Counselor Education Admissions: A Selection Process that Highlights Candidate Self-Awareness and Personal Characteristics

Abstract

This article describes an experiential model for applicant selection in a master"s level counselor education graduate program. While nonintellectual aspects are emphasized in the model, some traditional measures are also considered. The program"s emphasis on counselor self-awareness and personal characteristics is articulated. A discussion of the model's rationale, the interpersonal aspects of candidate selection and a discussion of the group- oriented interviewing process is provided. Contemporary and future challenges for application selection models in Counselor Education programs are articulated.

Counselor Education Admissions: A Selection Process that Highlights Candidate Self-Awareness and Personal Characteristics

Thomas J. Hernández, Susan R. Seem and Muhyiddin A. Shakoor

This article describes an experiential model for applicant selection in a master"s level counselor education graduate program. While nonintellectual aspects are emphasized in the model, some traditional measures are also considered. The program"s emphasis on counselor self-awareness and personal characteristics is articulated. A discussion of the model's rationale, the interpersonal aspects of candidate selection and a discussion of the group-oriented interviewing process is provided. Contemporary and future challenges for application selection models in Counselor Education programs are articulated.

In the 21st century, counselor education faces a number of challenges, not the least of which is, the influence of technology upon delivery of curriculum, web counseling and a widespread impetus towards solving problems quickly. In addressing these issues the field of counselor education seems to be moving away from what is the core of counseling: the self of the counselor. The importance of knowing oneself in order to be helpful to others seems often to get lost in the business of training counselors. However, the literature abounds with references to the importance of the adage "counselor know thyself" (e.g., self-understanding and awareness) and of personal characteristics of the counselor (e.g. Corey, 2001; Locke, 1998; Hackney & Cormier, 2009; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Ramirez, 1999; Sciarra, 1999; Seligman, 2009). Thus, despite these 21st century challenges, counselor education programs need to reconsider the question of counselor self-awareness and personal characteristics as essential components in training. This article addresses a counselor education program"s admissions model that examines both interpersonal qualities (e.g.

listening and feedback skills) and intrapersonal qualities (e.g. self-awareness and personal characteristics) of applicants in its selection process. A review of the literature on admissions selection criteria is provided along with selection variables that access personal qualities and self-awareness of candidates. Finally a review of the advantages and disadvantages of this selection process is discussed.

A Brief Review of the Literature

The selection of applicants for counselor education programs received much attention in the 1970s and 1980s. Most counselor education program reported using traditional or intellectual measures of academic success (e.g., undergraduate grade point average and exams such as the Graduate Record Examination and the Miller Analogies Test) in their selection process (Gimmestad & Goldsmith, 1973; Hollis & Dodson, 2000; McKee, Harris & Swanson, 1979; Pope & Klein, 1999; Rothstein, 1988). The efficacy of using such intellectual measures was examined. Research discovered little if any relationship

between traditional academic measures and counseling outcomes (Hosford, Johnson & Atkinson, 1984; Hurst & Shatkin, 1974; Jones, 1974; Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2001; Markert & Monke, 1990; Morrison, & Morrison, 1995; Rothstein, 1988; Sampson & Boyer, 2001).

Since the 1970s, counselor educators acknowledged that in addition to the academic, research, and clinical training challenges faced by students (Leverett-Main, 2004), counselor education must also provide experiences that increase student self-awareness and foster personal development (CACREP, 2001, 2009). Smaby, Maddux, Richmond, Lepkowski and Packman (2005) found academic measures such as entrance examinations and undergraduate grades were not accurate ways to assess or predict personal development. Personal development is "an individual‟s ability to develop increased understanding of self and to translate this understanding into effective counseling and social interactions" (Smaby, et. al, p. 45).These researchers suggested that additional measures of personal development, at the point of admission, might be necessary. It has also been argued that the admissions process is a time when counselor educators can be gatekeepers, and thus, behaviorally assess their students accordingly for their potential as counselors (Lamadue & Duffey, 1999).

Despite the field acknowledging the importance of personal characteristics in the admission process, scant literature exists on this topic. The need for admission procedures to select more fully functioning individuals (Foulds, 1969; Rothstein, 1988) and to develop selection indices that measure applicants‟ ability to help others (Anthony & Wain, 1971; Bath & Calhoun, 1977; Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Hurlburt & Carlozzi, 1981; Rogers, 1975; Rothstein, 1988) was well established in the late 20th century. This need focused on nonintellectual qualities that were perceived as essential to effective counseling (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; McKee et. al, 1979;

Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Rothstein, 1988). Potential selection criteria included personality characteristics (e.g., self-actualization, interpersonal warmth, affective sensitivity, self-awareness) (Carkhuff, 1969a; Hurlburt & Carlozzi, 1981; Jones, 1974; McKee, et al, 1979; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Rogers, 1975; Rothstein, 1988), social intelligence (e. g., social sensitivity, person perception, empathy) (Osipow & Walsh, 1973; Pope & Klein, 1999), cognitive flexibility (e. g., tolerance of ambiguity, complexity) (Mckee et. al, 1979) and communication skills (e. g., empathy, respect, genuineness, interpersonal communication) (Carkhuff, 1969a; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; King, Beehr & King, 1986; Pope & Klein, 1999; Rogers, 1970; Rothstein, 1988; Truax, 1970). This literature suggested that counselor attributes are crucial to one‟s ability to be an effective helper. The research in this area examined the relationship between the nontraditional academic factors, or the attributes of the counselor, and counselor effectiveness, and found mixed results, concluding that the relationship was ambiguous at best (Atkinson, Stasco & Hosford, 1975: Osipow & Walsh, 1973), while other studies indicated the existence of a relationship (Anthony & Wain, 1971; Hurst & Shatkin, 1974: McKee, et al, 1974; Rothstein, 1988; Tinsely & Tinsely, 1977). Indeed, Leverett-Main (2004) indicated that the skill of a counselor is less dependent on academic aptitude and more on personal qualities and interpersonal skills which might be best assessed through an interview process. Furthermore, Torres-Rivera, Wilbur, Maddux, Smaby, Phan, & Roberts-Wilbur (2002) argue that personal awareness was essential to the appropriate use of counseling skills.

In sum, there seems to be a consensus in the field that measures of personal development are important aspects to be considered in counselor education programs‟ selection process (Carlozzi, Campbell, & Ward, 1982; Helmes & Pachana, 2008; Leverett-Main, 2004; Pope & Klein, 1999; Smaby et al., 2005;

Wheeler, 2000). The field, however, offers little guidance in terms of how to assess personal attributes or characteristics and self awareness of applicants. Below we offer an admissions model that attempts to assess personal attributes and self – awareness along with traditional criteria. We also provide a discussion of how we attempt to reconcile strengths or limitations in the personal development area with strengths or weaknesses in traditional admissions criteria.

Selection Criteria

There is no single factor or test score that determines applicants" admission. Data used to reach an admission decision include both traditional and nonintellectual measures. Traditional admissions criteria used are: (1) a graduate application with the applicant"s written objectives for entering the program, (2) all undergraduate and graduate transcripts, and (3) three letters of recommendation. The nontraditional measures utilized are: (1) a level of facilitativeness score derived from responses to audiotaped client vignettes, and (2) a group interview that involves all counselor education faculty and approximately 8 to 10 candidates.

Graduate Application

In addition to the typical types of questions asked in graduate applications, the candidates are asked to write a statement of objectives. This statement includes candidates" objectives for wanting to be a professional counselor, a description of their professional or scholarly career, and commentary on their past work and experience as these relate to their field of study. There are three objectives for this selection criterion. First, faculty review the statement for graduate writing ability. Second, faculty try to gain a sense of the individual candidate"s personal characteristics and his or her level of self-awareness. Finally, faculty assess for candidate fit with the program.

Transcripts

Because faculty members do not believe that grade point average is an effective predictor of a candidate"s ability to help others (Markert & Monke, 1990), the department has no undergraduate or graduate grade point requirement. While undergraduate grade point averages below a 2.75 raise some concern in terms of the candidate"s ability to do the didactic, academic work required at the graduate level, a low grade point average does not automatically eliminate a candidate who demonstrates strength in some of the nonintellectual areas the department deems are important to becoming an effective professional counselor.

Recommendation Letters

Candidates are required to provide three letters of reference. References are asked to: (1) evaluate the candidate"s ability and motivation to do graduate work, (2) indicate any evidence that the candidate has the ability to be a helping person, (3) assess the candidate"s openness to receiving constructive feedback, and (4) identify the candidate"s strengths and limitations regarding emotional stability, self-motivation, self-awareness and maturation. This criterion is another attempt to obtain a picture of the candidate as a whole person, especially his or her ability to hear feedback in a non-defensive manner, and his or her strengths and limitations.

Pre-training measure of ability to help others

Carkhuff (1969a, 1969b), Rothstein (1988) and Rogers (1970) all argued that the best index of a future criterion is a previous measure of that criterion. They suggested that the selection process should include a pre-training measure of the applicant"s ability to communicate effectively the conditions of empathy, genuineness and respect. In an attempt to assess

candidates" natural ability to be of help to others, the department examines candidates" written responses to 6 audiotaped client vignettes. The responses are evaluated for facilitativeness using Carkhuff"s (1969a) scoring (1 .0 – 5.0). The Carkhuff score along with a brief qualitative summary of the candidate"s approach to helping is provided. One faculty member does all the scoring and the qualitative summary of all candidates" 6 responses. Faculty look for applicants with ability to listen, identify feelings and thoughts, and to provide relevant feedback without judgment, minimization, denial or problem solving.

Group Interview

Group interviews were posited as another way to assess nonacademic factors important to counselor effectiveness (Atkinson, Stasco & Hosford, 1978; Biasco & Redferring, 1976: Childers & Rye, 1987; Felton, 1972; Wilson, 1956). Group interviews were also viewed as a more effective way than individual interviews to discover applicants who might attempt to disguise their real selves. Further, group interviews also allow for the examination of interpersonal effectiveness, especially in terms of inducing behavior that is predictive of future behaviors, and to determine ability to handle ambiguity. Thus the department developed a semi-structured group activity to assess candidates" interpersonal proficiency and intrapersonal capacity. This activity focused on candidates" ability to present in a meaningful, cogent fashion, and to listen and give feedback without judgment or evaluation. Furthermore, this activity provides an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their level of self-awareness, ability to handle ambiguity and general personhood.

Eight to 12 candidates are invited to a group interview in which they engage in a triadic exercise. This group interview takes place in the department"s counseling laboratory where the candidates are seated in a group room while faculty observe the group interview through observation

windows. (See figure 1). One faculty member, who sits in the group room, proctors the group interview. Two candidates at a time are asked to sit, one in Chair A and one in Chair B. In Chair A the candidate has three minutes to present why he or she wants to be a counselor, the personal qualities or behaviors that will make the candidate an effective counselor, and the personal qualities or behaviors that the candidate believes need to be improved or changed in order to be an effective counselor. While the candidate in Chair A presents, the candidate in Chair B listens. When the Chair A candidate"s three minutes have elapsed, time is called by the proctor. Then the Chair B candidate is given two minutes to feed back what he or she heard to the Chair A candidate. If the Chair B candidate feeds back what the Chair A candidate said in less than two minutes, the candidate is allowed to use the remaining time to make a comment or ask a question. Both Chair A and B candidates are instructed to use the full time alotted and are told to stop when their time is done. Once the Chair B candidate is finished, the proctor indicates that Chair C is open to any other groupcandidate to use in order to give feedback, share a thought or ask for clarification. Any group applicant has the opportunity to participate in Chair C. The idea is that once a group member has interacted with either Chair A or Chair B or both, the participant in Chair C leaves the chair so other candidates may become involved in Chair C activity. Chair C remains open for two minutes. When Chair C"s time has elapsed , this portion of the triad is complete, and the next pair of Chair A and B candidates begins. In all, every applicant will be instructed to participate in Chair A and in Chair B, and all prospective candidates have the opportunity to participate in Chair C. (Please see Appendix A).

Ultimately, the entire process asks of each candidate "Who am I?" All faculty observing the group interview assess candidates regarding their degree of participation in each Chair. In Chair A,

faculty look for the ability of candidates to present themselves in a clear, logical, and concise manner. Additionally faculty look for a degree of self-awareness regarding candidates" motivations for entering the counseling profession, and their personal and professional strengths and limitations. Faculty pay attention to a candidate"s listening skills including clarification and use of questions, feedback skills, and theme identification in Chair B. Furthermore, faculty attend to the Chair B candidate"s ability to provide feedback to Chair A in a clear, concise, complete, and organized manner. Faculty look for a candidate"s degree of participation in Chair C along with an assessment of the quality of the

candidate"s interaction with Chair A and/or B. For example, does the candidate ask a question that furthers knowledge about the participant in Chair A or B? Does the candidate express how she feels about something that Chair A or B shared? Does the candidate demonstrate an ability to emotionally connect with others or does the candidate present self as an authority or come across as judging or lecturing? Throughout the group interview process, the faculty work to gain a sense of a candidate"s self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and degree of openness. Ultimately, faculty attempt to gain insight regarding the personhood of each candidate.

Table 1: Group interview screening criteria

	Screening Criteria
Chair A	• Ability to present self – succinctness, clarity, organization • Level of self-awareness and knowledge of self • Degree of openness • Ability to express affect
Chair B	• Listening skills • Asking for clarification • Feedback skills • Organization and accuracy of feedback • Theme development • Ability to hear and address affect • Ability to balance cognitive and affective demands related to interacting with another person without becoming distracted by his or her own personal agenda
Chair C	• Degree of participation • Quality of interaction • Ability to hear and address affect • Ability to balance cognitive and affective demands related to interacting with another person without becoming distracted by his or her own personal agenda

Admissions Process

All candidates who submit a completed graduate application form are invited to provide written responses to 6 client audiotaped vignettes. Next each and

every faculty member reviews all applicant files that contain the following: (1) the graduate application, (2) grade point average, (3) recommendation letters and (4) Carkhuff score and qualitative summary of each candidate"s responses to client

vignettes. Each candidate"s file receives a score on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) from each faculty member. A mean score is then derived for each candidate. Then candidates are rank ordered based upon their score, and the top 40-45 candidates are invited to attend a group interview. Finally, each faculty member reviews the rank ordering of candidates, and the selected candidates are briefly discussed. An individual faculty member may advocate to include a candidate in the group interview or exclude a candidate whose rankings placed him or her in that category. Ultimately, the faculty come to a consensus regarding who will be invited to the group interview. Approximately four group interviews are held across four consecutive days each semester.

Immediately after the group interview is completed, the faculty meet to make an admission decision regarding each candidate. The task is to select those candidates who best fit the program. The objectives for this stage are to: (1) assess candidates on their performance during the group interview on the behaviors identified above; (2) learn how each faculty member perceives the candidate through the group interview; and (3) utilize perceptions of the faculty regarding each candidate with the other data to make appropriate selections. In pursuit of these objectives, faculty hope to see what the candidate is like as a person. Overall, the faculty ask the following types of questions regarding candidates" performances in the three chairs.

- Does the candidate interact with others in a genuine manner (e.g. do they seem to talk at or talk down to others, do they seem genuine in their interactions)?
- Can they listen accurately (without interpreting, assuming, interjecting their issues)?
- Do they have some self-awareness regarding their strengths and limitations?

- What is the level of their self-awareness as related to their age and life experience?
- Can they give feedback (e.g., can they reflect back to Chair A without downplaying limitations, embellishing or being judgmental)?
- Can the Chair A candidate present in an organized, succinct and direct manner?
- Is the Chair B candidate"s feedback organized and clear?
- Can the Chair A, B, or C candidate hear themes?
- Does the candidate appear sensitive to others in terms of differences, experiences?
- How transparent does the candidate appear to be?
- Can the candidate manage his or her anxiety regarding involvement in the group interview?

After a discussion of a candidate"s group interview performance, the faculty also consider the candidates" Carkhuff score, letters of recommendations, undergraduate grade point average, and written objectives. These criteria are examined in order to assess candidates" ability to hear affect and focus on client concern (Carkhuff score). Further, faculty look at the candidate"s undergraduate grade point average and written objectives to see if there might be writing challenges at the graduate level for that particular individual. Additionally, letters of recommendation are utilized to gain a perspective on the candidate"s ability to hear feedback, level of emotional maturity and ability to perform academically at the graduate level. Then, each faculty member votes using a zero to 5 scale: (1) A score of less than 2 indicates rejection, (2) a score between 2 but less than 3 indicates conditional acceptance, and (3) a score of 3 to 5 indicates acceptance. A mean score for each candidate is then derived.

For a candidate who enrolled in a course or courses as a non-matriculated student *before* attending the interview, the faculty begin the process by hearing from any individual faculty member who has had personal experience with the candidate in the classroom and who can address the candidate‟s ability to do graduate work and has some knowledge of the candidate‟s personal characteristics, such as self-awareness, openness to feedback, ability to listen and to provide feedback. If the interview is the department‟s first experience with a candidate, faculty work with the information gathered in the application and in the interview process. What follows are examples of different levels of candidate‟s performance and subsequent admission decisions: (1) satisfactory Carkhuff score and performance in the group interview; (2) satisfactory Carkhuff score and poor performance in the group interview; (3) unsatisfactory Carkhuff score and a satisfactory performance in the group interview; and (4) unsatisfactory Carkhuff score and performance in the group interview. Each example is discussed in terms of the faculty‟s perception of the candidate (non-matriculated student) or no prior knowledge of the candidate and all the admission criteria.

Satisfactory group interview performance and Carkhuff score

The easiest admission decision usually occurs when the candidate has performed satisfactorily on the Carkhuff as well as in the group interview. On these occasions, faculty members review all of the data and typically find congruence between what the candidate demonstrates in the group interaction and who she or he is on paper. In cases like this, Carkhuff scores, together with faculty‟s individual ratings, as well as other traditional indicators convey a unified perspective of an individual the faculty all believe is a good prospect for the program and one who is likely to succeed.

Satisfactory Carkhuff score and poor performance in group interview

In those cases where the Carkhuff scores are satisfactory but the candidate has performed poorly in the group interview, faculty discuss their individual perceptions of the candidates‟ performance in the group interview and their reactions to the written objectives and other traditional data. If the candidate was a non-matriculated student, faculty also confer about the perception of the individual faculty member who taught that candidate. If the candidate had a successful classroom experience, the faculty‟s experience with the candidate helps other faculty members understand things about the candidate, which may have led to questionable performance in the group interview. For example, the candidate may have struggled with challenges in terms of confidence, interacting with others in public, or displaying self-confidence in the face of faculty. In a case like this, the instructor‟s personal classroom experience with a candidate is taken into consideration in the decision-making process.

In cases where the Carkhuff score is satisfactory but the candidate has had a less than successful class performance and has performed poorly in the group interview, faculty listen to the instructor‟s perception of the candidate in terms of academic performance and self-awareness. Additionally, faculty discuss the candidate‟s group performance and share their reactions to the written objectives and other traditional data. The combination of poor performance in academics and self awareness in a class, and in the group interview often leads to a decision of rejection.

Unsatisfactory Carkhuff score and satisfactory performance in group interview

In instances where the Carkhuff score is less than satisfactory but the candidate has had a successful classroom performance and did well in the group

interview, faculty discuss the candidate"s ability to listen and provide feedback during the group interview and compare that performance to the candidate"s Carkhuff score. For example, the candidate may have heard accurately and addressed affect during the group interview but had a lower Carkhuff score indicating a dismal of affect and irrelevant questions. Faculty may decide that the candidate"s performance in the group interview outweighs the low Carkhuff score. Overall, faculty view the Carkhuff score as an exceptionally helpful admission criterion. Often the written responses to the audiotaped client vignettes reveal certain nuances about how well the person listens or makes distinctions between content, levels of affect, or expressed and unexpressed feelings. All faculty may see the person as a good candidate based upon that individual"s group interview performance but on the basis of the Carkhuff score, see a lack of or poor ability to identify feelings, or a tendency to try and talk the client out of their feelings. When data are mixed (i.e. the candidate does poorly on the Carkhuff but moderately well in the interview and has references that encourage the faculty about the candidate"s potential,) the faculty"s review often leads them to accept the candidate on conditional terms. Most often conditional acceptance means that the candidate is expected to take the department"s introductory course and upon successful completion of the course and recommendation of the faculty instructor, participate in the group interview process for a second time. Successful performance in the group interview will result in conditional acceptance being changed to acceptance. Poor performance results in loss of matriculated status or rejection.

Unsatisfactory Carkhuff score and group interview performance

When the applicant performs poorly on the Carkhuff and in the group interview, faculty are less likely to admit a candidate. When a candidate"s performance in the

group interview mirrored his or her Carkhuff score (e.g., the candidate did not listen accurately, downplayed affect or asked irrelevant questions during the group interview and ignored and/or downplayed affect in his or her responses to the case vignettes), faculty tend to view the candidate as not possessing the necessary skills for admission. When the candidate has been a student in a class, the instructor"s perception of the candidate"s academic ability and self-awareness based on personal knowledge in the class room is taken into account. Because faculty are inclined to believe in the positive potential of humans, they look for any indication that the applicant may be a good candidate. Often there may be indicators in letters of reference or other traditional data. In cases where faculty find little evidence or indication they reject the candidate.

In sum, each candidate is discussed, and both objective data and subjective perceptions are shared by the faculty. The whole admissions process is an attempt to answer the questions "who is this person?" and "what skills and personality attributes does this candidate possess?" and seeks to clearly define the potential of the applicant to be a successful college, mental health or school counselor. While there is no assigned weighting for each selection criterion, the department as a whole tends to weigh more heavily the nontraditional factors (e.g., Carkhuff score, performance in the group interview) in its final decision. This often involves dialogue and sharing of perspectives. The faculty attempt to reach consensus regarding the admission decision for each candidate. Ultimately, the final decision on each candidate is reached by a faculty vote.

Balancing traditional and nontraditional criteria in the admissions decision process

While this admissions process clearly values nontraditional admissions criteria, the faculty are aware of the need to balance a candidate"s personal attributes

with his or her ability to perform academically at the graduate level. The candidate, who does well in the department‟s nonacademic and traditional academic selection criteria, is accepted. For a candidate who does well with nonacademic selection criteria but appears deficient in traditional academic measures such as undergraduate grade point average and writing ability, the decision to accept or reject is not as clear. The faculty tend to reject a candidate if his or her written objectives reveal that the candidate‟s writing is disorganized, contains errors, and is generally unclear. In such situations, the faculty might question the candidate‟s ability to excel at the graduate level even with academic support. Experience has demonstrated that low undergraduate grade point averages (e.g.: below a 2.75) often indicates that a candidate will struggle with writing and other academic work at the graduate level. The faculty discuss whether or not the department has the resources to be able to support a student who may have significant deficits (e.g. how much faculty time would be required to assist this candidate become successful).

Advantages and Disadvantages of this Admissions Model

While the faculty believe that this admissions model has advantages, there are also challenges in using such a selection process. A major advantage of this admissions process is the fact that the department examines both traditional and nonacademic measures. Thus candidates who may not perform as well on traditional academic measures such as grade point average or writing are provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their nonacademic abilities such as self-awareness, ability to help others, listen and give feedback (Atkinson et al., 1978).

Another advantage of this selection process is the department‟s emphasis on the importance of the adage "counselor know thyself." Counselor self-knowledge is critical to effective counseling especially in a diverse society (Locke, 1998; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1991). Sciarra (1999), for example, articulates the need for counselors to be self aware in order to be culturally sensitive, and suggests that the two traditional counseling terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal have analogues in multicultural counseling; that is, the counselor must be able to understand his or her own culture and to examine culture between him or herself and the client. The department‟s selection allows for candidates to demonstrate their intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities.

An additional advantage to this process is the involvement of all faculty in the admission decision process. All faculty have a stake in each candidate admitted to the program and is aware of potential strengths and limitations of each graduate. While each faculty member‟s perception of a candidate‟s performance in the group interview is based upon the selection criteria it also involves individual reactions. However, the nuances of candidate personality and ability are assessed and experienced by all faculty. This allows for a consensus to emerge with each decision and can compensate for just one faculty member‟s idiosyncratic reaction to an individual candidate.

This selection process which allows for faculty‟s reactions, feelings and thoughts about a candidate to be a part of the decision making process can be an advantage. This approach to admissions allows for clinical judgment that is balanced with traditional admissions criteria. In a study that examined evaluation criterion and decision-making processes used during admissions in four counselor education programs, Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) found that the faculty appeared to utilize the admission interview to screen out applicants who were inappropriate rather than to choose the best qualified candidates. A strength of the admissions model presented here is its articulation of characteristics that are used for evaluation of applicants (e.g., ability to hear and address affect, listening and feedback skills, self-awareness, etc.).

Thus this model helps faculty select rather than just eliminate unsuitable candidates.

This admission process also has disadvantages. A disadvantage is that only selected candidates are invited to the group interview and, thus, faculty do not assess all candidates" nonacademic abilities. This may result in candidates who may be strong on nontraditional criteria but not as strong in traditional areas to not be invited for the group interview. Thus, the department may miss candidates who have characteristics that the literature has identified as necessary for being an effective counselor.

This process also employs the use of subjective, nonacademic measures that some might argue reduces the ability of the faculty to select on an objective basis. Personality characteristics and level of self-awareness are less easy to quantify than a test score such as the GRE. Therefore, a disadvantage to this admissions model might be the need to balance objective measures with these less quantifiable, yet qualitative measures that the literature suggest should be considered in screening potential candidates for counselor education programs (Leverett-Main, 2004; Smaby et al, 2005).

Another disadvantage of this selection process is the requirement that all candidates come to campus to attend the audiotape session in which applicants supply written responses to client vignettes. This requirement may limit who applies to the program because of the issue of travel.

The time and energy the admission process entails may be a disadvantage. The fact that all faculty review all applicants, meet to discuss the rank ordering of applicants, and participate in the assessment of candidates" performance in group interviews requires a significant time commitment. This is time that takes away from other faculty activities.

Considerations and Future Research

Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) suggested that personal characteristics

used for candidate selection need to be behaviorally defined to increase objectivity during the interview assessment and faculty decision-making processes. The admissions model presented here could be refined to provide behavioral definitions of the evaluation criteria used for the group interview. Additionally, the Carkhuff scale (Carkhuff, 1969a) emphasized empathy as a skill. The department recognized that this focus on affect reflects a western European value, and thus the use of this scale may not be appropriate for candidates whose cultural identity differs from this western European worldview. The department is currently conducting a study examining the relationship among gender, race/ethnicity, and Carkhuff score to identify any potential biases with the use of this scale.

The department is also discussing how it might structure the admission process so that candidates who live a distance from campus can still apply. This is of particular interest because of inquires from international students about our program.

In summary, counselor education continues to struggle with how to select the best candidates for training as counselors. The model offered here is an attempt to address the need to assess personality characteristics as a part of the admissions process. As a discipline we continue to be faced by the following question: How can we select applicants who possess the values and characteristics that are viewed by the profession as essential to competent counseling? The challenge for counselor education is to develop ways to assess the personal characteristics of candidates that the literature deems necessary to be an effective counselors.

References

Anthony, W. A., & Wain, H. J. (1971). Two methods of selecting prospective helpers. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 18*, 155-156.

Atkinson, D. R., Stasco, D., & Hosford, R. (1978). Selecting counselor trainees

with multicultural strengths: A solution for the Bakke decision crisis. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 56*, 546-549.

Bath, K. E., & Calhoun, R. O. (1977). The effects of professional counselor training on empathy: Continued cause for concern. *Counselor Education and Supervision,17,* 98-10.

Biasco, R., & Redferring, D. L. (1976). The group interview as a selection procedure. *Improving College and University Teaching, 24*, 153-154.

Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs. (2001). CACREP accreditation manual: 2001 Standards. Alexandria, VA: author.

Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs. (2009). CACREP accreditation manual: 2009 Standards. Alexandria, VA: author.

Carkhuff, R. R. (1969a). *Helping and human relations: A primer for lay and professional helpers. Vol. 1. Selection and training.* New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, Inc.

Carkhuff, R. R. (1969b). Critical variables in counselor training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16,* 238-245.

Carkhuff, R. R., & Berenson, B. G. (1967). *Beyond counseling and therapy.* New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.

Carlozzi, A. F., Campbell, J. J., & Ward, G. R. (1982). Dogmatism and externality in locus of control as related to counselor trainee skill in facilitative responding. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 21,* 227-236.

Childers, J. H., & Rye, D. R. (1987). Doctoral student selection in counselor education: A multidimensional assessment strategy. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 65,* 555-557.

Corey, G. (2001). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy (6*[th] *Ed.).* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Felton, G. S. (1972). Development of an effective selection process for new professional mental health worker training programs. *Newsletter for Research in Psychology, XIV, #4,* 4-8.

Foulds, M. L. (1969). Self-actualization and level of counselor interpersonal functioning. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 9,* 87-92.

Gimmestad, M. J., & Goldsmith, E. B. (1973). Admissions policies for graduate programs in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 12,* 172-177.

Hackney, H. L., & Cormier, S. (2009). *The professional counselor: A process guide to helping*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Helmes, E., & Pachana, N. (2008). Value of interviews for admission to clinical training programs: Perspective of program directors. *Australian Psychologist, 43*, 4, 249-256.

Hollis, J. W., & Dodson, T. A., (2000). *Counselor Preparation* (10th Ed.). Philadelphia: Accelerated Development.

Hosford, R. E., Johnson, M. E., & Atkinson, D. R. (1984). Admission criteria, experiential background and personal interview as predictors of success in a counselor education program. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 23,* 268-275.

Hurlburt, J. D., & Carlozzi, A. F. (1981). *Affective sensitivity as related to instrumentality and expressiveness.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association, Dallas, TX.

Hurst, M. W., & Shatkin, S. D. (1974). Relationship between standardized admissions variables and certain interpersonal skills. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 14,* 22-33.

Jones, L. K. (1974). Toward more adequate selection criteria: Correlates of empathy, genuineness and respect. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 14*, 13-21.

King, D. W., Beehr, T. A., & King, L. A. (1986). Doctoral student selection in one professional psychology program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 42,* 399-407.

Kuncel, N. R., Hezlett, S. A., & Ones, D. S. (2001). A comprehensive meta-analysis of the predictive validity of the Graduate Record Examinations; Implications for graduate student selection and performance. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, 162-181.

Lamadue, C. & Duffey, T. (1999). The role of graduate programs as gatekeepers: A model of evaluating student counselor competencies. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 39*, 101-109.

Leverett-Main, S. (2004). Program directors" perceptions of admission screening measures and indicators of student success. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 43*, 207-219.

Locke, D. E. (1998). *Increasing multicultural counseling understanding* (2nd. Ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Markert , L. F., & Monke, R. H. (1990). Changes in counselor education admissions criteria. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 30,* 48-57.

McKee, J., Harris, C. M., & Swanson, C. D. (1979). A performance-based admissions screening program. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 58,* 72-75.

Morrison, T., & Morrison, M. (1995). A meta-analytic assessment of the predictive validity of the quantitative and verbal components of the Graduate Record Examination with graduate grade point average representing the criterion of graduate success.

Educational and *Psychological Measurement, 55*, 309-316.

Nagpal, S., & Ritchie, M.H. (2002). Selection interviews of students for master"s programs in counseling: An exploratory study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 41,* 207-218.

Neukrug, E. (2002). *Skills and techniques for human service professionals: Counseling environment, helping skills, and treatment issues.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Osipow, S. H., & Walsh, W. B. (1973). Social intelligence and the selection of counselors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 20,* 366-369.

Pope, V. T., & Klein, W. B. (1999). The personal characteristics of effective counselors: What 10 experts think. *Psychological Reports, 84*, 1339-1344.

Ramirez, M. III. (1999). *Multicultural psychotherpay: An approach to individual and cultural differences.* (2nd. Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Rogers, C. R. (1970). A revolutionary program in graduate education. *Library College Journal, 3,* 16-26.

Rogers, C. R. (1975). Empathic: An unappreciated way of being. *The Counseling Psychologist, 5,* 2-9.

Rothstein, S. M. (1988). *Shock wave.* Carlsbad, CA: Continental Publications.

Sampson, C. , & Boyer, P. (2001). GRE scores as predictors of minority students" success in graduate study: An argument for change. *College Student Journal, 35* (2), 3-12.

Sciarra, D. T. (1999). *Multiculturalism in Counseling*. Itasca, Ill: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.

Seligman, L. (2009). *Fundamental skills for mental health professionals.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Smaby, M., Maddux, C., Richmond, A., Lepkowski, W., & Packman, J. (2005). Academic admission requirements as predictors of counseling knowledge, personal

development, and counseling skills. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 45*, 43-57.

Sue, D., Aredondo, P., & McDavis, R. (1991). Multicultural counseling competencies: A call to the profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 20,* 64-68.

Tinsley, H. E., & Tinsley, D. J. (1977). Relationship between scores on the Omnibus Personality Inventory and counselor trainee effectiveness. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 24,* 522-526.

Torres-Rivera, E., Wilbur, M. P. , Maddux, C. D., Smaby, M. H., Phan, L. T., & Roberts-Wilbur, J. R. (2002). Factor structure and construct validity of the Counselor Skills Personal Development Rating Form. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 41*, 268-278.

Truax, C. B. (1970). An approach to counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 10,* 4-14.

Wheeler, S. (2000). What makes a good counsellor? An analysis of ways in which counsellor trainers construe good and bad counselling trainees. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 13,* 65-83.

Wilson, P. C. (1956). The work sample in selecting graduate students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 3,* 286-290.

Profiles

Thomas J. Hernández is an Associate Professor, Susan R. Seem is Professor and Chairperson, Muhyiddin A. Shakoor, Professor Emeritus, all in the Department of Counselor Education at The College at Brockport, State University of New York College, Brockport NY. Any correspondence about this article should be directed to Thomas J. Hernández, Associate Professor, Department of Counselor Education, The College at Brockport, State University of New York, 350 New Campus Drive, Brockport, New York 14420. Dr. Hernández can also be reached via e-mail at thernandez@brockport.edu .

Appendix A: Physical arrangement
of the admissions group exercise

Group Members

Faculty Observation Room

Faculty Observation Room

C

A   B

2-way mirror

Faculty Proctor

2-way mirror