experiences for their graduate school counseling students. Nationally, it appears that program evaluation expectations lack specificity, organization, and any strong connection to the evaluation field.

Further research is needed on how state licensure examinations influence program evaluation education for school counselors. In our initial testing research (Carey et al., 2018), we found that further research is needed to elucidate the nature and scope of available state and commercial licensure tests with respect to program evaluation. It is also important to determine whether these tests influence the curriculum in school counseling graduate professional programs. The US has over 50 years of experience with other educational achievement and licensure tests and understands well the dynamic between large-scale tests and standards or expectations. Therefore, if ASCA, CACREP, and state agencies provide a coordinated articulation of program evaluation expectations for school counselors, tests will be developed by commercial publishers that reflect these expectations.

Recommendation 2: Develop the evaluation capacity of practicing school counselors.

As Trevisan (2000) found in his initial study, we also found in this study, that state licensure requirements overall do not assure that applicants can fulfill program evaluation expectations to properly support CDGC or ASCA National Model programs. We thus conclude that there is a great need for program evaluation professional development among practicing school counselors. We recommend that interested professionals work with states and school districts to fulfill this professional development need. Since Trevisan's (2000) study, a handful of state models for this kind of work have been implemented that could be adopted or adapted in other states. Martin and Carey (2012) contrast school counselor evaluation capacity building efforts in two states, Missouri and Utah. Missouri is an example of a state that adheres to local control for educational decision making, while Utah maintains more central authority for decision-making. Therefore, these states use different strategies to make the case for program evaluation of school counseling programs and incentivize school counselors to conduct evaluation. For example, Missouri uses communication and incentive strategies that signal the importance of conducting program evaluation to encourage school districts to respond affirmatively. Utah on the other hand, uses a combination of policies and resources. However, both states provide opportunities for school counselors to shape evaluation and increase their knowledge, understanding, and skills in conducting evaluation.

Since many states have adopted or aim to adopt the ASCA National Model (Martin et al., 2009) in educational or examination requirements, there may be interest among these states in partnering with school counselor educators, evaluators, and other professionals to fulfill evaluation training needs and develop infrastructure to build evaluation capacity for practicing school counselors. Trevisan and Hubert (2001) and Astramovich et al. (2005) provided examples of how professional development and evaluation capacity building could be conducted at the school district level. They provided examples that go beyond one-shot workshops, such as providing ongoing technical assistance that includes periodic training, follow-up, and a means to fade instructional scaffolding so that school counselors take ownership for their learning and development. In both studies, school counselors reported that they were eager for evaluation training and support. There appears to be a strong interest among today's practicing school counselors for evaluation professional development.

Recommendation 3: Develop the evaluation capacity of counselor educators.

Our findings, coupled with the low status of research and program evaluation for most counseling practitioners (Steele & Rawls, 2015) highlight the need to revisit how research

and program evaluation is addressed within doctoral training. If many of today's school counselors are not being educated and trained in program evaluation, it is logical to assume that many counselor educators also did not receive this training. Therefore, they are likely unprepared to teach program evaluation or understand its value. This will then play a major role in how program evaluation is applied within the field and within its policies.

Our findings highlight a complex and multi-layered problem that will require focused work to address. Nearly 25 years ago, Hosie (1994) provided a broad rationale for incorporating evaluation course work and other evaluation experiences into the doctoral education of counselor educators. He highlights the importance of understanding how evaluation influences public sector policy, which remains relevant today. In an investigation of doctoral-level training in program evaluation for counselor educators, Sink and Lemich (2018) found scant preparation across programs in the US. However, they offered several recommendations that if enacted, could solidify the doctoral-level preparation of counselor educators in program evaluation. There is much work to be done.

The CACREP (2016) standards for counselor educator doctoral programs maintains evaluation expectations for counselor educators. The expectations are scattered throughout the professional identity standards. The standard that conveys the expectation clearest is housed within the Research and Scholarship component of Professional Identity standards, namely, "f. models and methods of program evaluation" (p. 36). At the time of the Hosie (1994) article, there were no program evaluation standards maintained by CACREP. While they are now included in CACREP, they are bound up in the research and scholarship standard, similar to the way these two sets of expectations are lumped together in the CACREP master's program standards. This affects whether counselor education doctoral students receive education and training in evaluation, as is the case with school counseling master's programs. We recommend that counselor educators and others interested in the program evaluation skills of school counselors, work with CACREP to better articulate program evaluation expectations that clearly convey the role of evaluation in support of CDGC and ASCA National Model programs. Further, evaluation expectations must be disentangled from research.

Professional development in evaluation is clearly needed for school counselor educators who teach school counseling professional graduate students. This training could start with the role of evaluation in support of CDGC or ASCA National Model programs. Documents associated with these programs could be provided so that the evaluation training is grounded in the professional practice of school counselors, the current thinking of school-based counseling programs, professional expectations from the evaluation field, and supports needed to ensure program effectiveness. Professional development opportunities such as workshops could be provided at professional meetings such as the annual Evidence-Based School Counseling Conference. School counselors or other professionals with evaluation expertise could provide online training, study groups, and on-site consultations to build evaluation capacity for counselor educators.

Recommendation 4: Use the Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011) as the basis for revising CACREP and ASCA standards and to provide professional development for educators.

A clear definition of program evaluation is a necessary starting point for development of sound instructional content and other educational activities. Several definitions of program evaluation can be found in the evaluation and school counseling literature. These competing definitions can be confusing to anyone attempting to develop professional practice in evaluation. The continued emergence of the field of evaluation and the interdisciplinary nature of evaluation are key reasons for this (Trevisan & Carey, 2020). In fact, ambiguity about what program evaluation is may be one reason why program evaluation and research are often confounded in accreditation standards. We offer the following definition, articulated in the educational evaluation *Standards* (Yarbrough et al. 2011):

- The systematic investigation of the quality of programs, projects, subprograms, subprojects, and/or any of their components or elements together or singly;
- For purposes of decision making, judgments, conclusions, findings, new knowledge, organizational development, and capacity building in response to the needs of identified stakeholders;
- Leading to improvement and/or accountability in the users' programs and systems;
- Ultimately contributing to organizational or social value (Yarbrough et al., 2011; p. xxv).

This definition captures the unique content of program evaluation found in the evaluation literature and is broadly accepted across several professions, including the American Counseling Association (ACA). The ACA was a cooperating member of the joint committee that established this definition of evaluation and the development of the *Program Evaluation Standards* document (Yarbrough et al. 2011). This document articulates 30 standards to guide the conduct of educational program evaluation. The standards are organized into five categories: Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, Accuracy, and Accountability. Developed through a rigorous standard setting process, the standards describe what quality looks like when conducting program evaluation.

Use of the *Program Evaluation Standards* (Yarbrough et al. 2011) has three important advantages. One, given the rigorous development of the *Program Evaluation Standards*, organizations interested in program evaluation can be assured that it reflects the best thinking on program evaluation. Therefore, there would be no need to develop

another definition, particularly for accreditation bodies that revise their program expectations every few years. Two, the *Program Evaluation Standards* clearly differentiate program evaluation from research. This differentiation helps address the unique aspects of program evaluation in accrediting standards and school counselor professional competencies and provides the basis for graduate program instruction and in-service professional development. Three, since the ACA was involved in the development of the definition of evaluation and standards that guide the professional conduct of evaluation, the needs and expectations of the school counseling field were in part represented. In short, the political rationale, substantive basis, and professional concern for adopting the *Program Evaluation Standards* is already present.

Concluding Remarks

The work of the school counseling field and profession in the US over the last 20 years is impressive. The development of the ASCA National Model and its implementation or partial implementation in most states is a notable achievement. Program evaluation knowledge and skills for school counselors is essential to fully realize these states' initiatives and are critical to the success of professional school counselors. By clarifying state program evaluation expectations for school counseling licensure, enhancing graduate program instruction for masters and doctoral students, and providing professional development for practicing school counselors and counselor educators, the school counseling profession can move forward and be viewed as an essential component of K-12 school reform efforts.

Despite the challenges of obtaining data that provides a complete picture of the connection between state level expectations and what occurs in graduate classrooms, our findings likely provide a fairly accurate assessment of the status of state level program evaluation expectations for school counseling licensure, particularly for the time that this study was conducted. The assessment is informed by our collective knowledge about the inner workings of licensure in several states, the improvement and enhancement of website materials that has occurred in state agencies that increasingly rely on the internet to communicate expectations, as well as knowledge and experience in teaching pre-service school counselors. Moreover, two of the authors of this paper are or have been school counseling faculty members connected nationally to many other school counseling faculty and thus, communication with many of these individuals help to validate the picture we think we see concerning the disconnect between state expectations and classroom instruction. Our findings also corroborate 30 plus years of writing in the school counseling literature, lamenting the lack of training in program evaluation for school counselors and a consequent lack of acceptance and practice of program evaluation among school counselors. In sum, while there is some progress, little has changed with

respect to the preparation and expectations for competence in program evaluation among school counselors.

In broader sense, our results also demonstrate that, even in the US context where school counseling is a mature field, where there is a longstanding recognition of the importance school counselors' having competence in program evaluation, and where government has a long history of policy and practice to encourage student access to high quality counseling services, achieving the levels of coordination and collaboration among government, professional associations, accrediting bodies and higher education that are necessary for promoting the development of adequate educational standards for school counselors has been very challenging. Policy advocates in countries where school counseling is a developing profession should take care to attend to the importance of coordinating the perspectives of these stakeholders in order to develop a common set of standards for practice upon which quality assurance practices like licensure can be based.

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