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Advocating for Holistic Admissions Review: Implications for Master's Level Counselor Education Programs

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Advocating for Holistic Admissions Review: Implications for Master's Level Counselor Education Programs

Abstract

Positioning diversity at the forefront of counselor education has been an ongoing movement for well over the last decade. Attention has been given to considering recruitment and retention practices, with CACREP requiring counselor education programs to show evidence of ways this is enacted. Building on this work, counselor educators have brought needed attention to questioning how structural inequity permeates policies and procedures within counselor education programs. A critical consideration of counselor education admissions practices through an equity lens has been lacking in the literature. In this article, the authors make the case for the use of holistic admissions review as an equitable practice within counselor education.

Keywords

holistic admissions review, counselor education, anti-racist practices

Counselor education admissions practices have been recognized as a crucial gateway into the profession and thus warrant careful consideration for how candidates are vetted, interviewed, and selected (Garner et al., 2020). Traditionally, these practices have given a great deal of weight to undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and written candidate statements (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2013). Scholars within counselor education have problematized the impact that these procedures and policies can have on restricting students considered for admission, perpetuating inequities within the counselor admissions process (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). Scholars have proposed alternative admissions criteria including considering dispositions and personal characteristics (Garner et al., 2020; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2013), counseling related professional experiences (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017), and relevant personal experiences (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017).

Whereas these recommendations move forward important considerations for broadening candidate review and assessment, a framework to guide development and implementation of alternative admissions processes is currently not in existence within counselor education. One potential framework for consideration is holistic admissions review (HAR). HAR originated in the medical profession (American Association of Medical Colleges, 2014) and is defined as:

a flexible, individualized way of assessing an applicant's capabilities by which balanced consideration is given to experiences, attributes, and academic metrics and, when considered in combination, how the individual might contribute value as a medical student and future physician (Addams et al., 2010, p. 10).

As indicated in the definition, the focus of HAR moves attention away from evaluating the candidate based on their potential as a student and towards evaluating on their potential as a future professional (Addams et al., 2010). HAR may provide a route to reduce biases within the

admissions process that disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds by incorporating a more expansive, strengths-focused approach to the admissions process while maintaining rigorous and intentional review (Scott & Zerwic, 2015).

We propose that adopting HAR in counselor education would contribute to taking accountability for deeply embedded white supremacist structures in higher education and work towards antiracist practices. Further, HAR is a route to increasing social and cultural diversity in counselor education programs and the counseling field. As such, the purpose of this article is to: (a) encourage the broadening of evaluation criteria, as to value a wide variety of personal, intellectual, cultural, and social capital; (b) reconceptualize current admissions practices to better account for what makes a candidate a successful future counselor; and (c) advocate for the use of HAR in master's level counselor education admissions to increase diversity in the field. The authors will begin by reviewing current admissions practices in counselor education and then discuss barriers to social and cultural diversity imposed by the current practices. Next, the authors will describe movement toward more culturally sensitive admissions practices and introduce HAR as a means of building upon current practices to increase diversity in the counseling field.

Literature Review

Admissions Processes in Counselor Education

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards require that the counseling academic unit, “makes continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community” (CACREP, 2016, p.5). The CACREP admissions language includes references to selections being made by a committee and provides a minimum of four evaluation criteria. The four criteria include, “consideration of each applicant’s relevance of career goals, aptitude for graduate-level study, potential success in forming effective counseling relationships, and respect for cultural differences (CACREP, 2016, p.5). Specificity

in how graduate admissions committees should assess these requirements is not provided; therefore, individual counselor education programs have autonomy in metrics used to evaluate these criteria.

Historically, counselor educators have relied on the following application components for assessment: GPA, Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, interviews, letters of recommendation, written candidate statements, background checks, and other information that can be gleaned from submitted a transcript, resume, and/or curricula vitae (Hatchett et al., 2017; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Aptitude for graduate coursework is commonly assessed using metrics such as standardized test scores and undergraduate GPA; however, letters of recommendation, personal statements, and experience have also been used as a tool to assess potential for academic success (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). In a qualitative study with counselor education program directors, individuals reported that letters of recommendation and personal statements were the least effective measures for applicant screening, citing personal interviews as more effective (Leverette-Main, 2004). Skills and traits that may be challenging to assess on paper (e.g., ability to develop effective counseling relationships, respect for cultural differences) may be easier to evaluate through personal interaction.

Barriers Imposed by Traditional Admissions Practices

Whereas the use of these methods has long since been established, their use is not without criticism, as some create and maintain systemic barriers to admission (Michel et al., 2019). Scholars have challenged the use of GPA (Garner et al., 2020), GRE (Garner et al., 2020), and even writing samples (Woo et al., 2020) as part of the graduate admissions process, each having their own unique considerations which are briefly discussed below.

While GPA reflects a numerical average, it may not accurately reflect the totality of an applicant's academic capabilities. Several factors may contribute to differences in GPA that are not reflective of students' cognitive abilities. For example, scholars have pointed to the likelihood that first-generation college students and students from lower socio-economic

backgrounds may be working more hours and unable to devote the same amount of time to coursework as peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Woo et al., 2020). In addition, some students may have struggled the first year of their undergraduate study, lacking the social capital to seek out academic support, and worked to improve their academic standing over time (Woo et al., 2020). Others may have experienced unforeseen life circumstances that significantly impacted their ability to be fully present in their coursework. Additionally, valuation of undergraduate GPA is often heavily weighted and minimum scores required for graduate admission are arbitrarily assigned; however, with far reaching impact. GPA minimum scores can be used as cut-off scores in admissions (Leverette-Main, 2004). Undergraduate GPA is not a strong predictor of graduate degree attainment or time to completion (Kuncel et al., 2001). Further, within counselor education undergraduate GPA was not found to be associated with personal factors relevant to counseling (Smaby et al., 2005).

Standardized test scores at the graduate admissions level often refer to the GRE. Examinations such as the GRE claim to represent the fairest assessment of student aptitude, yet studies report that these types of tests have been culturally exclusive and were standardized for the population in which they are normed, often white, middle-class students (Wilson, 2020). While the Educational Testing Service (ETS) does not specifically reference the historical criticisms of the GRE, they do allude to awareness of its challenges. The ETS addresses test fairness on their website by highlighting their efforts to conduct “routine analyses of test questions to establish that questions do not unfairly contribute to group differences” (ETS, 2021).

Programs have varied on their use of the GRE, with some requiring minimum scores while others have opted to forego these criteria. One study found that counselor educators ranked the GRE as the least helpful predictor of student success in counselor training programs (Leverett-Main, 2004). The mounting criticisms and evidence of lack of applicability of standardized test scores to graduate degree attainment seems to support the recent movement made by some

programs away from requiring the GRE for graduate admissions (Woo et al., 2020). For example, fewer than half of the graduate programs in the first author's institution now require this exam (Author Institution, 2022). Further, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing reports that more than 50% of all 4-year colleges and universities will not require standardized tests for the fall 2022 admission cycle (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2021). Criticisms of the GRE in regard to bias are perpetuated by significant racial subgroup differences in scores, potentially impacting admittance into graduate programs for Students of Color and discouraging some students from applying when minimum GRE scores are a heavily weighted factor (Woo et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis of validity, bias, and fairness of common graduate admissions measures, Woo and colleagues (2020) point to the inequalities in opportunities and resources present over generations that likely contribute to the subgroup differences in test scores.

Academic aptitude for graduate study is often measured by GPA and standardized test scores; whereas, other established admissions considerations outlined by CACREP (i.e., relevance of career goals, potential success in forming effective counseling relationships, and respect for cultural differences) may be evaluated through the submission of applicant writing samples. This practice is widely used in admissions procedures (McCaughan & Hill, 2015). It is problematic, however, to rely on one unidimensional metric (e.g., writing sample) to assess multidimensional constructs such as professional dispositions and respect for cultural differences. Examined through a critical lens, the question arises - is this practice truly assessing these identified areas or is it merely evaluating writing style, ability to code switch, and command of white written language? Candidates possess differing levels of exposure to academic writing both in their pre-undergraduate and undergraduate education based on a multitude of factors such as background and access to prior training. Without intentionally engaging in antiracist practice, written statements are essentially a proxy for the candidate's proximity to whiteness rather than a measure of the experiences, dispositions, and goals these samples are truly meant to assess (Inoue, 2015). The assessment of writing samples is a

subjective process, introducing reviewer preferences in writing style and descriptors used (Woo et al., 2020). Writing samples purport to measure candidate attributes; however, in practice they actually evaluate mechanical writing skills and style of communication and it is difficult to ascertain the level of support received in crafting the statement. For example, some candidates may have received assistance from mentors or support with editing reflecting the presence of social capital in these areas that is not accessible to all applicants (Woo et al., 2020).

Centering Admissions as a Means of Fostering Diversity in the Profession

A handful of suggested admissions practices were gleaned from the literature that align with an antiracist and strengths-based foci. These practices center around targeted admissions messaging (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017), reexamining graduate exam requirements (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017), defining dispositions or traits relevant to professional practice (Garner et al., 2020; Halinksi, 2010; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Wheeler, 2000), and embracing a social justice lens (Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). In a case study conducted by Hipolito-Delgado and colleagues (2017) researchers explored factors that encouraged or discouraged Students of Color to pursue careers in counseling. Based on the results of the case study the authors offered several recommendations relevant to increasing the diversity of students within counselor education. One recommendation was to increase clarity in admissions requirements, including the adoption of a holistic admissions process. The authors noted that, “various students expressed doubt over their ability to gain admissions into a graduate program, due to low standardized test scores or low undergraduate GPAs. Interestingly, these students had extensive counseling related professional experience as well as rich personal experiences” (p.83). Admissions procedures that expand applicant criteria to include these experiences may encourage more applications from Students of Color (Hipolito- Delgado et al., 2017).

Lopez-Perry and colleagues (2021) introduced the Social Justice Recruitment and Retention Model for recruiting and retaining BIPOC school counselors in doctoral counselor education programs. The model includes a five-part cycle for recruitment and retention

incorporating a strengths-based Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens. Applicant review is referenced in the third phase of the cycle, Screen/Orient. Recommendations in this phase include faculty engaging in holistic review of candidates (either full holistic review or a hybrid version combining components of holistic review with more traditional review elements). Suggestions for candidate criteria to assess in the review process include, “skills in cross-cultural communication, collaboration, leadership, advocacy, and data for equity and social justice” (p.13).

Both Hipolito-Delgado and colleagues (2017) and Lopez-Perry and colleagues (2021) offer important recommendations for reenvisioning criteria used in counselor education admissions. For example, Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2017) highlight the potential benefit of aligning admissions criteria with experiences relevant to the counseling field. Further, Lopez-Perry et al. (2021) generated several specific recommendations for candidate skills that would be important to assess in candidate review. In addition to a consideration of candidate experiences and skills, there has been a movement to consider dispositions in the counselor education admissions process. In their article suggesting creative group strategies for interviewing counselor education candidates, Swank and Smith-Adcock (2013) make the case that applicants should be reviewed for academic potential, personal characteristics, and dispositions before gaining admittance into a program. Dispositions to consider include warmth and acceptance, empathy, flexibility, self-awareness, genuineness, emotional stability, and open-mindedness. Expanding on this recommendation, Garner et al. (2020) developed the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment - Revised Admission (PCDA-RA), a counselor education admissions assessment tool for evaluating nine counselor-related dispositions. The dispositions include conscientiousness, coping and self-care, openness, cooperativeness, moral reasoning, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, and emotional stability and are rated using a three-point scale rubric. The inclusion of assessment areas beyond academic metrics (i.e., undergraduate GPA and GRE scores), advance the

consideration of a more holistic review process in counselor education admissions.

Advocating for Holistic Admissions Review in Counselor Education

Urgently, emphasis has shifted from focusing solely on recognizing and increasing diversity to underscoring and highlighting systemic practices that perpetuate bias (Harris et al., 2021). One systemic practice that deserves careful attention is the admissions process, as it is the gateway into the field. Propelled by an antiracist framework, educators must engage in intentional examination of the systemic racial bias inherent within institutional structures (McSwain, 2019). This type of self-reflection and critical lens is captured by the philosophy and pedagogy of antiracism. Racism can be found in higher education by exploring the inadvertent privileging of characteristics and resources commonly possessed by white students. In our consideration, we see this lens as also being important to consider when viewing the experiences of underrepresented and/or marginalized students. This phenomenon can be seen in assessment/testing, admissions, paying for school, curriculum, sense of safety on campus, and access to connected mentorship networks (Gusa, 2010; Harris, 2020).

Notably, a Spring 2021 special issue of *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling* was devoted to antiracist counselor education (Harris et al., 2021). Within this special issue a definition of anti-racism for use in counselor education was introduced. Kishimoto (2018) defined anti-racism as, “the practice of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures, and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism and its residual effects” (p. 1). Institutions are becoming increasingly aware that their overall success is directly linked to the success of their underrepresented students (Hurtado et al., 2012), who are often disproportionately impacted by systemic policies, informal procedures, and other practices. Within counselor education, the editors of the special issue underscore the need for counselor education programs to, “move from only being aware of how racism operates to infusing anti-racist themes throughout all their pre- and in-service training...” (Harris et al., 2021, p. 2). Antiracist practices provides a framework that supports educators as they move beyond mere

acceptance of diversity and diverse representation to a critical reflection of patterns, practices, and policies that perpetuate systemic bias.

Holistic Admissions Review

Background on HAR

Much of the literature on HAR can be traced to the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) Holistic Review Project (AAMC, 2014). The nature of this project was to, “develop, distribute, promote, and assess the impact of tools and resources that medical schools can adopt or adapt to create and sustain medical student diversity that supports institutional mission-driven goals” (Addams et al., 2010, p. ix). Since the publication of the seminal document, *Roadmap to Diversity: Integrating Holistic Review Practices into Medical School Admission Processes*, AAMC project authors have released two additional publications outlining how to evaluate the impact of HAR (2013) and legal and policy foundations (2014).

Whereas the medical field led the way in promoting HAR in health professions, other health fields such as pharmacy, nursing, and public health have followed suit. The definition of HAR identified by the AAMC has been utilized by professionals in other health fields (i.e., nursing) interested in adopting HAR (Glazer et al., 2016; Scott & Zerwic, 2015; Wros & Noone, 2017). The Urban Universities for Health Equity through Alignment, Leadership, and Transformation of the Health Workforce (2014) convened a research study examining admittance practices of health professional programs with a specific focus on HAR. Results indicated the impact of HAR on increasing student diversity. The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) used this information to develop strategies for implementation by other higher education professionals interested in integrating HAR procedures (Artinian et al., 2017). The strategies address areas of inclusion in HAR such as considering non-academic criteria along with academic criteria in the initial screening process, assessing for criteria related to the school’s mission and goals, and experiences and/or identification with communities in a health professional shortage area or other aspects of diversity such as first-generation student status, gender, ethnicity, or

language ability (Artinian et al., 2017).

Benefits of HAR

Implementation of HAR may help programs more clearly align their admissions practices with their profession's goals and values and unmask the talents, skills, and attributes of students who have the potential to make important contributions to the field through which traditional admissions practices may have been screened out. Essentially, HAR offers an unbiased, professional value-based lens from which to acknowledge, examine, and deconstruct deeply rooted white supremacist structures, such as meritocracy, and its impact on the admissions process. For example, Sue, Sue, Neville, and Smith (2019) describe how dominant cultures have the power to determine societal norms and how contemporary forms of oppression continue to go unchecked through the perceived unbiased application of inherently biased white supremacist themes such as the myth of meritocracy which asserts that race, gender, or other marginalized group membership "does not play a role in life successes" (p. 128). We are suggesting that previous counselor admissions processes include biases that inherently disadvantage students from underrepresented backgrounds and perpetuate a deficit-based perspective that does not consider or acknowledge a variety of strengths. Traditional admissions processes covertly do not acknowledge strengths that historically marginalized candidates bring and prioritize the strengths of members of the dominant group by allowing white cultural values and beliefs to shape normative expectations of ideal candidates.

The authors believe that HAR may serve as a vehicle for increasing social and cultural diversity in the counseling profession and provide a structured way for programs to begin to take accountability for deeply embedded white Supremacist structures in counselor education. Professional ethics call for nondiscrimination, advocacy, and justice yet it is often easier to identify how these concepts connect to clinical work and tangible antiracist actions are more difficult to apply (American Counseling Association, 2014). Currently, the processes and historical practices used in admissions have not been aligned with these ideals. Researchers have

identified how targeted recruitment practices can help increase diversity. Notably, the Council of Graduate Schools (2016) released a report identifying expanding student diversity within graduate programs as a benefit of HAR.

Some institutions, especially at the undergraduate level, are already early adopters of HAR, especially the component of eliminating a focus on standardized test scores (University of California, 2020). This may have been propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic when students around the United States had difficulty sitting for college entrance exams such as the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and colleges made decisions to waive these tests for immediately subsequent admissions cycles. This is a continuation of a trend to de-emphasize these metrics in admissions decisions. For example, the California university system approved a test optional policy through the 2023-2024 recruitment cycle (University of California, 2020). A number of honors colleges within undergraduate institutions have moved to adopting HAR, providing a window into the outcomes of this approach on factors such as diversity of applicants enrolled in the honors program (National Collegiate Honors Council, n.d.; Vahlbusch et al, 2017). Similarly, Vahlbusch, Kretz, and Jones (2017) describe the impact of implementing holistic review in the university honors program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire between 2010 and 2017. The honors college shifted from an automatic to a more holistic admissions framework, favoring a broader set of inclusion factors rather than cut points in student standardized test scores. The authors noted that automatic admissions led to systemic exclusions of underrepresented groups such as English language learners, homeschool students, and students from a high school with no rank. Notably, this shift also helped to increase the enrollment of Students of Color, increasing from 1.8% in 2008 to 11% of total honors students in 2017.

HAR in Counselor Education

Suggestions for Use in Counselor Education

The very nature of HAR necessitates a consideration and customization of how criteria

reflect beliefs, values, and skills important within a specific field. For example, when the nursing profession was interested in engaging in implementation of HAR, consideration for ways that nursing HAR departed from criteria associated with medical school admissions was necessary (Glazer et al., 2016). As a part of this process interviews were conducted with deans of nursing schools regarding barriers to implementation and recommendations were made to identify student factors specific to nursing. Similarly, within psychology, academics are examining ways to customize HAR review in this field (Roberts & Ostreko, 2018). Using the wisdom of other allied health fields, we propose the exploration of HAR in counselor education by using the components of previously established frameworks such as experiences, academic metrics, and attributes. These concepts will be described below in detail and considerations for their applicability to counselor education.

Experiences

Addams (2010) defined experiences as things such as life path, education, and employment. In a constructivist learning environment, varied experiences enrich growth opportunities and expose students vicariously to a breadth and depth of personal narratives that they may otherwise not encounter. While it is common in the admissions process for candidates to describe life-challenges, stressors, and achievements, educators have a unique opportunity to be intentional in the unearthing of candidate strengths and discovery of how candidates have navigated these experiences as they also reflect on them. The purpose of bringing these facets into consideration is not to exploit the challenges or adversity that candidates bring, but rather to highlight the areas of strength and resiliency, intentionally reframing these challenges as assets to graduate counselor training and to their future professional career paths. This practice also allows educators to learn about the past experiences of applicants, and it makes room for the intentional creation of socially and culturally diverse cohorts of individuals with varied life experiences. Additionally, this practice may contribute to the development of a more diverse counseling field, better preparing students to meet the needs of the diverse populations they will serve.

Suggestions for Use in Counselor Education

Lopez-Perry et al. (2021) offer recommendations for the identification of candidate strengths aligned with the six cultural assets (i.e., aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, resistance, and familial capital) identified in the Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso, 2005). Candidate experiences related to overcoming systemic barriers and persisting towards goals despite obstacles could be criteria used in the admissions process. Experiences such as these represent navigational, resistance, and aspirational capital, assets that can contribute to both a counselor education program and the counseling field. Consideration is needed for how these experiences would be intentionally assessed in the application process. For example, counselor educators may consider whether there are certain questions on the application that would be appropriate to assess for these areas and/or if these would also be assessed through questions during a candidate interview.

Academic Metrics

Academic metrics or “quantitative components” of a candidate’s application typically include GPA and standardized test scores such as the GRE and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Addams, 2010, p.10). While there has been renewed examination of the applicability of academic metrics to the admissions process, and a movement within many higher education institutions to eliminate or reduce the weight of this criteria, eliminating academic metrics completely may conflict with larger institutional processes. For example, graduate schools often rely on these criteria for scholarship eligibility and other rankings (i.e., honor society status, award eligibility, graduate assistantship funding). HAR in counselor education aims to balance the consideration of academic metrics while increasing the cultural responsiveness of the evaluation process. As such, recommendations for how counselor educators may consider academic metrics within a HAR process are offered.

Suggestions for Use in Counselor Education

It may be helpful for programs to determine how much weight they want to give to this

metric or consider alternatives for assessing what the GRE has historically measured. Programs may also want to pull their data and evaluate how predictive GRE scores and undergraduate GPA have been regarding student success and other relevant outcomes. Alternatives to evaluating cumulative undergraduate GPA might be examining major- specific GPA or even limit their assessment or evaluation of GPA to that obtained within the last two years of undergraduate study, emphasizing demonstrated growth rather than a numerical outcome. For programs interested in opting out of using either GPA or GRE as academic metrics, consideration could be given for ways to assess academic aptitude beyond test scores. For example, as part of the application process candidates could be asked to share an exemplary project completed as part of their undergraduate education and discuss its impact related to the generation of knowledge and/or application of knowledge (i.e., contribution to the learning environment, institution, or community). Alternately, counselor educators may want to include submission of a learning portfolio or related work sample that would showcase candidates' academic abilities (Perusse et al., 2001). Given that portfolios can covertly introduce resource inequities it is recommended that counselor educators structure assignment parameters to minimize the impact of candidates' varying access to undergraduate institutional resources (i.e., technology, service-learning opportunities, structured opportunities to clinical experiences/internships).

Attributes

Addams (2010) described attributes as personal/professional characteristics, skills, and current abilities. Within counselor education these concepts are often grouped under the heading counselor skills and dispositions and typically include things such as interpersonal characteristics, communication skills, cultural competence, professionalism, and attitude/engagement with learning (Garner et al., 2020). Dispositions are particularly important for counselors because personal experiences, personality, history, and background are all relevant to their work; particularly as it relates to an individual's motivations and desire to enter the profession (e.g.,

helping themselves by helping others, desire for power). Evaluation of dispositions is a dynamic process involving ‘inviting in’ but also ‘screening out’. This refers to the intentional awareness of how dispositions can speak to both a candidate’s potential positive impact for the counseling field and fit for the program as well as problematic characteristics that impede counselor skill development and may create potentially dangerous client-counselor relationships.

Suggestions for Use in Counselor Education

Notably, CACREP has drafted new criteria for consideration in counselor education admissions for the 2024 CACREP Standards. The revisions include a consideration of attributes/dispositions for the first time (i.e., self-awareness). Historically, interviews have been used by counselor educators to assess candidates’ dispositional behaviors (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2013). Recently, scholars developed a dispositional screening tool for use in counselor education admissions interviews, the PDCA-RA (Garner et al., 2020). The use of rubric tools such as these should be considered carefully, as there are potential strengths and drawbacks. For example, the rubric can be shared with candidates prior to the interview to increase the transparency of what is being evaluated. Further, interviewers can be trained on using the rubric to increase inter-rater reliability and reduce subjectivity of raters. Counselor educators would want to ensure that when assessing dispositions, they are able to operationally define and observe the disposition within a brief interaction, as these short interviews do not allow for time to assess personality traits (Garner et al., 2020). Counselor educators may elect to go with a dispositional admissions tool such as the PDCA-RA or could elect to utilize the dispositions identified in their student assessment tool as a way to align candidate dispositional behaviors with those emphasized by the program.

Counseling skills included in the proposed 2024 CACREP Standards revision (CACREP, 2021) include technology skills necessary to complete counselor education training and those related to forming diverse counseling relationships. Some programs have incorporated role-plays and other experiential activities as a way to assess for counseling-related skills

(Swank & Smith- Adcock, 2013). Further, within the interview stage candidates could be provided with a counseling-related document to review. Counselor educators may then select follow-up questions based on the document to assess a candidate's ability to discuss and apply counseling-related content (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2013). Intentionality in the assessment of these skills would be important to ensure that candidates are able to showcase them in authentic ways. Counselor education programs may need to customize based on their program method of delivery (i.e., fully online, hybrid, face-to-face). For example, some online programs conduct interviews via phone or video conference rather than face-to-face, posing unique considerations for how to assess.

Discussion

Drawing upon the work of related fields and prior experience with traditional counselor education admissions processes, counselor educators should reflect upon their role in navigating the nuances of HAR, particularly in the evaluation of candidate challenges/gatekeeping, willingness to implement this alternative framework, and capacity to challenge one's own biases that may impact the facilitation of HAR. Evaluation of candidate attributes can be challenging for a number of reasons. Dispositions historically identified with successful counselor trainees often conflict with experiences that may help prepare them for work as counselors. These experiences may include personal trauma or mental health challenges, prior legal concerns, and experience with substance use. Counselor educators must then determine as part of the admissions process how the applicant uses these experiences to contribute to their potential counselor identity. There has been a focus on counselor admissions to identify red flags related to counselor trainees entering the profession for the "wrong reasons" (e.g., unresolved trauma, unmet mental health needs, desire for power, etc) and while it is important to identify potential red flags, it is also necessary to consider the impact of exposure to trauma or challenging life experiences and how they highlight relative strengths such as ability to empathize which is foundational for counseling.

Counselor educators in the admissions process may also be unaware of how the experience of historical trauma and systemic oppression may contribute to the specific strengths of individuals experiencing marginalization. It is clear that consideration of candidate attributes is important but how would counselor educators go about this process in a structured, equitable way? Essentially, counselor educators are left navigating uncharted territory and are challenged to balance: (a) equitable consideration of a wide range of applicant academic metrics, experiences, and attributes; (b) do so in a manner that is sensitive to the personal nature of the information candidates are sharing while also providing a space for applicants to showcase how their life experiences have shaped who they are; and (c) awareness of the boundary between challenging personal experiences and past experiences that may prohibit candidates from professional licensure.

The evaluation of experiences, academic metrics, and attributes represents a solid initial framework for the examination of HAR in counselor education; however, the interaction of these three concepts must also be considered. As noted earlier, medical professions such as nursing and physician training have been at the forefront in the use of HAR; however, the level, depth, and nature of client-practitioner interactions in these fields varies significantly from that of counseling. Specifically, the nature of the client-counselor relationship is integral to the counseling process and heavily involves the personhood of the counselor. Therefore, consideration not only of the types of criteria but also the weight and evaluation of the criteria is critical.

Counselor educators interested in undergoing this process may need to anticipate significant preparation and planning. Increased commitments of time and energy may be required to reimagine and retool long-standing structures, as it is often easier and less time consuming to continue with current practices. Additionally, an intangible yet arguably more challenging roadblock to navigate may be managing faculty perceptions (expectations) and institutional barriers that may impede the implementation of HAR practices. Indeed, in recommendations for

implementing HAR offered by nursing researchers through a case study note that buy-in from multiple stakeholders including administration and faculty is essential because of the complexity and commitment involved in enacting this process (Wros & Noone, 2017). For example, a tendency among faculty to replicate the process that they experienced as graduate students, out of ease and in some ways as an academic rite of passage may be deeply ingrained. Increased awareness of how department HAR practices may help or potentially hinder candidates as they navigate the landscape of institutional policies and practices is necessary. For example, removing the requirement for candidates to take the GRE may also mean that they are less likely to sit for the exam, thereby potentially inhibiting their eligibility for scholarships and external funding. Barriers can be removed at the program level, yet there may be barriers that remain at the institutional level that can have very real implications for students. Additionally at some institutions, admitting students with a GPA below 3.0 may automatically place them on academic probation per graduate school policy, which could impact students' eligibility for graduate assistantships.

Counseling programs train students to work in different settings which could make reaching consensus about valuable applicant characteristics, skills, and experiences challenging. The identified attributes, experiences, and metrics should be comprehensive enough to include all settings yet also may need to have some specificity regarding specialty areas. Navigating this balance may prove challenging when trying to reach programmatic consensus for HAR across different tracks.

The empirical literature on HAR in counselor education is limited (Hatchett et al., 2017). For example, counselor educators' views on the use of HAR in counselor education admissions is unknown. Qualitative research examining the perspectives and beliefs of individuals involved in counselor education admissions would help elucidate the candidate experiences, attributes, and metrics applicable to counselor education. This is important in shifting the focus from what makes a strong counselor in training to what makes an effective future counselor. Case study

examples from programs currently utilizing an HAR approach would add to data on associated outcomes. Further, this could be used to provide guidelines and best practice recommendations for the use of HAR in counselor education.

The CACREP standards attempt to move forward a narrow consideration of diversity in the absence of addressing equity and inclusion. The 2024 CACREP Standards dictate that admissions committees consider suggestions made in prior versions of the standards which reflect traditional admissions processes, such as relevance of career goals and aptitude for graduate study. Notably, the 2024 standards also include consideration of candidates' ability to build "effective counseling relationships with diverse populations" and their level of self-awareness (CACREP, 2021). The inclusion of self-awareness, a dispositional skill integral to reflective practice and clinical supervision, aligns with a more holistic framework. CACREP standards provide guidance regarding how programs can uphold the virtues of the counseling field, yet counseling dispositions that support skills necessary for culturally reflective and sustaining practice were not outlined beyond self-awareness. HAR is an opportunity for counselor education programs to align dispositions, experiences, and skills with those that are critical to training ethical and competent future professionals who will promote equity and inclusivity in our profession.

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