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AUTHOR   Porter, Dion; Donnell, Chandra; Buck, Tina; Edwards, Yolanda
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ABSTRACT
        A panel discussion offered suggestions and recommendations
for faculty and institutions of rehabilitation counseling education on more
effective recruitment methods. Strategies were also considered for potential
faculty members. Candidates seeking academic positions in rehabilitation
counseling education face many challenges. Location of program; reputation of
the program and faculty; whether it is a research or teaching institution;
and whether they can mesh with the existing faculty are a few of the core
considerations. The importance of diversity to the institution as well as the
existence of a racially and ethically diverse community needs to be
considered. Candidates have to decide between a career in the private sector
or in academia, and have to determine which would be the best fit and
lifestyle for them. In the field of rehabilitation, distance education has
been used to assist educators in reaching populations not otherwise served.
Training suggestions are offered to prepare candidates to feel competent and
comfortable with this type of technology and this type of work. Several
suggestions are given to help programs increase the appeal of their programs
with minority groups. (JDM)

Challenges and Concerns Faced by Doctoral Candidates Seeking Academic Positions

Dion Porter
Chandra Donnell
Tina Buck
Yolanda Edwards

Abstract. *This presentation attempted to provide the audience with insight into many of the challenges and concerns faced by doctoral candidates when attempting to obtain academic positions in rehabilitation counseling education. The panel also offered suggestions and recommendations to faculty and institutions pertaining to more effective recruitment methods and strategies for potential faculty members. The presentation initially addressed diversity and support issues related to being a new faculty member, then it looked at important differences between a career in academia and the private sector. From there it addressed the challenges associated with distance education and offered some recommendations for the field.*

Diversity and Support Issues

There are many overall challenges that face all doctoral candidates as they seek academic positions in rehabilitation counseling education. Location of the program, reputation of the program and faculty, teaching institutions versus research institutions, and fit or match with the existing faculty name just a few core factors. This life-altering decision can also be impacted by other factors of central focus relevant to culturally diverse candidates.

Two central themes are typically relevant for candidates who are racially/ethnically diverse. The emphasis or importance diversity appears to have within the department as well the existence of a racially/ethnically diverse professional and community environment is critical. The atmosphere or values and philosophy of the university/department and program are equally paramount. Attitudes toward diversity can be reflected by the efforts the department has made in actively recruiting candidates for culturally diverse racial/ethnic groups and backgrounds. This general attitude is also illustrated by the make-up of the student program and whether or not it is comprised of culturally diverse individuals. A strategic plan to diversify the faculty, staff and

student body within the department, as well as the college and university as a whole, also reflect the sincere desire to emphasize diversity. Even with these other factors in place, whether or not the environment is genuinely open to new and diverse ideas, opinions, cultures and lifestyles is perhaps the most important indication of its attitude toward diversity. If the initiatives toward diversity aren't consistent with the overall atmosphere, then potential candidates are likely to lose interest in the academic position as well as the academy itself.

Many persons enjoy working and function well in supportive environments. For persons from culturally diverse backgrounds, that support is oftentimes very important. The general atmosphere within the department must be one of inclusion. A program that is inviting and reflects openness toward diversity holds more appeal than a program that does not exhibit these qualities. Doctoral candidates look for a diverse presence within the environment of their prospective department and the university at-large. Culturally diverse candidates also seek a source of support from the community in which they seek to become a part. They often look for answers to the questions: Is there a diverse presence within the surrounding community? Are there cultural outlets within the surrounding community? and, What is the traveling distance to access cultural outlets? The answers to these questions will serve as important cues for the candidate as to how they will exist outside of the university setting and handle their responsibilities as faculty.

Private Industry versus Academia

Private Industry

Private industry versus a career in academia has consistently been in the spotlight of higher education for many years. Many persons having hidden disabilities have had an increased need to maintain moderate stress levels. In academia, there is a pressure to teach, conduct research,

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publish, and present at national conferences in order to reach ones greatest career potential. This is also accompanied by the reality of relocation, which can be a major stressor in itself. Another option is to work for a city-based private agency with tremendous support for self-care, reasonable work hours, reduced pressure, better compensation, room for advancement, and freedom to pursue research and publishing, within one's on range of health and comfort.

Degree Sequence

Most doctoral programs do not include teacher training. With little teaching experience, many potential candidates have found it necessary to focus on teaching skills in order to gain more confidence within that area. Some candidates take additional independent study courses in teaching in order to learn more about different teaching modalities, instructional methods, theory, and supervision on classroom concerns. Initially, the areas in which many doctoral candidates may feel least confident is as follows: 1) cultural differences in communication, especially written communication or writing style. It is many times very difficult to know exactly how to grade student papers written by culturally diverse students where English is not their primary language or when they utilize American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language. These language differences may pose problems with syntax and grammar that may not match the widely accepted and used APA style of writing; 2) learning styles that differ from that of the doctoral candidate. Many candidates and aspiring teachers learn best visually and experientially, and have to make a strong effort to honor and adapt to other learning styles; 3) adaptations for persons with disabilities. Many candidates in the classroom have to learn to make adaptations for overheads, videos, exams, and guest presentations for students with visual, auditory, and learning disabilities.

Technology

Many doctoral candidates have had to learn to use technology in various methods in order

to deliver courses. Just as many persons have had to adapt to the expectation of familiarity with television viewing, many have had to adapt to the expectations of Internet use also. This learning also incorporates knowing that many students who you are instructing have a very close and intimate cyber-relationship. Other issues include being aware of the convenience of e-mail and learning proper "netiquette" when making professional contacts, maneuvering around the Internet (or not) in order to understand its use in online conferences and journals, and exploring websites providing important information for persons with disabilities and students within the field of rehabilitation counseling. In the future, doctoral programs offering degrees in rehabilitation counseling may require more instruction in the area of technology for students who have not been exposed to it during their previous education or work experience.

Concerns with Distance Education

In the field of rehabilitation, distance education has been used to assist educators to reach a diverse and distant population. With this growing demand on education to use distance education, there has been an increased emphasis in rehabilitation counseling to train and retrain vocational agency counselors as well as reach traditional students who are in geographical locations too distant to commute to the university. As a result, there is a need in higher education to provide degree programs and certifications that can be delivered to students despite the limitations of time and space. Accommodating this problem has left many doctoral programs with the dilemma concerning how to prepare their doctoral students to teach and deliver courses via distance education.

In developing a distance education experience, doctoral students must examine what the rehabilitation field is currently looking for in distance education as a whole. Andrews (2000) stated that there has been an increase in the number of faculty position openings requesting

distance education experience. But many doctoral candidates do not have distance education experience which is a major issue in rehabilitation counseling education. Andrews (2000) stated that in 1998, job search process candidates were reporting two things related to distance education; 1) candidates needed knowledge and experience in distance education, and 2) during the interviews, job applicants were asked about their experience with distance education. He stated, "our program did not prepare the students for meeting this requirement" (Andrews, p. 217).

Many doctoral programs are now developing various seminars incorporating distance education in order to give their students exposure to this new technology. Some of these doctoral programs incorporating distance education include Arkansas, Penn State, Michigan State and the University of Iowa. Andrews reported that many of the doctoral students that participated in his seminar on distance education reported frustration with system problems. As a result, the seminar produced doctoral students who were not motivated and who only participated at a marginal level. Such a program may have produced future professors who have little or no interest in distance education because of their negative experiences with this technology.

Competence in Distance Education

Several researchers in distance education have suggested several ways of becoming confident and knowledgeable in distance education. Willis (1994) suggested that success or failure of distance education rests on the motivation to use new technologies. If this is true, future educators play an important role in the implementation of distance education and technological change. The first step in becoming confident and knowledgeable in distance education is to become aware of the different types of technology used in distance education. The adoption of new technologies can be intimidating as well as exciting for future educators with limited

technological backgrounds. It can be challenging and very time-consuming to learn to use the new technologies coupled with non-traditional teaching strategies such as distance education. For doctoral students, finding support is critical in order to make the most effective use of a new approach to teaching and new applications to technology (Gilbert, 1996). Finding support can be found in classes such as instructional design and web-course design courses. These courses can be taken at a community college, a university campus or at campus workshops. The main emphasis is on finding a course that will allow you to learn the technology without the stress and pressure of a normal doctoral course.

The second way to become knowledgeable in the area of distance education is to attend conferencing on distance education. The Syllabus Magazine has conferencing on distance education and its technology every three months. The University of Wisconsin has a national conference on distance education every year in August. Attending these type of conferences allows one to observe what others are doing while developing their own skills in distance education. Sherry (1996) suggested that meeting with other faculty who are participating in distance education will provide doctoral students with the opportunity to communicate with other faculty who have participated in distance education also.

The third way is to co-teach, design, or teach a distance-education course. This will allow doctoral students to gain valuable experience related to distance education without the feeling that they are alone, flying solo, or being "thrown to the wolves."

Recommendations and Conclusions Relevant to the Field

As the number of doctoral candidates applying for academic positions in rehabilitation counseling education continues to grow, there is an increasing need for more structure and direction related to the application process as a whole. The above, although important, are just a

few sentiments from a small pool of aspiring doctoral candidates who were willing and interested in voicing their opinions on a very important issue in rehabilitation education today.

Due to the nature of our field and the populations that we serve, we should all have a vested interest in the diversity of our environments. The field of rehabilitation counseling is but a microcosm of the changing face of the American society. So it stands to reason that our faculty, students and programs should reflect this face as well. The following recommendations may be helpful in assisting programs to increase/maintain appeal of their programs with minority status. These include; 1) having strategic plans in place for recruitment efforts of culturally diverse staff and students, 2) cultivating and maintaining an inviting atmosphere within the program and among faculty and staff, and, 3) securing representatives from university and community organizations similar to the background of candidates available for them to meet during the interview process.

Making the choice of entering the academy or choosing employment in the private sector can be a difficult one. There are many important factors that must be considered when making this decision. They include comfort level with teaching, comfort level with diverse students, salary, and stress level related to both industries. The competence factor in technology must also be considered in order to reach ones greatest potential for success. The key to making this important decision may actually lie within ones on self, that is, making a decision that is best suited for ones lifestyle and comfort zone. Whichever choice appears to be the heathiest one and has the potential of yielding the greatest career satisfaction and overall quality of life should be the choice that should be taken in an effort to achieve ones personal career goals.

Finally, in the area of distance education, one should strive to become as competent as possible with the ever-changing technology that has begun to tightly embrace our field of rehabilitation counseling. Through the collaboration with colleagues, the collaboration with other

institutions offering distance education models and obtaining ones own personal training on the technology, doctoral candidates can become more familiar, comfortable, and feel more competent and confident when using this technology. Various workshops, training, courses on distance education and seminars can all assist doctoral candidates in staying on the cutting edge of the ever-changing world of distance education technology. Again, these are simply a few sentiments from a small sample of candidates that we would hope to one day develop into an annual forum where doctoral candidates can meet with potential employers to voice these concerns or similar concerns. (END)

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TUCSON, AZ 85721-0069

Printed Name/Position/Title: DION PORTER / ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Telephone: (520) 621-5552

FAX: (520) 621-3821

E-Mail Address: dfporter@u.ARIZONA.edu

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