

 THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Examining College Admissions Counseling Curricula within School Counselor Preparation Programs

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This research study analyzed the curriculum of school counselor preparation programs and programs' emphasis on preparing counselors to support students in their college admissions and college choice processes. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys of counselor education department chairs and document analysis of the curricular offerings in all CACREP-accredited school counseling specialty programs. Results indicated only one-third of programs include distinct college admissions counseling courses and substantial variation in college admissions counseling competencies within program curricula. Programs were three times more likely to offer substance abuse and twice as likely to offer marriage and family therapy courses.

College admissions counseling is a process requiring school counselors to develop and implement curricula educating students about the outcomes associated with college attendance as well as specific steps in the admissions and selection process. School counselors must also create and utilize effective marketing and communication campaigns to foster a culture of postsecondary planning (Hugo 2019; Sohmer 2019). At the same time, counselors must have an in-depth understanding of the complexity of college choice theories and how to connect theory to their everyday practices. It is also essential for counselors to utilize knowledge of college

and university strategic enrollment management (SEM) practices to best prepare students to successfully navigate the process. In essence, effective college admissions counseling requires school counselors to synthesize many of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) competency areas, including program administration, fostering effective communication, connecting theory to practice, and integrating evidence-based decision-making.

The American School Counselor Association notes that school counselors often do not receive any formal training in college admissions counseling in its descrip-

tion of the ASCA college admissions specialist credential (ASCA 2022). The ASCA college admissions specialist training is a self-paid, optional professional development opportunity resulting in a certificate of completion. Despite this lack of formal training in college admissions counseling, the ASCA college admissions specialist credential identifies the following thirteen key competencies for being a college admissions specialist:

- Identifying the role of the school counselor in promoting college readiness
- Identifying academic habits that prepare students for postsecondary success
- Articulating how school counseling standards support the development of academic habits and postsecondary readiness
- Identifying ways to incorporate academic habits curriculum into classroom lessons, and small groups that support K–12 learning objectives
- Discussing the importance of collaborating K–12 to improve students' postsecondary success
- Strategizing ways to collaborate with your school counseling, teaching and administrative staff to keep your school focused on the culture of college and career readiness
- Listing factors associated with postsecondary success in early childhood, elementary, middle and high school, and explain how comprehensive school counseling programs can have an impact on these factors
- Discussing the importance of a college-going culture and recognize what fosters a college-going culture
- Analyzing your school's current culture regarding postsecondary readiness
- Discussing best practices for promoting a college-going culture that take into consideration demographic settings and special populations
- Recalling the basics of financial planning for college to help increase awareness around

college costs and encourage parents to educate themselves early about the true cost of college

- Recognizing and discuss community college opportunities with students
- Employing best practices for writing letters of recommendation (ASCA 2022, para 2)

This series of competencies is critically important in preparing students to achieve postsecondary success. These competencies describe the foundational actions that school counselors can operationalize to build a comprehensive school counseling program that fosters a college-going culture and aids students in making successful postsecondary transitions. The competencies are consistent with the ASCA Model's Mindset 3, "Every student should graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities," as well as the ASCA Student Services Behavior 2G, "Help students and families navigate postsecondary awareness, exploration, admissions and financial aid processes." (ASCA 2019, p.2).

Knowledge of College Choice Theory

Understanding high school students' decisions about postsecondary education and their college selection process can be strengthened through the application of theory. The following sections describe the diverse theoretical frameworks that provide insight about students' postsecondary decision-making. A review of the literature identifies multiple models that attempt to explain the complex decision-making process students experience as they engage in the college choice process (Kinzie, *et al.* 2004; Kotler and Fox 1985; Ware and Mathis 2019). Prominent models of college choice range from theories of economic price response and status attainment to information processing (Kinzie, *et al.* 2004; Kotler and Fox 1985; Ware and Mathis 2019). More recent models of college choice theory seek to combine aspects of each of these models to better address the complex decision-making processes utilized by high school students.

Economic, Status Attainment, and Information Processing Models of College Choice

Economic models of college choice theory focus on student and family price responses to college tuition and related costs of attending colleges and universities. The original economic model of college choice was developed by Kotler and Fox (1985), who described students' college choices as a process of examining a series of potential costs and risks. Economic models continue to rely on students and their families possessing the required information, cultural capital, and ability to calculate and weigh potential advantages and disadvantages of each institutional option as well as a myriad of financial aid and college financing options (Dynarski, *et al.* 2021; Kinzie, *et al.* 2004). However, often students and their families do not possess a full understanding of the costs or implications of financing options (Dynarski, *et al.* 2021; Hearn and Longanecker 1985; Hossler and Bontrager 2014; Lillis and Tian 2008). Recent studies on the influence of return-on-investment data, gainful employment outcomes, and student debt as a factor in enrollment choices fit within this model (Carnevale, *et al.* 2020; Cresswell-Yeager 2021; Dynarski, *et al.* 2021).

Status attainment models focus on the expectations regarding college attendance and institutional choices communicated to students from parents and family members, educators, counselors, other students, and society in general. Socioeconomic status and academic achievement are often major determinants in how students are socialized to view their college choice processes. Students internalize expressed expectations and experiences, impacting the type and range of higher education institutions considered (Cresswell-Yeager 2021; DesJardins, *et al.* 2019; Grubbs 2020; Hardy 2021; Hossler and Bontrager 2014; McDonough 1997; McDonough 1994; Syed and Johnson 2021).

The information processing model concentrates on student and family proficiency in gathering and analyzing information, evidence, and facts regarding institutional choices, financial aid options, and employment labor market information. This model focuses on the

process of using information to reduce uncertainty regarding college attendance as well as choices between higher education institutions. The analysis and information processed in this model may be influenced by many outside factors, including socioeconomic status, socialization, cultural capital, and expectations (Kinzie, *et al.* 2004; Ware and Mathis 2019)

Combined Models of College Choice

Combined models of the college choice process incorporate a focus on how socialization, cultural capital, and environmental factors influence college choice and recognize that all the aforementioned singular models of college choice theory provide important components that can enhance an understanding of the college choice process. There are four prominent combined college choice theoretical frameworks, including Jackson (1982), Chapman (1981), Hanson and Litten (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

Hossler and Gallagher's Model of College Choice is a sociological model that integrates numerous variables and environmental influences into a framework for gaining insight into students' college choice processes (Hossler, *et al.* 1999; Martin and Dixon 1991). The Hossler and Gallagher model asserts it is essential to examine socioeconomic, family background, school characteristics, social, and cultural factors influencing the college choice process (Hossler, *et al.* 1999). The model frames the college choice process as three stages including student predisposition to attend higher education, the student's college search process, and the student's final college choice decision. Hossler and Gallagher's combined model provides a more comprehensive view of the multi-staged process by incorporating a multifaceted view of numerous variables that influence student college choices.

Hossler and Gallagher's Model of College Choice is the most widely used theoretical framework to describe college choice (Prach, *et al.* 2022; Syed and Turner 2021). An important strength of the model is that it combines aspects of many other models within its framework, enabling a more comprehensive view

of the college choice process (Kinzie 2004). Additionally, each of the model's three steps (predisposition, search, and choice) have been extensively utilized and evaluated in the research literature (Prach, *et al.* 2022; Syed and Turner 2021). The model has been utilized to study the college choice process of traditional students in four-year colleges, community college students, transfer students, student veterans, and non-traditional age students (Tobolowsky and Bers 2019). The Hossler and Gallagher Model of College Choice asserts that comprehensive school counseling programs are likely to have more influence in the predisposition and search stages of the model, which underscores the importance of early engagement with postsecondary planning and fostering a college-going culture (Hossler and Gallagher 1999).

Knowledge of Strategic Enrollment Management

The college admissions landscape has undergone significant change and is increasingly competitive as institutions seek to sustain and grow enrollment. Colleges and universities have increasingly adopted SEM practices. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (2022) defines SEM as “a comprehensive process designed to help an institution achieve and maintain optimum enrollment, where optimum is defined within the academic context of the institution. It’s a concept and process that enables the fulfillment of institutional mission and students’ educational goals” (AACRAO 2022, 1).

SEM is critical to both student and institutional success as student outcomes and the financial health of the organization are highly dependent on careful enrollment and retention planning as well as strategy execution (Hornor 2020; Hundrieser 2012). SEM is inherently complex, coordinating the efforts of a broad array of campus units and initiatives that must collaborate seamlessly to move students through the enrollment funnel, from prospect to successful graduate (McLaughlin and McLaughlin 2007; Hornor 2020). For example, efforts to enhance academic student engagement and involvement in campus activities necessitate

the collaborative efforts of faculty and staff (Hornor 2020). The intricacies of student development and college choice theories also impact the complexity of SEM processes, requiring institutions to recognize individual differences and meet students where they are developmentally (Hornor 2020). This heightens the need to use analytics to predict student behavior and college choice (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999; Hornor 2020; Ruffalo Noel Levitz 2019). Research on dramatically-shifting enrollment patterns, utilization of student services, and perspectives about the worth of a college degree suggest that there is significant work ahead in helping students during their college choice process.

Knowledge of College Admissions Counseling

Preparing students for admission and success in higher education institutions is a critical factor in the country’s global competitiveness (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). The National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) reported that high school counselors allocate about 20 percent of their time to postsecondary guidance (NACAC 2019). However, the most recent College Board National Survey of School Counselors and Administrators found that 32 percent of counselors reported not having any graduate preparation in college admissions processes and another 33 percent perceived their training to be inadequate (The College Board 2012).

Preparing more school counselors to effectively counsel students on the college admissions process can aid in enhancing the nation’s global competitiveness (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). While lack of effective college counseling in high schools has been used as a common explanation for disparities in the college choice process and institutional access, effective college counseling can produce a stronger college-going culture (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). Seniors in high school who met with their school counselor to discuss future plans were more than 3.2 times more likely to enroll in college and twice as likely to enroll in a baccalaureate-granting institution (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). Additionally, high school seniors who

participated in college counseling were 6.8 times more likely to submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). Furthermore, cohort data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 indicate college counseling makes a substantial increase in students' postsecondary enrollment (Belasco 2013; Engberg and Gilbert 2013; Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). Moreover, research by Hurwitz and Howell (2014) asserts adding one additional school counselor to provide college counseling services increased students' college enrollment in four-year institutions by more than ten percent (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019; Hurwitz and Howell 2014).

These results suggest an incongruence between student learning outcomes in graduate school counselor preparation programs and the actual professional duties most school counselors find themselves performing (Holcomb-McCoy and Owen 2019). Knowledge of college admissions counseling, SEM, and college choice theories serve as important foundational knowledge for fostering a college-going culture and aiding students in postsecondary preparation. Given the ASCA National Model's expectation for developing postsecondary awareness and helping students successfully navigate college exploration, admissions, and financial aid processes (ASCA 2019), it is essential for counselor education programs to prepare students in these competency areas within the curriculum. The purpose of this research study was to analyze the curriculum of school counselor preparation programs and programs' emphasis on preparing counselors to support students in their college admissions and college choice processes. The study employs two overarching research questions, including: 1.) Do school counselor preparation programs include instruction on college admissions counseling and college choice theoretical frameworks within the curriculum? and 2.) What influences school counselor preparation programs' curricular decisions about college admissions counseling? The data from this study can be used to strengthen school counselor preparation programs as well as counseling professional development programs.

Methodology

An extensive array of research methodologies, designs, and conceptual frameworks have been employed to investigate graduate program curricula. However, few research studies have focused on how graduate counselor education program curricula address college admissions counseling. Instead, recent studies have investigated school counselors' self-efficacy in college knowledge and associated professional development needs in college admissions counseling (Hornor and Westberry 2022; Nice, *et al.* 2020). This study differs in its focus on studying the graduate curricula in the school counselor preparation process. Clearly, the complexity of college admissions, college choice theory, and the rapidly changing postsecondary SEM environment inform the research design and strategy (Leavy 2017; Mertens 2015). The changing landscape of college admissions counseling necessitates careful consideration of existing graduate coursework and the rationale associated with the curricula in the research process. For these reasons, this study utilizes a mixed-method research design utilizing online surveys and document analysis.

A convergent parallel mixed-method design was used in this study because the research questions focused on the inclusion of instruction on college admissions counseling and college choice theoretical frameworks within school counselor preparation programs as well as the factors that influence curricular decisions. Leavy (2017) asserted that using a mixed-method research strategy is particularly powerful in gaining multiple perspectives and more comprehensive insights about the research topic. This research strategy enabled both statistical analyses of participants' quantitative ratings to be compared with other research study participants as well as document analysis of each program's curriculum offerings (Creswell 2018; Leavy 2017; Strauss and Corbin 2015). IRB approval was attained for this research study from the researcher team's institution.

Participants were selected using a strategy of surveying department chairs and program coordinators from all CACREP-accredited school counselor education programs. The survey was sent to all department chairs and program coordinators listed on the CACREP

Directory of School Counselor Preparation Programs. This research strategy was based on the rationale that participants serving as department chairs and program coordinators would be likely to possess knowledge of their program curricula and associated curricular decisions. The study administered 262 online surveys, and 76 department chairs and program coordinators participated, yielding a 29 percent response rate. Percy, *et al.* (2015) asserted that even a small research sample may provide great insight and information on the research topic. Academic catalog entries for each of the 262 CACREP-accredited school counseling programs were analyzed to identify if coursework in college admissions counseling was offered or required.

The survey design drew heavily upon the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) college admission specialist learning objective competencies (ASCA 2022). The competencies are consistent with the ASCA National Model's expected school counselor mindsets and student services behaviors associated with preparing students for postsecondary opportunities and helping them develop postsecondary awareness and successfully navigate college exploration, admissions, and financial aid processes (ASCA 2019). By purposefully constructing the survey questions, drawing upon the research literature, and aligning each of the survey questions with one of the study's research questions, the researchers ensured the questions posed to participants were relevant and appropriate (Strauss and Corbin 2015). The survey questions focused on three important areas including: the provision of a college admissions course within the counselor education preparation program curriculum, emphasis on college admissions counseling topics within the curriculum, as well as the factors influencing each program's decision to include or not include college admissions counseling curricula within the program.

The study employed seventeen survey questions, including asking participants to rate their program's level of curricular emphasis on thirteen specific college admissions counseling competency areas. The survey utilized a four-point Likert scale for these ratings (ranging from no emphasis, low emphasis, moderate emphasis, to high emphasis, which ranged from one (no emphasis)

to four (high emphasis). Likert scales are widely used within educational research and are commonly constructed with four to seven points on the scale (Asu'n, *et al.* 2016; Heung 2011; Wu and Leung 2017). By omitting the intermediate category, four-point Likert scales help to decrease social desirability bias and the number of respondents selecting a neutral response (Asu'n, *et al.* 2016; Heung 2011; Wu and Leung 2017). Since the survey questions asked department chairs and program coordinators to rate the level of curricular emphasis within their own programs, the neutral response category was not necessary to the analysis (Asu'n, *et al.* 2016; Heung 2011; Wu and Leung 2017).

The survey also asked two questions with yes/no responses designed to assess if the curriculum included distinct college admissions counseling courses, including the following questions: "Does your program offer a course on college admissions counseling?" and "Does your program require a course on college admissions counseling?" In addition, the survey posed two open-ended questions, including "If college admissions counseling is addressed within your school counseling preparation program, please describe how the topic is integrated within the curriculum" and "Please describe the factors influencing your program's decision to include or not include college admissions counseling curricula within the program."

The study also employed document analysis to gain additional insight about counselor education preparation program curricula. Document analysis employs a systematic procedure for analyzing and interpreting documents to gain understanding or knowledge (Bowen 2009; Wood, *et al.* 2020). The system procedure includes a wide range of activities, including finding or accessing the documents, analyzing the documents for meaning, and then synthesizing the data findings (Bowen 2009; Wood, *et al.* 2020). Document analysis can be particularly helpful as a triangulation technique for confirmation of trends or data findings (Bowen 2009; Wood, *et al.* 2020).

The CACREP Directory of School Counselor Preparation Programs roster was utilized to identify programs. The researchers then located the current academic catalog on each institution's website. Academic cat-

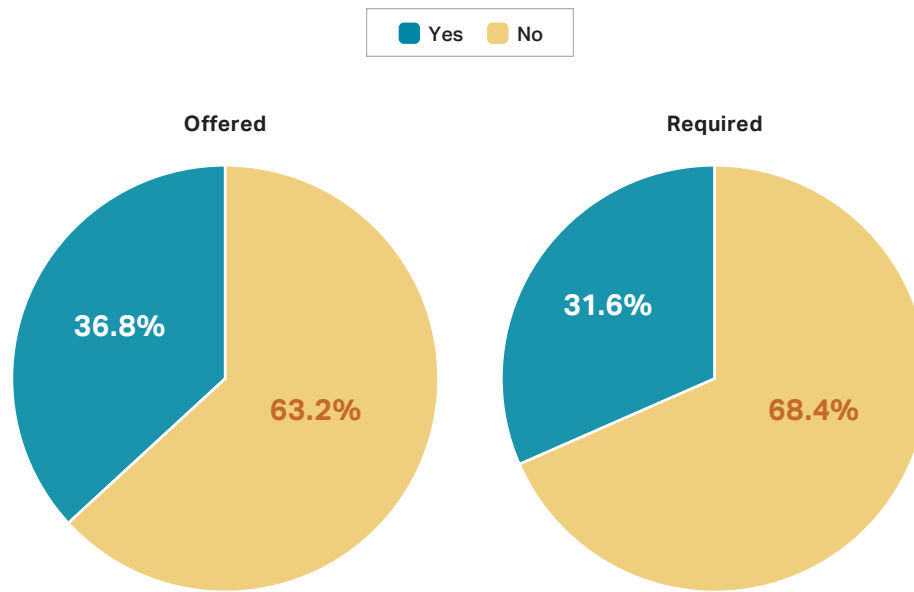


FIGURE 1 ► College Admissions Counseling Coursework Availability and Requirement Status, as Reported by Survey Participants (n=76)

alog entries for each of the 262 CACREP-accredited school counseling programs were analyzed to identify coursework offerings in college admissions counseling. Researchers reviewed both the counselor education catalog page containing the course offerings, program requirements, description of the program, as well as the program's course descriptions. Keyword searches for "college admissions counseling," "college admissions," "postsecondary planning," "postsecondary counseling," and "college readiness" were conducted. Researchers also read each catalog entry to search for any related keywords. The presence or absence of coursework related to college admissions counseling in the college catalog was entered in a spreadsheet by program.

Results

Counselor education department chairs and program coordinators participating in this study answered a variety of survey questions designed to generate insight about two overarching research questions. Document analysis and survey results were used to understand college admissions counseling frameworks in the curriculum.

College Admissions Counseling Coursework

The overwhelming majority of counselor education department chairs and program coordinators reported that college admissions counseling was not a distinct course offering within their programs. As depicted in Figure 1, only 36.8 percent of respondents reported that their school counseling preparation programs offered a course on college admissions counseling, and only 31.6 percent reported requiring a college admissions counseling course within their program.

Counselor education department chair and program coordinator ratings of their programs' level of curricular emphasis on a variety of college admissions counseling competency areas indicate there is substantial variation how programs provide instruction on college admissions counseling competencies. As depicted in Table 1 (on page 20), the overwhelming majority of programs place a moderate to high level of emphasis on the role of the school counselor in promoting college readiness (94.5 percent), academic habits that prepare students for postsecondary success (94.4 percent), and strategies for fostering a college-going culture (94.5 percent).

TABLE 1 ► Level of Emphasis the School Counseling Preparation Program Places on the Following Within the Curriculum

Subject Matter	Emphasis										Mean	SD
	High		Moderate		High + Moderate		Low		No			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
The role of the school counselor in promoting college readiness	28	38.89	40	55.56	68	94.45	4	5.56	0	0.00	3.33	0.57
Academic habits that prepare students for postsecondary success	24	33.33	44	61.11	68	94.44	4	5.56	0	0.00	3.27	0.55
Strategies for fostering a college-going culture	12	16.67	52	77.78	64	94.45	4	5.56	0	0.00	3.11	0.47
How school counseling standards support the development of academic habits and postsecondary readiness	20	27.78	40	55.56	60	83.34	12	16.67	0	0.00	3.11	0.65
Individual and societal outcomes associated with college completion	12	16.67	40	55.56	52	72.23	12	16.67	8	11.11	2.77	0.85
College and university admissions decision processes	12	16.67	36	50.00	48	66.67	12	16.67	12	16.67	2.66	0.94
Financial aid and financial planning for college to help increase awareness around college costs	12	16.67	32	44.44	44	61.11	20	27.78	8	11.11	2.66	0.88
College search strategies with students	16	22.22	28	38.89	44	61.11	20	27.78	8	11.11	2.72	0.93
Best practices for writing letters of recommendation	8	11.11	36	50.00	44	61.11	20	27.78	8	11.11	2.61	0.82
College application best practices	20	27.78	20	27.78	40	55.56	24	33.33	8	11.11	2.72	0.98
Analyzing college choices with students	8	11.11	32	44.44	40	55.55	24	33.33	8	11.11	2.55	0.83
College admissions essay writing best practices	4	5.88	28	41.18	32	47.06	24	33.33	12	16.67	2.35	0.83
Strategic enrollment management (SEM) practices within colleges and universities	0	0.00	28	38.89	28	38.89	28	38.89	16	22.22	2.16	0.76

In contrast, 61.1 percent of programs reported low or no emphasis on SEM practices to provide counselors with insight into how colleges and universities build a freshmen class. It is also important to note that 38.9

percent of programs reported placing a low or no emphasis on educating future school counselors on college search strategies with students or financial aid and financial planning for college to help increase awareness

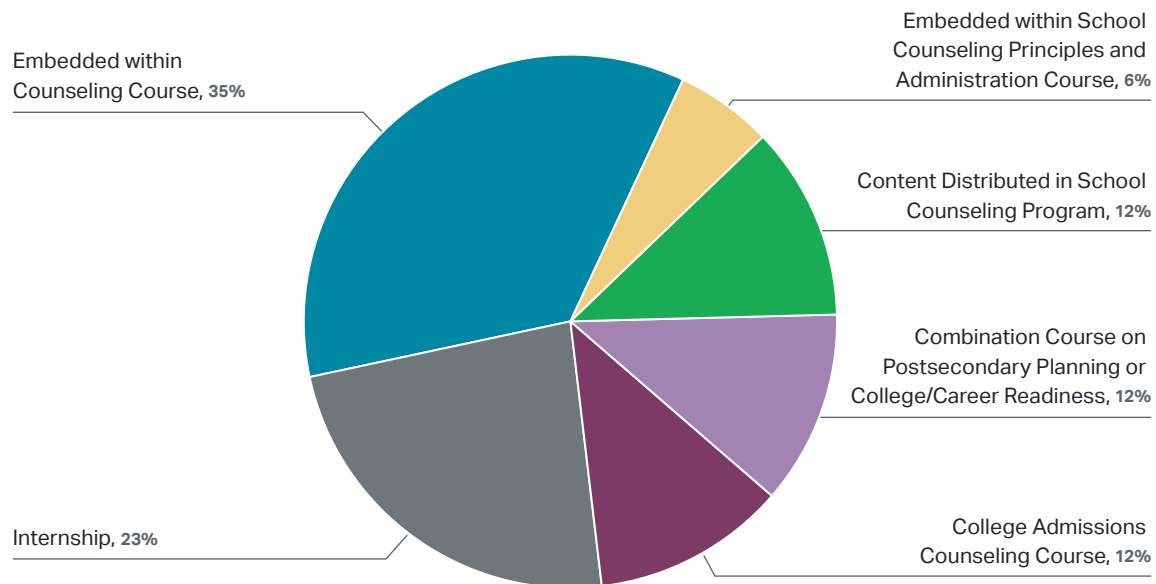


FIGURE 2 ► Delivery Strategies for College Admissions Counseling Content (n=51)

of college costs. In addition, 44.4 percent of programs report low or no emphasis on educating future school counselors about strategies for analyzing college choices with students or college application best practices.

College Admissions Counseling Curricular Integration and Rationale

The survey also examined curricular integration strategies for college admissions counseling content within counselor education programs. Figure 2 depicts the six different curriculum structural strategies counselor education programs reported utilizing to deliver college admissions counseling content. Most programs (35 percent) report merging college admissions counseling competencies within career counseling courses, and 23 percent of programs report relying on internships to address college admissions competencies.

Counselor education department chairs and program coordinators report several factors as influential in the decision to include or not to include college admis-

sions counseling within the program curriculum. For programs not offering a college admissions counseling course within the curriculum, the most frequently reported reasons for non-inclusion were an already-full curriculum and lack of CACREP accreditation requirements in this area. For example, one survey respondent stated, “Due to CACREP requirements, our curriculum is full.” Another respondent shared their program is “choosing to emphasize other areas of ASCA and just don’t have a lot of extra ‘room.’”

In contrast, programs offering coursework in college admissions counseling most frequently reported state influence. For example, one respondent stated, “The goal in my state to increase college and career readiness was for all state universities with counselor education programs was to offer a regularly scheduled course on postsecondary planning.” Another participant shared, “the state level standards have made this a concrete objective over the next few years so adapting our syllabi and curricula have been deemed both important and necessary.”

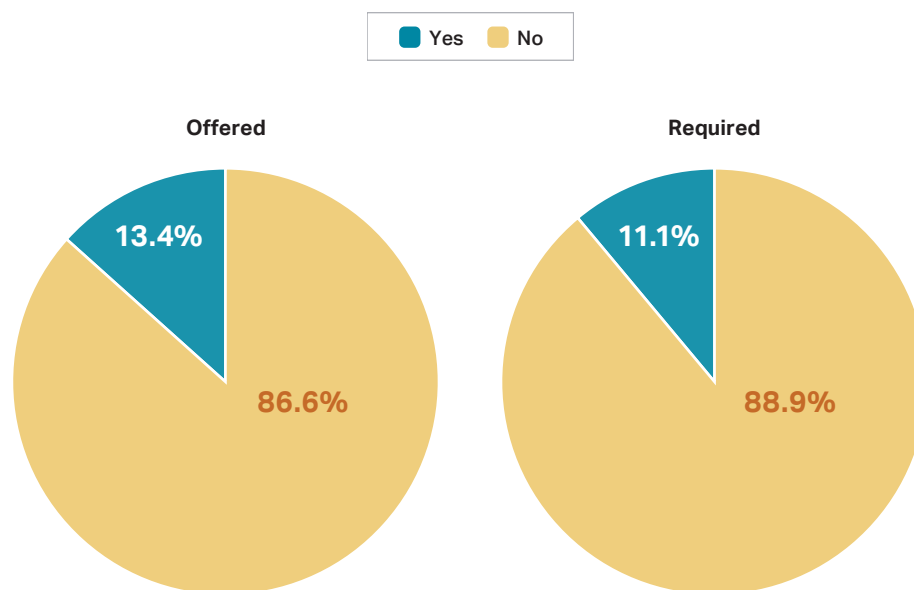


FIGURE 3 ► College Admissions Counseling Coursework Availability and Requirement Status, as Indicated by Academic Catalog Analysis (n=262)

Document Analysis Results

Document analysis of the curricular offerings in all 262 CACREP-accredited school counseling specialty programs indicates that the number of counselor education programs offering or requiring college admissions counseling coursework may be far less than indicated by the survey findings. As depicted in Figure 3 (on page 22), an analysis of the college catalog course program requirements and course descriptions of each of the 262 CACREP-accredited school counseling programs indicated 15 percent of programs offer a course in college admissions counseling, and only 11 percent of programs require coursework in that area. Programs offering college admissions counseling coursework typically utilize course titles like Postsecondary and College Counseling for School Counselors, College Access and College Admissions Counseling, College and Career Readiness, and College Admissions and Postsecondary Counseling.

Document analysis of every CACREP-accredited counselor education specialization program in school counseling indicates programs are far more likely to offer coursework in other specialty areas. For example,

programs are 3.5 times more likely to offer substance abuse or addiction counseling rather than postsecondary preparation or college admissions counseling, with accredited programs offering over 122 courses in addictions or substance abuse counseling. Moreover, accredited school counseling programs offered almost double the amount of course offerings (62 courses) in marriage and family therapy or couples counseling as compared to postsecondary preparation or college admissions counseling. Similarly, an equal number of school counseling programs (11 percent) chose to require courses in play therapy as postsecondary preparation or college admissions counseling.

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest college admissions counseling coursework is largely absent from the curricula of most school counseling preparation programs. In this study, only 36.8 percent of counselor education department chairs and school counseling program coordinators reported that their school counseling preparation programs offered a course on college admissions counseling and only 31.6 percent reported requiring a

college admissions counseling course within their program. Considering research from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) and College Board reporting that high school counselors allocate approximately 20 percent of their time to post-secondary guidance, this curricular exclusion creates an incongruence between the curriculum delivered in graduate school counselor preparation programs and the actual professional college counseling duties school counselors find themselves performing (NACAC 2019; The College Board 2012). These findings are also consistent with and help explain the research findings from the most recent administration of the College Board National Survey of School Counselors and Administrators, where 32 percent of counselors reported not having any graduate preparation in college admissions processes, and another 33 percent perceived their training to be inadequate (The College Board 2012).

School counselor preparation programs can address this incongruence between school counselor education preparation and school counseling practice by aligning student learning outcomes and coursework addressing college admissions counseling. Given the substantive proportion of time school counselors allocate to college admissions counseling and the complexity of the ASCA college admissions specialist competencies, school counselor preparation programs should consider adding a college admissions counseling course within each program's curriculum. The addition of a specific course dedicated to college admissions counseling and associated competencies, builds this alignment with great intentionality, and sends a powerful message about the importance and prominence of this vital role within school counseling practice. Offering a course dedicated to college admissions counseling in the program will also provide students with the opportunity to develop a more holistic view of college counseling, synthesizing the content with other coursework in career counseling, mental health, and academic achievement. Delivering this course content earlier in the program would provide additional opportunities for synthesis and application of holistic college counseling during field placement courses.

The integration of secondary school counselors and college administrators as course guest speakers on college admissions counseling and SEM further strengthens the relevance and alignment of the curriculum and professional school counseling practice. For programs not offering a college admissions counseling course within the curriculum, the most frequently reported reasons for non-inclusion were an already-full curriculum and lack of CACREP accreditation requirements in this area. Leveraging ASCA's college admissions specialist competencies within existing courses can help bridge this gap. Creating an intentional focus on these competencies and linking them to projects, course assignments, fieldwork, and guest speakers communicates the importance of college admissions counseling within the curriculum.

Research findings from this study also indicated a discrepancy between the percentage of programs offering college admissions counseling reported by counselor education department chairs or program coordinators (36.8 percent) and the percentage of programs listing college admissions counseling courses in the college catalog program requirements and course descriptions (15 percent). Document analysis of the curricular offerings in all 262 CACREP-accredited school counseling specialty programs indicates that the number of counselor education programs offering or requiring college admissions counseling coursework is likely far less than indicated by the survey findings. Several reasons for this discrepancy are possible, including the perception that college admissions counseling courses exist because short content modules are being squeezed into other existing courses, such as career counseling or practicum experiences. This underscores the benefit of creating a distinct college admissions counseling course to communicate the importance and complexity of the subject matter in school counseling. Counselor education department chairs and program coordinators may also have been more likely to participate in the survey if they did have college admissions counseling coursework in their program compared to others who may not have wanted to share a potential deficiency in their coursework and counselor preparation.

An examination of the study results indicate there is significant variation in the delivery and foci of college admissions counseling topics within school counselor preparation programs. In addition, document analysis of every CACREP-accredited school counseling program indicates curricula are far more likely to include coursework in other specialty areas rather than college admissions counseling. For example, school counseling programs are three-and-a-half times more likely to offer substance abuse counseling and twice as likely to offer courses in marriage and family therapy rather than postsecondary preparation or college admissions counseling. This variation and focus on other topics may be related to the other CACREP-accredited programs offered by the institution. For example, school counseling preparation programs may be drawing upon existing courses in other CACREP-accredited programs like clinical mental health counseling or marriage, couple, and family counseling programs to comprise program electives instead of developing their own school counseling focused program electives. Findings from this study support the need to incorporate a more intentional curricular focus on college admissions counseling.

Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

While this study found strong consistency in curricular offerings and program coordinator responses about the integration of college admissions counseling coursework within school counselor education preparation programs, an analysis of the study's methodology indicates several potential limitations and recommendations for future research. The study was conducted using a

mixed methods methodology utilizing document analysis of college catalogs and surveys of program coordinators. Program coordinators in programs offering college admissions counseling coursework may have been more likely to respond to the survey than coordinators of programs where college admissions counseling is largely absent from the curriculum. Future research studies incorporating a larger and more diverse response rate from program coordinators may improve the generalizability of the findings. Future studies employing different methodological techniques, including qualitative interviews and focus groups, may yield greater insight about counselor education faculty perspectives on teaching college admissions counseling as well as program curriculum decision-making processes.

Conclusion

The examination of the curriculum of school counselor preparation programs and programs' emphasis on preparing counselors to support students in their college admissions and college choice processes provides valuable insights on the lack of inclusion of college admissions counseling within the curricula. Examining these curricular offerings through the lens of school counselor needs and professional duties as well as ASCA college admissions specialist competencies, reinforces the importance of aligning the curriculum with current school counseling practice. Integrating college admissions counseling courses within school counseling preparation programs provides a valuable framework for delivering the essential learning outcomes school counselors need to engage in meaningful college admissions and post-secondary counseling.

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