

The Production of Professional School Counselors in Alabama: Graduation Rates of CACREP and Non-CACREP Programs

Susan R. Boes, Brent M. Snow and Julie S. Chibbaro
University of West Georgia

Abstract

Today's professional school counselors have many roles and tasks within the schools. As more children depend on the services of school counselors, well-trained counselors are needed to meet the demands. Data presented in this paper provide support for the production of professional school counselors in Alabama and the immediate southeastern area of the United States. We compared the number of graduates from universities that are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and those that are not accredited by CACREP.

The Production of Professional School Counselors in Alabama

In today's world, the work of Professional School Counselors is crucial because the needs of our school-age children are vast and diverse. Parents and other stakeholders must be made aware of the roles and tasks that Professional School Counselors perform so that their services are utilized to the fullest to meet the needs of 21st century students. Accordingly, it is imperative that Professional School Counselors are trained to the utmost extent so they are capable of working to help resolve the needs of today's students. To this end, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) developed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) to ensure training matches the demands of 21st century students. Additionally, the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2005) was developed as a model framework to provide K-12 school counselors the structure needed to guide their comprehensive programs. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) (Education Trust, 2003) preceded these ASCA developments and was "the impetus for seeking and developing the fundamental changes needed to bring the work of school counselors into alignment with the mission of schools for the 21st century" (Martin, 2002, p. 148).

Vaughn, Bynum, and Hooten (2007) reported the need for counselor education programs to prepare school counselors who are able to assume the roles as proposed by ASCA. Adherence to the State Plan for Alabama Higher Education 2003-04 to 2008-09 is also an important aspect to consider for training school counselors in the state of Alabama as it articulates the framework for higher education (Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), 2008).

Connecting ASCA and Other Initiatives for School Counselor Education

A key factor connecting the ASCA initiatives as well as TSCI is the educational focus that joins school counseling programs to the total school program. As an integral part of the school, Professional School Counselors work as team members collaborating to fulfill the No Child Left Behind (U. S. Department of Education (USDOE), 2001) legislation. As part of the educational team of their school, Professional School Counselors are also involved in the national standards-based movement as well as being accountable for providing comprehensive,

developmental programs (ASCA, 2003, 2005; Cobia & Henderson, 2007; Curry & Lambie, 2007; Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007). Vaughn et al. (2007) found the majority of their study's participants prefer to promote academic achievement through appropriate academic, career, and personal/social school activities. However, the study indicated several areas of concern. Specifically participants identified the necessity to reduce clerical tasks. Also recognized were the needs to improve parental involvement and to increase the role of school counselors as leaders in the school and advocates for student needs. The needs identified by Vaughn et al. are considered necessary to meet the multiple demands of school children in the 21st century. Becoming advocates for social justice (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; House & Martin, 1999; Phillips, Sears, Snow, & Jackson, 2005), helping to bridge the gap with the education of low income children (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007), developing diversity training for school personnel (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001), and using and understanding data that effectively demonstrate changes in student behavior and in academics (Cobia & Henderson, 2007; Dimmitt, et al., 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2007) are education requirements for school counseling graduates if they are to effectively meet these current demands.

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

CACREP Accreditation versus non-CACREP Accreditation

CACREP is the largest and most prestigious accrediting body in the nation for counseling programs. CACREP was created to: 1) present guidelines reflecting the expectations of the profession, 2) endorse professional quality programs, and 3) strengthen the credibility of counseling (Accredited Counselor Education Programs, 1982; Bobby & Kandor, 1992). As a voluntary accreditation body CACREP promotes the standardization of the counselor's scope of practice by established curriculum guidelines (Paisley & Borders, 1995; Smaby & D'Andrea, 1995). Loesch and Vacc (1988; 1994) reported that the CACREP standard for the core curriculum is reflected by the National Counselor Examination (NCE) as administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors (2008). Programs that are not accredited establish their own curriculum. Faculty members use their past counseling experiences, state mandates, and professional preferences to guide them in their planning. This in no way suggests that non-accredited programs have standards that are substandard or produce faulty graduates, however because the curriculum is not reflected by the NCE, there is no external evaluation to compare the quality of the curriculum (Bobby & Kandor, 1992; Smaby & D'Andrea, 1995).

Research on CACREP Accreditation versus non-CACREP Accreditation

There is a dearth of literature related to graduates of programs accredited by the Council for Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) versus non-CACREP accredited programs and much of it is outdated. Bobby and Kandor (1992) investigated hindrances programs identified that kept them from seeking CACREP accreditation. Their findings included barriers of the 600 clock-hour internship and the student-to-faculty ratios set by CACREP. Other identified concerns were the 48 semester hour program or 72 quarter hour, the requirement of a minimum of 2 full-time faculty members (currently 3 full-time faculty members) in an individual program, and the 20-1 now 10-1 advisor/advisee ratio. Faculty in few accredited programs found any major difficulty meeting the above standards, however sometimes financial and faculty support are not easy to acquire.

Akos and Scarborough (2004) examined internships for preservice counselors, which CACREP considers, along with practicums, to be the most critical experiences of a program. Both CACREP accredited and non-CACREP programs were investigated. Using a qualitative analysis of internship program syllabi, Akos and Scarborough found vast disparities in expectations for students during these clinical experiences, yet within

CACREP, programs handle these experiences in individual manners that adhere to the standards.

More recently, Adams (2006) studied the effect CACREP accreditation had on student knowledge in the core counseling areas as assessed by the NCE. The study examined the scores on the NCE over a 5-year period to differentiate between CACREP and non-CACREP scores. Scores on the NCE were significantly higher overall on the NCE by CACREP program graduates, as well as in the core knowledge areas as compared to graduates of non-CACREP accredited programs. Adams concluded that graduates of non-CACREP programs may not have profited from the energy and quality of curricula that is set in CACREP accredited programs. No investigations were located specifically addressing the number of school counseling graduates from CACREP versus non-CACREP accredited programs.

Training Standards for the Counseling Profession

Training standards within the counseling profession have been outlined by CACREP since 1981 and are often revised to meet current needs of clients and students (CACREP, n.d.). CACREP accreditation provides program graduates with training that meets or exceeds national standards (CACREP, 2006). With the national standards for school counseling programs, the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005), credentialing through various boards including the National Board for Certified Counselors (2008) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2008) it might seem that school counselor candidates are trained with the same knowledge, skills, and strategies for their future careers. Yet can one logically question whether all Professional School Counselors are trained in a like manner with equal skills and educated with the same curriculum. Additionally, one might wonder if all Professional School Counselors perform the same tasks at their sites in the same manner. Answers to these queries should be negligible, but without the same standards and similar curricula this may not be so. The importance of graduating well-trained Professional School Counselors is further heightened when one looks at the large number of school counselors needed in the nation's schools today (Snow, Boes, Chibbaro, & Sebera, 2008).

School Counselor Shortages

There is an increased need for well-trained school counselors in our schools to meet the needs of students who are faced with increasingly challenging issues (Schwab, 2001; Portman, 2002). According to Top Colleges (n.d.) there is a widespread need for more Professional School Counselors across the nation. There are not enough well trained Professional School Counselors Who give college advise to our high school students. In January, 2008, House Joint Memorial Bill 3 was introduced for legislation in New Mexico. This bill titled "Study School Staff Shortage Issues" predicts there will be several shortages of school personnel including nurses, instructional support staff, and school counselors. These shortages are expected in public and charter schools (House Joint, 2008).

Shifting populations and an increased number of school-aged children are contributing to the predicament. Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba and Indelicato (2006) reported on a shortage of Spanish speaking school counselors in the state of Florida. Additionally, they noted the population of school-age Hispanic children in Hillsborough County, Florida alone was estimated to be 51,000. Iowa also lists special needs staff shortages which are calculated on the number of conditional licenses which are issued, the number and frequency of job postings at their Department of Education website and the number of projected graduates in the various disciplines (n.d.). California (Pytel, 2006) and Michigan (Hobson, Fox, & Swickert, 2000), have reported shortages that continue to be problematic. While these reports only represent a cross section of Professional School Counselor shortages from individual states, The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2006) announced shortages across the nation in pupil service personnel which includes counselors who are equipped to help students more effectively.

While there had been a slight increase in school counselors during the 1990's, the increase did not keep up with the increased number of school-aged children enrolled in our nation's schools. The ratio of students to counselors has remained approximately the same as it was prior to the increased hires of school counselors in the 1990's (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2007).

School Counselor Programs and Counselor Ratios in Alabama and Georgia

Alabama has 15 universities with programs training school counselors and 6 of the 15 are accredited by CACREP (2008). CACREP has set the standard for the training of school counselors in the United States and many programs desire this status. Most programs in Alabama graduate 25 or less students per year according to the reports to American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). In keeping enrollments low, it appears programs in Alabama approximate one of the CACREP requirements of reasonably small instructor/student ratios. In the neighboring state of Georgia program graduates were higher per year (AACTE, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). However, the Board of Regents (BOR) for the University System of Georgia decreed that all school counseling programs in the state be accredited by CACREP which may possibly affect the number of program graduates per year in the future. In the *Regents' Principles and Actions for the Preparation of Educators for the Schools* (BOR, 2004) section IIB (10) all programs are to "seek and maintain national accreditation for school counseling programs through the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)" (p. 7).

Many school counseling programs desire CACREP accreditation but not all are supported at the state level as in Georgia. The National Center for Education Statistics (USDOE, 2007) presents student-to-counselor ratios for the United States. In the data presented the state of Alabama educated 741,758 students with 1,814 counselors for a student-to-counselor ratio of 409:1. Data from the neighboring state of Georgia demonstrate that in 2007 approximately 1,598,461 students were educated. The number of counselors was approximated at 3,536 for a student-to-counselor ratio of 452:1. The recommended student-to-counselor ratio by ACA (2007) is 250:1, the ratio determined to demonstrate students receive adequate access to counseling services. The current U.S. average student-to-counselor ratio is 476:1. Neither Alabama nor Georgia is near the 250:1 recommended ratio. Both have better ratios than the national average. If shortages as predicted by NASP (2006) and other states (Hobson, et al., 2000; Pytel, 2006; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006) occur in Alabama and Georgia, both states may need more well-trained counselors. These predictions along with the changing needs of school-aged children seem to suggest more counselors who are trained in appropriate skills to better counsel our children.

Because graduation rates of training programs are a determining factor addressing potential shortages the present study focused on the number of school counseling graduates being produced by the various institutions in the state of Alabama. The study also compared the sum of school counseling graduates in Alabama to Georgia and other training programs in the southern area of the United States. The data was reviewed for all school counseling programs whether the program was accredited by CACREP at the time. Current CACREP status is also noted for the school counseling programs.

Method

Data Collection

The collection of data for this study was based on a review, analysis, and compilation of information found in various directories of members from 1995 to 2002 published by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). Part of each AACTE directory is an analysis of the productivity at member institutions. These member universities and colleges submit an annual report through the AACTE/NCATE Professional Education Data System and information is presented for teachers, administrators, and school counselors. The data are approximately 2 years old when published in each directory, so information found in the

2002 directory is actually reporting data from 2000, the 2001 directory from data for 1999 and so forth. After the 2002 directory, however information for counseling is not identified specifically but is grouped under “advanced” programs. Thus, information about school counseling graduates or completers the term used by AACTE, was available only through the 2002 directory.

The data collected by AACTE is considerable in length and is specified for each member institution. AACTE (2002) describes itself as follows:

AACTE and its predecessors reflect educator preparation’s evolution from normal schools to colleges to comprehensive universities. The Association’s approximately 760 member institutions include private, state, and municipal colleges and universities – large and small- located in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Together, they graduate more than 90% of new school personnel entering the profession each year in the United States. In addition, AACTE has a growing number of affiliate members, including state departments of education, community colleges, educational laboratories and centers, and foreign institutions and organizations (p. 1).

Data Analysis

Using this database from AACTE, the authors identified every college or university reporting school counseling graduates. The authors then identified the accreditation status by CACREP of each reporting institution. Those that were accredited by CACREP were identified with the year accreditation was granted. In the analysis of data, only graduates who completed the school counseling program during or after the year accredited were considered CACREP graduates. Thus, an institution may have both graduates from a CACREP program and graduates from a non-CACREP program.

The authors are unaware of any databases that even approximate the information about school counselors as that collected by AACTE. Clawson, Henderson, Schweiger, and Collins (2004) along with predecessors, Hollis and Dodson, (2000), Hollis (1997), Hollis and Wantz (1990, 1994) have gathered considerable information about counselor education programs in the United States. While these authors have delineated helpful information including some data relative to admission and graduation rates, most of the numbers seem to be estimates and, of course, these works have not been published yearly with specific data for each year.

Results

Fifteen universities have school counseling programs in the state of Alabama. Six universities currently have CACREP accreditation, while others may be in the application process (CACREP, 2008) (see Table 1). The number of school counseling graduates from each of the 15 universities is depicted in Table 2.

Alabama and Selected Georgia School Counseling Programs

The University of Alabama was the first program to acquire CACREP status in 1982 and Auburn University became CACREP accredited in 1986. It was not until 1999 that the University of Troy at Phoenix City acquired CACREP status, followed by the University of Montevallo in 2003. More recently, the University of Troy acquired CACREP accreditation in 2005, followed by the University of Troy at Montgomery in 2006 (CACREP, 2008). Those programs not yet achieving CACREP accreditation status in Alabama include Alabama A & M University, Alabama State University, Auburn University at Montgomery, Jacksonville State University, Troy State University at Dothan, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of North Alabama, the University of South Alabama, and the University of West Alabama.

The University of West Alabama data was first reported in this series of years as Livingston University. In 1995 Livingston University gained regional status (Wikipedia, 2008). Data is incorporated in Table 2 under its current name The University of West Alabama.

The total number of graduates of school counseling programs in the state of Alabama approximates 1,095 for the years 1995-2002 (AACTE, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). Individual program numbers for these reporting years range from 35 graduates at Alabama A & M, a non-CACREP program and Auburn University, a CACREP accredited program to a high of 148 graduates from Alabama State University, also not a CACREP accredited program (see Table 2).

Top Ten Graduating Programs in the Southern ACES Region

Of further comparison, by examining the Southern Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (SACES) region for the top 10 producing universities with school counseling graduates from both CACREP accredited programs and programs that are not CACREP accredited for the years 1995-2000, no university program in Alabama is represented. The top 10 producing programs in the southeast include: Western Kentucky University (non-CACREP), the University of West Georgia (CACREP), University of South Carolina (CACREP), Prairie View A& M University (non-CACREP), Eastern Kentucky University (CACREP), Georgia Southern University (non-CACREP), University of Georgia (CACREP), University of South Florida (non-CACREP), Morehead State University (non-CACREP), and Georgia State University (CACREP) (see Table 3 for numbers of graduates). Five of these top producers have attained CACREP status (CACREP, 2008) while the other five programs are not accredited. Forty percent of the 10 programs are in the state of Georgia, which is notable and three of these programs are CACREP accredited. Thirty percent of the programs are in Kentucky, with one in Florida, South Carolina, and Texas (see Table 3).

During the time of the AACTE reported data, The SACES region included 58 university programs with CACREP status and 115 programs that were not CACREP status. The total count of PSC graduates in the SACES region from CACREP accredited programs for the time period for the study was 8,741 while the non-accredited programs reported 11,679 graduates. The graduates from non-accredited programs surpassed the number of graduates from CACREP accredited programs. Fifty seven percent of graduates for the 1997-2002 timeframe were from non-CACREP accredited programs as compared to 43% of school counseling graduates from CACREP accredited programs. Programs with CACREP accreditation status generally graduate fewer students overall.

Discussion

It appears evident that program size and graduation rates vary between CACREP accredited and non-CACREP accredited programs in the SACES region. While CACREP (2001) reports programs with accreditation status typically graduate lower rates of Professional School Counselors, this was not always true for the programs in Alabama. Alabama A & M reported only 35 graduates and Auburn University at Montgomery reported 36 graduates for the timeframe of the study which is the same as the reported graduates for Auburn University which has acquired CACREP status.

The population of Alabama as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau (2000a) for mid census 2006 under Quickfacts, is reported at a total population of 4,599, 030. Of this population there is an estimated 6.5% of children under the age of 5 and 24.2% of children reported as less than 18 years of age. This leads one to ponder whether the number of graduates of school counseling programs from the 15 university programs are adequate to facilitate the needs of the future school population. In Georgia, Quickfacts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b) estimates the total population for 2006 to be 9,363,941 persons with 7.5% of those persons being under 5 years of age and 26.2% of these persons being under the age of 18.

Interestingly, the number of school-age children is somewhat similar according to the percentages provided by Quickfacts (2000a, b), yet the number of Professional School Counselors produced in Georgia, with fewer school counseling programs, for the reporting period by AACTE (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) was more than double the production number of Professional School Counselors in Alabama. There are 15 school counseling programs in Alabama supplying over 1,000 school counselors for the reporting years.

There are only 10 school counseling programs in Georgia producing more than double the number of Professional School Counselors for the same reporting years (Snow et al., 2008). Obviously, school counseling programs in Georgia tend to be larger than those in Alabama. With such growing populations, more Professional School Counselors may be needed in Alabama and Georgia.

It is interesting to note that the various items Bobby and Kandor (1992) noted as keeping programs from seeking CACREP accreditation are those that make programs outstanding and graduates capable of developing exceptional comprehensive guidance programs that are connected to academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development. The 600 clock-hour internship plus a 100 hour Practicum gives graduates a minimum of 700 hours of work in a school counseling program under the direct supervision of a site supervisor.

This two semesters or longer of clinical experience was considered the most critical experience of counseling programs (Akos & Scarborough, 2004) and it is understandable that programs throughout a state with similar curricula will be graduating stronger Professional School Counselors. The student-to-faculty ratios, advisor/advisee ratio along with the minimum of three full-time faculty works to keep classes smaller and offers the opportunity to get student needs met while in the program. While accredited programs found little difficulty meeting CACREP standards, programs that are not accredited do not realize the impact these standards set. The number of school counseling graduates may lessen as more programs aim for CACREP accreditation.

Summary and Recommendations

With 15 school counseling programs at institutions in the state of Alabama, six with CACREP accreditation, school counselor production currently appears to cover P-12 counseling needs. Adherence to CACREP standards and licensure guidelines, which often follow CACREP guidelines, benefits P-12 students in the state of Alabama because similar curricula will ensure school counselors throughout the state develop similar comprehensive programs. Thus, the areas of academic achievement, career preparedness, and social emotional are mandated by ASCA to meet the counseling needs of P-12 students throughout the nation. Similarities in curriculum such as depicted in accreditation standards allow school counselors to develop similar comprehensive programs that help students in the areas of academic achievement, career preparedness, and social/emotional development. While accreditation was not the primary focus of the study, generally school counseling programs which have acquired CACREP accreditation graduate fewer professional school counselors and the assumption can be made they have a culture that enhances student and professor relationships because of the required ratios (Snow et al., 2008). Limitations of this study include the obvious that AACTE's data is no longer published relative to school counselor program graduates. School counseling graduates are subsumed under "advanced programs."

Recommendations

Additional studies are needed to investigate the quality of school counseling programs that are accredited and those that are not accredited by CACREP. Predictive shortages of school counselors in the nation may challenge CACREP accredited programs due to the lower graduation rates. Thus it is important to continue this research. While Adams (2006) found there is a difference on NCE scores from accredited and non-accredited programs there is still a need for more empirical research to determine quality of training programs.

In general it appears enrollments in school counseling programs in Alabama are kept relatively low, which approximates the CACREP (2001) requirement for reasonably small instructor and student ratios. A logical question might be whether all programs in the state of Alabama might be CACREP accredited if the appropriate support would be available. Without knowing the curriculum, faculty resources, student to faculty ratios, and other quality indicators at institutions not currently accredited by CACREP, it does appear realistic, however, that many or most could achieve accreditation if the appropriate support was available. The mandate by

The Board of Regents (2004) in the state of Georgia has moved more school counseling programs toward CACREP accreditation status. Such a mandate might make it possible for more programs in Alabama to attain this status. However, without such a mandate, one recommendation might be that accreditation status become a practical advocacy theme for counselor educators within the state. As counselor educators it is also important to advocate for issues of the profession, should we deem the appropriateness of such actions.

Table 1

Alabama School Counseling Programs and Year of Initial CACREP Accreditations.

<u>University Name</u>	<u>CACREP accreditation year</u>
Alabama A & M University	N/A
Alabama State University	N/A
Auburn University	1986
Auburn University at Montgomery	N/A
Jacksonville State University	N/A
University of Alabama	1982
University of Alabama at Birmingham	N/A
University of Montevallo	2003
University of North Alabama	N/A
University of South Alabama	N/A
University of Troy at Dothan	N/A
University of Troy at Montgomery	2006
University of Troy at Phoenix City	1999
University of Troy	2006
University of West Alabama	N/A

Note. The year indicated is the initial year of CACREP accreditation. N/A indicates CACREP status is not applicable at this time.

Table 2

Production of School Counselors by Programs in Alabama

<u>University</u>	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	Total
Alabama A & M	-	8	4	5	-	5	8	5	35
Alabama State	27	18	16	12	6	5	41	23	148
Auburn University	9	8	5	2	3	7	-	1	35
AU at Montgomery	5	13	-	-	-	-	9	9	36
Jacksonville State ³¹	72	-	-	8	1	3	10	125	
U. of Alabama	19	17	10	16	23	10	9	11	115
UA at Birmingham	11	10	9	10	8	7	8	2	65
U. of Montevallo	4	-	7	5	11	6	12	15	60
North Alabama	14	-	3	7	10	3	9	8	54
South Alabama	8	14	9	7	5	7	4	10	64
Troy at Dothan	9	13	6	14	18	6	9	16	91
Troy at Montgomery									
Troy at Phoenix C.	23	27	-	20	28	30	0	0	128
Troy at Troy									
West Alabama	13	8	7	4	5	87	8	7	139
Subtotal	173	208	76	102	125	174	120	117	1095

Note. These numbers represent the totals as reported to AACTE in a given year. They may not reflect actual numbers for each year as a university may collapse data and report numbers at different timeframes. The reader is reminded that Livingston University became the University of West Alabama in 1997. Troy University and Troy University at Montgomery did not report as single units, thus there no data is presented.

Table 3

Numbers and Means of School Counseling Graduates of SACES Top Producing Programs from 1995-2002

		N	\bar{X}
Western Kentucky University	(N/A)	931	116
University of West Georgia	(2001)	620	78
University of South Carolina	(1984)	602	75
Prairie View A&M University	(N/A)	517	65
Eastern Kentucky University	(2003)	449	56
Georgia Southern University	(N/A)	427	53
University of Georgia	(1987)	401	50
University of South Florida	(N/A)	375	47
Morehead State University	(N/A)	367	48
Georgia State University	(1980)	349	44

Note. These numbers represent the totals as reported to AACTE in a given year. They may not reflect actual numbers for each year as a university may collapse data and report numbers at different timeframes. Dates indicate the year first accredited by CACREP. N/A indicates CACREP status is not applicable at this time.

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