

The Internship in School Counseling: Expectations and On-Site Activities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the results of 10 years of log sheet use for recording school counseling internship hours. The log sheet is based on the Michigan Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (MCGCP). The components Guidance Curriculum, Individual Student Planning, Responsive Services and System Support were used to construct the log sheets. School counseling interns compiled the log sheets between 1995 and 2005 in a CACREP accredited school counseling program at a regional university in the Midwest. Hours from 86 interns were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Results indicated that over a ten year span the activities of school counseling interns approximate the recommended percentages in each of the four components of the MCGCP. Elementary and middle school interns are under the percentage recommended for Guidance Curriculum, high school interns are under the recommended percentage for Responsive Services and all interns are above the recommended percentages for System Support. This preliminary analysis seems to indicate that using a detailed log sheet has helped interns and supervisors direct their activities in recommended directions.

Clinical training is the capstone experience for school counseling programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2001). Standards require that students complete an internship of 600 clock hours in a school setting that will enable the intern to perform a variety of activities that a regularly employed staff member would be expected to perform. How these standards are operationalized in schools can be variable (Stickel, 1995, Crespi & Butler, 2005). Crespi and Butler called for an examination of the rigor of school counseling internships. They introduced questions including the need for raising training standards to include more hours, to occur over a one to two year time span and to happen only at the end of coursework. Akos and Scarborough (2005) note that researchers have rarely examined the pedagogy of internship. Their study used the internship syllabi from 59 school programs as the data source. They found the three content themes mentioned most frequently were counseling skills and techniques, ethical and professional behavior and systematic intervention centered on consultation and collaboration. Other themes included special topics such as bullying, assessment activities and contextual understanding of school policies and culture emerged. Few syllabi mentioned Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000) or the ASCA National Model (2003). They concluded that national trends seem not to influence clinical training practices as reflected course syllabi.

Historically school counseling has struggled with a lack of both focused identity and clear cut programmatic identity within the school structure. Over the last decades, much of the work of accrediting bodies, state departments of education, school counselor

training programs, and professional associations have focused on the transformation of school counseling services in schools into comprehensive developmental programs based on standards. The role statement of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2000) calls for programs to be developmental in nature and to assist students in using lifelong skills through the development of career, academic, self awareness and interpersonal communication skills. All students are to participate and to benefit from such skills. The Comprehensive Guidance Program Model began in 1971 in Missouri under the direction of Norman Gysbers and associates at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Many programs nationwide are adapted from the structure of this model (Cobia & Henderson, 2003). The Michigan Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (2005), first adopted in 1991 is an example.

The program provides a set of four components. The first component, Guidance Curriculum consists of structured developmental activities presented in K-12 classrooms through classroom and group activities. Individual Student Planning helps all students plan monitor and manage their learning and career development through advisement, assessment, placement and follow-up functions generally delivered on an individual basis. Responsive Services include consultation, personal counseling, crisis counseling and referral activities intended to meet the immediate needs of students. Systems Support covers the management activities such as professional development, staff and community relations, advisory committees, and program management operations that support the program. Recommended times are allotted for each programmatic element. For example, Guidance Curriculum should consume 30 to 40% of the time of an elementary school counselor, and 15 to 25% of the time of a high school counselor.

Method

This study examined the log sheets compiled by school counseling interns in a CACREP accredited school counseling program at a regional university in the Midwest. The study covered the years from 1995 to 2005. The four components of the MCGCP: Guidance Curriculum, Individual Student Planning, Responsive Services, and System Support were used to construct the log sheets used by school counseling interns. Each of these four areas was further defined by the activities specific to that area. In addition the area of non-guidance activities was added in order to discourage interns from excessive amounts of time in areas that are not considered the work of school counselors such as substitute teaching, building duties, and scheduling. A total of 23 activities defined the log sheets. Hours were entered onto a Microsoft Excel spread sheet for analysis.

Results

A preliminary analysis was conducted to compare the percentages that interns were working in each of the four components of the MCGCP with those recommended by the model. Hours from log sheets from 86 interns were calculated. There were 14 interns at elementary schools, 25 at middle schools and 47 at high schools. Overall percentages indicated that 19% of time was spent in Guidance Curriculum activities, 21% of time in Individual Student Planning activities, 31% in Responsive Service activities, 24% in System Support activities and 4% in non-guidance activities.

At the elementary level, 26% were in Guidance Curriculum, 9.7% in Individual Student Planning, 35% in Responsive Services, 26% in System Support and 3% in non-guidance activities. This compares to the recommended range of 30 to 40% in Guidance Curriculum, 5 to 10% Individual Student Planning, 30 to 40% Responsive Services, and

15 to 20% in System Support. Middle school interns spent 15% in Guidance Curriculum, 15% in Individual Student Planning, 38% in Responsive Services, and 27% in Systems Support and 4% in non-guidance activities. The MCGP calls for a range of 20 to 30% in Guidance Curriculum, 15 to 25% in Individual Planning, 30 to 40% in Responsive Services and 15 to 20% in System Support. High school interns spent 18% of time in Guidance Curriculum, 26% in Individual Student Planning, 25% in Responsive Services, 21% doing System Support and 5 % in non-guidance activities. This compares to the suggested ranges of 15 to 25% in Guidance Curriculum, 25 to 35 % in Individual Student Planning, 30 to 40% in Responsive Services, and 15 to 20% in Systems Support.

Discussion

Results indicated that over a ten year span the activities of school counseling interns does reasonably approximate the percentages recommended by the MCGCP. Elementary and middle school interns are slightly under the percentage recommended for Guidance Curriculum activities. High school interns are under the recommended percentage for Responsive Services. All interns are above the recommended percentages for System Support activities. Non-guidance activities are taking relatively little of the intern's time. The use of log sheets specific to the MCGCP seems to be directing interns toward the activities consistent with the model. This may or may not be indicative that school counseling programs are consistent with the model or that fully employed school counselors use of time so closely approximate the model. The preliminary analysis does seem to indicate that using the detailed log sheet has helped school counseling interns and their supervisors focus their activities in recommended directions. It also seems that defining and limiting non-guidance activities has helped interns to resist such activities.

In a recent study of school counselors' career satisfaction and commitment, Baggerly and Osborn (2006) found that the only positive predictor of commitment was appropriate counseling duties. They concluded that such career satisfaction and commitment may help with the retention and recruitment of new school counselors and with their effectiveness with students. Although our study is preliminary and represents one school counselor training program, the indications are that specifically outlining the activities using the log sheet has helped school counselor interns model recommended activities for school counselors.

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