School Counseling Intern Roles: Exploration of Activities and

Comparison to the ASCA National Model

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Abstract

Examination of 6,556 hours of school counselor interns' activity logs provided a detailed description of roles and activities. Comparison of counselor intern activities to the ASCA (2005) National Model found consistency between responsive services at the elementary level and both responsive services and guidance curriculum at the middle school level. Identification of time on planning and inappropriate tasks provides a clearer picture of school counseling interns' activities in the school.

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School counseling traces its roots to the first years of the 20th century, beginning

with the articulation of the term vocational guidance (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). For

nearly as long as it has been a profession, school counseling has been plagued by a

lack of a clear or consistent definition of counselor roles and responsibilities (Coll &

Freeman, 1997; Gysbers, 2001; Murray, 1995; Myrick, 2003; Whiston, 2002). Without

clear enunciation of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of school counselors,

practitioners, and the profession will continue to face role overload, job creep, and lack

of respect within the school. Paisley and McMahon (2001) suggested that the ambiguity

of the school counselor's role is the most critical challenge facing the profession today.

While role definition is clearly a significant challenge, there have been efforts to

articulate a vision or roles statement for school counselors. The American School

Counseling Association (ASCA, 2003, 2005), prominent school counseling models

(Gysbers & Henderson, 2000, 2006; Myrick, 2003), individual states (Sink & MacDonald

1998), and many leading authors (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Galassi & Akos 2004;

Green & Keys, 2001; Paisley & McMahon) have articulated visions and

conceptualizations of a comprehensive school counseling program, including

appropriate roles and activities for school counselors.

While there are many reasons to the lack of a clear statement of roles of school

counselors, it is critical that counselors be more proactive in defining the boundaries of

their professional responsibilities. This issue becomes even more critical as

administrators, policy makers, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders become more

focused on accountability and demonstration of outcomes through test scores. The school counselors and school counseling programs that will thrive in this environment will articulate specific and objective goals that connect counselor roles to the educational mission of the district and will empirically demonstrate the outcomes of these efforts (Johnson, 2000; Whiston, 2002).

One of the first steps in designing a school counseling program which address accountability and measures specific outcomes is a clear description of the roles and responsibilities of the counselors. Myrick (1993) estimated that up to 50% of counselors' time is consumed by non-guidance activities. Delineation of the amount of time consumed by non-guidance activities and efforts that do not benefit students would provide counselors with evidence to advocate for change. Empirical measurement of counselors' time includes Burnham and Jackson's (2000) report of 25.04% of time in non-guidance activity, while Madak and Gieni (1991) calculated that counselors spent 26.2% of their time in planning and non-guidance activity. Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams (1989) found that school counselors spent more time on scheduling than any other function.

These disquieting statistics, coupled with role ambiguity, highlight the importance of school counselors documenting their roles and activities in the school (Fairchild & Seely, 1994). Equipped with empirical evidence of their time and effort, counselors may better position themselves to advocate for student needs. Furthermore, counselors may be able to demonstrate to principals and administrators the importance of reducing non-guidance responsibilities and engaging in more activities that will positively impact the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students (ASCA, 2005).

Counselor Roles

Exploration and articulation of the activities and responsibilities of school counselors will require diverse and multiple empirical examinations from a variety of viewpoints. The broad spectrum of roles that counselors perform, coupled with the nature of school counseling expectations, where each school district, even each school building will have distinct and individual needs, necessitates comprehensive research to clearly understand the school counselors' responsibilities. Researchers and counselor educators must continue to explore counselor roles and student outcomes. School counselors at the individual building level must also be more active in documenting their actions and examining the resulting student outcomes.

A review of the counselor roles literature suggests that research in this area is alive and well. Schmidt, Lanier, and Cope (1999) reviewed 20 years of research in Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, and found 34 articles pertaining to school counselor roles. Given this quantity of research it would be logical to expect that the field has explicated a clear statement of how school counselors spend their time. However, this does not seem to be the case. Myrick (2003) noted that research in this area is, "incomplete and ambiguous because of varying and limited samples, questionnaires, and research methodologies" (p. 101). Furthermore, many investigations have focused on perceptions of the role of a school counselor rather than what counselors are actually doing. It seems that we know more about what administrators (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001; Zalaquett, 2005), teachers (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Beesley, 2004; Ginter & Scalise, 1990; Gibson, 1990), parents (Ibrahim, Helms, & Thompson, 1983), and students (Aluede & Imonikhe, 2002) *think*

about school counselors' roles than we know about what school counselors *actually do*. The present investigation was an attempt to use an alternative methodology to draw a more accurate and detailed picture of the roles and activities of one group, namely school counseling interns.

Previous examinations of school counselor activities have often utilized methodologies that either asked counselors to rank a list of roles, rate the importance of tasks, or to estimate the amount of time devoted to different activities. Furlong, Atkinson, and Janof (1979) asked counselors to rank fourteen activities based the percentage of time the tasks consumed. These authors found that individual and group counseling was the most frequent activity, followed by consultation, appraisal, and assisting parents (Furlong et al., 1979, p. 7). Morse and Russell (1988) surveyed school counselors who rated the extent to which 40 activities were part of their actual role as a counselor. They found that referrals, consultation, counseling students about feelings, working with teachers, and counseling around self-concept were the five highest rated tasks with respect to what counselors were actually doing in their job.

Time estimation studies have found that school counselors spend most of their time in individual counseling (19.67%), administrator/teacher consultation (8.03%), group counseling (7.98), scheduling (7.23), and academic advising (5.74) (Agresta, 2004). Burnham and Jackson (2000) found 24.4% of time devoted to individual counseling, 18.42% for consultation, and 25.04% in non-guidance activities. Fitch and Marshall (2004) asked counselors to estimate the number of hours per week devoted to 11 tasks and found the following five tasks as the most time consuming; counseling (9.0 hours), other duties (7.87 hours), curriculum (6.11 hours), consultation (4.71 hours), and

coordination (3.69 hours). Based on a 40 hour week, estimated time on different activities in this study would be 22.5% individual counseling, 19.65% for other duties, 15.25% curriculum, 11.77% consultation, and 9.25% program coordination. All of these studies contribute to the knowledge base of school counselor roles. However, this research is limited by lack of differentiation across the grade levels counselors serve, error introduced through estimations compared to daily activity logs, and limits on the number of roles or activities counselors are provided on survey instruments.

Madak and Gieni's (1991) examination of five, half-time elementary school counselors' activity logs represents an alternative to ranking and estimation methodologies that should provide a more accurate accounting of the daily activities of school counselors. Three times during the school year participants in this study logged three consecutive weeks of activity. Using this approach nine weeks of activity were generated for each counselor. Findings from this study are important because they represent actual time on task, and are not subject to bias in recall or estimation of time for different activities. Using this methodology, Madak and Gieni found that individual counseling (42.1% of time), teacher consultation (12.3%), short meetings with students (9.5%), paper work (8.8%), and planning (7.1%) were the top five activities. Classroom guidance was tenth on the list, comprising 4% of counselors' time (Madak & Gieni, 1991). Wilgus and Shelley (1988) utilized a longitudinal logging procedure that generated elementary school counselor activities during an entire school year and covered fifteen different roles. These authors found that individual counseling (19% of time), other tasks (15%), staff consultation (14%), guidance and counseling meetings (9%), parent contact (8%), and group counseling (7%) were the most frequently logged

activities (Wilgus & Shelly, 1988). Interestingly, classroom guidance only consumed 5% of these elementary school counselors' time.

Holowiak-Urquhart and Taylor (2005) provided yet another methodology describing the variety of tasks and responsibilities undertaken by a school counselor. These authors described one school counselor's roles by reporting activities and the counselor's personal thoughts during each minute of one entire day. The counselor engaged in many different tasks during the day, including consultation with eighteen different people (Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005). Investigations such as this provide a detailed description of the variety of tasks and responsibilities of school counselors. Taken together, these latter studies provide a more exhaustive, literal recording of school counselor activities, although with relatively small samples. The present investigation seeks to build on the current literature through the examination of daily activity logs compiled by school counselor interns.

Goals of Present Study

The two primary goals of the present investigation were to describe the roles and activities of school counseling interns and to then compare these findings to the ASCA National Model (2005). To provide the most comprehensive accounting possible, counseling interns' activities were coded and the percentage of time devoted to each activity was calculated. The results provide the clearest possible picture of these counseling interns' activities, and identify the roles that consumed the greatest percentage of their time. Counseling intern activities were also organized by Gysbers and Henderson's (2000; 2006) four service delivery methods, as well as inappropriate

activities, and planning time and compared to recommended time allocations for school counselors in elementary school, middle school, and high school settings.

Method

Sample

Data for the present investigation were obtained through a review of school counselor interns' activity logs. Logs reviewed for this investigation were from students who completed their Master's level school counseling internship during the past four years at a small university in the Midwest. The sample was comprised of forty-six female and seven male interns. The mean age of the interns was 34.32 years (SD = 8.859). The race/ethnicity of the sample was 94.3% Euro-American and 5.7% Latina/o. The socioeconomic status of the schools where interns worked varied widely from 1.7 to 90% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (*M* = 26.82%, SD = 17.742). The counselor to student ratio of the internship sites ranged from 1:119 to 1:777 (*M* = 1:408, SD = 137.360). Interns in this sample had spent between zero and twenty-three years in a school setting, (*M* = 4.26 years, SD = 5.932), and between zero and eight years employed as a school counselor (*M* = 0.93 years, SD = 1.603). It should be noted that students were eligible for a conditional license and through this mechanism were able to be employed as a school counselor while completing their graduate education. Other interns were completing a secondary or elementary school counseling internship while they were currently or previously employed as a counselor in a different grade level (e.g., secondary internship while employed in an elementary school). Twenty of the logs were completed by interns in a high school setting (grades 9 - 12), eight were in a middle school setting (6 - 8), and 29 were in an elementary school setting (k – 5). Four

interns completed both an elementary and secondary school counseling internship resulting in a total of 57 logs completed by 53 interns.

Three different internship modes were available to students. One type of internship included individuals who were employed as a school counselor and completed their internship as part of their regular, assigned duties. Twenty-five of the 57 logs were completed by interns employed as the school counselor with an average of 35.92 (SD = 8.034) logged hours per week. Sixteen students were in a traditional internship, completing their unpaid hours in a school counseling program and with no other role in the school, averaging 25.62 (SD = 6.825) hours per week. The third modality involved sixteen students who were employed in some other role in the school building, most often as a teacher. These interns logged an average of 20.72 (SD = 8.558) hours per week. All interns were expected to perform all of the job duties of a school counselor, regardless of internship model.

Data

Demographic information and the description of school counselor activities were collected from materials submitted by school counseling interns upon completion of internship. School counseling interns used a standardized form for recording their activities. The logs included the time each activity began and ended, type of activity (e.g., individual counseling, classroom guidance), who was involved in the activity (e.g., 9th grade African-American female, 6th grade class), a brief description of the activity (e.g., discussed test-taking anxiety, social skills lesson), and a statement of counselor outcome or effectiveness (e.g., developed relaxation plan, students demonstrated appropriate use of skills).

The 57 counselor intern logs contain a total of 19,980 hours of counselor activity. To facilitate analysis, four weeks from each log was captured to be included in data analysis. Data were selected by randomly identifying one week from every four to six weeks of logged activities. Given the size of the potential data pool, this method was utilized to increase the heterogeneity of tasks logged by the counselors without coding the entire log for each participant. For instance, some counselors can spend 6 to 8 weeks with the scheduling process and the above method was used in attempt to capture the breadth of tasks counselors undertake across the school year while reducing the possibility of over sampling from a specific time period when one or two tasks may dominate the school counselor's day. The final data set resulted in counselor intern logs from 228 weeks and included a total of 6,556 hours of activity.

School Counselor Roles

Prior to coding the activity logs, an exhaustive list of possible counselor activities was developed. The roles list was developed through a research review, the authors' experience, and communication with eight practicing school counselors. Research by Agresta (2004), Burnham and Jackson (2000), Hardesty and Dillard (1994), and Scarborough (2005) included lists or measures of school counselor roles that were included in the roles list. The authors then added other roles that were not captured by the above authors. Finally, the compiled list was distributed to the group of practicing school counselors who responded with feedback and suggestions for additional activities. The eight practitioners were all Euro-American, including seven women, four high school, one middle school, and three elementary counselors. The counselors had been practicing for an average of 2.5 years, ranging from 1 to 7 years.

The roles list was generated to provide coders with the broadest possible list of counselor activities to facilitate the coding process. While the counseling logs did include a notation of activity type (e.g., individual counseling, classroom guidance) some diverse activities (e.g., email to a parent, lead IEP meeting) were coded under general terms (administrative or meeting) while the description of the intern's actions provided a more detailed description of the activity. One limitation of previous investigations of counselor roles is that a limited number of roles are provided as source material for counselors to describe the range of their roles and rate percentages of time devoted to each activity (e.g., Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Furlong et al., 1979). By taking a broader perspective on the number and variety of activities school counselors encountered it was expected that a more comprehensive and accurate picture of these counseling interns' activities and roles could be articulated.

The final list of counselor roles included 67 varied and distinct activities or topics of counseling (e.g., group counseling, program evaluation, calculating grade point averages, conducting home visits, making referrals, grant writing, monitoring study hall, observing a student, substitute teaching, managing student attendance information). The list of roles drew upon research by Burnham and Jackson (2000) who examined five counselor roles and seventeen non-guidance activities, Hardesty and Dillard's (1994) examination of seventeen counselor activities, and the ASCA (2005) list of fourteen pairs of appropriate and inappropriate activities. Based on experience the authors added to these lists to create a pool of 45 roles. The group of school counseling practitioners reviewed the list and collectively added an additional twenty-two items resulting in the final 67 items. Within this list individual counseling was coded based on

focus of the session resulting in a total of 11 different codes (e.g., family issues, crisis counseling, peer relationship concerns). Furthermore, four different codes were generated for scheduling: individual scheduling, group scheduling, building the master schedule, and a general scheduling category to address paperwork associated with scheduling. Consultation was also divided into administration (principal, other administrators), parent (emails, phone conversation, meetings, conferences), teacher, psychological (other counselors, school psychologists, mental health counselors), and community consultation (e.g., community leaders, business owners).

Data Coding

Two strategies were utilized to ensure reliability during data coding. First the authors met for a total of four hours for training and orientation on coding. During two meetings the authors discussed the 67 activity codes and practiced coding six weeks of counselor logs to ensure compatibility in coding. The data set was then divided among the three authors and coded for type of activity. To increase reliability of data coding each coded log was then reviewed by a different author to check compatibility of coding across coders. Initial inter-rater reliability was 94.7%. Any discrepancies and disagreements were then resolved through discussion, resulting in agreement on the coding of all activity logs.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Data analysis sought to describe the actual roles and activities of school counseling interns and then compare these findings to time recommendations from the ASCA (2005) National Model. The first goal was accomplished through totaling coded activities from interns' logs and calculating the percentage of time devoted to each

activity. Prior to conducting extensive analysis, counselor activities were coded according to the four service delivery mechanisms (guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support) and compared across type of internship (employed counselor, employed in different role, or traditional internship) using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Across internship type there were no differences in percentage of time for each delivery mechanism and all data were collapsed for subsequent analysis

Results describing the 12 most frequent activities and percentage of time on each activity can be seen in Table 1. The 67 coded activities and three composite variables were ranked by the mean percentage of time each activity consumed. The three composite variables were total individual counseling (sum of 11 individual counseling codes), total scheduling (individual scheduling, group scheduling, building master schedule, general scheduling duties), and total consultation (administration, parent, teacher, counselor, community). To provide a context for the amount of time devoted to these activities the final column illustrates the number of days that each task would consume across a typical school year.

Elementary school counseling interns spent, on average, 36.8% of their time in direct contact with students (classroom guidance, individual and group counseling) while these activities consumed 38.97% of middle school interns' time. At the high school level direct contact including individual counseling, classroom guidance, individual scheduling, and group counseling (14th most frequent activity at 2.52%), accounted for just 19.32% of interns' time. Planning time (e.g., preparing guidance lessons, preparing for group session) and administrative tasks (e.g., gathering data,

Table 1

Most Frequent Counselor Intern Activities by Grade Level.

Setting / Activity	Mean % of Time	SD	Days per School Year[c]
Elementary n = 29			
Classroom Guidance	18.79	.1209	36.54
Planning Time	15.93	.1358	30.98
Individual Counseling	12.03	.0897	23.41
Total Consultation Time	10.39	.0742	20.22
Administrative Tasks	6.91	.0694	13.45
Group Counseling	5.98	.0715	11.64
Professional Development	5.75	.0608	11.19
Supervision	5.54	.0509	10.78
Parent Consultation[a]	4.38	.0411	8.52
Meetings	4.16	.0446	8.10
Teacher Consultation[a]	3.71	.0496	7.21
Counseling for Academic/ Classroom Concerns	2.96	.0261	5.76
Middle School n = 8			
Classroom Guidance	23.77	.2740	46.24
Total Consultation Time	12.50	.0894	24.31
Individual Counseling	11.27	.0905	21.92
Professional Development	10.72	.1094	20.86
Planning Time	7.92	.0324	15.42
Parent Consultation[a]	7.21	.0635	14.03
Administrative Tasks	6.49	.0610	12.62
Total Scheduling Time	6.19	.0929	12.05
Meetings	5.31	.0481	10.34
Group Counseling	3.89	.0777	7.57
Supervision	3.85	.0300	7.50
General Scheduling[b]	2.71	.0600	5.27

Setting / Activity	Mean % of Time	SD	Days per School Year[c]
High School n = 20			
Planning Time	11.93	.1307	23.28
Professional Development	10.80	.0963	21.01
Total Consultation Time	10.49	.0780	20.41
Administrative Tasks	10.12	.0741	19.68
Individual Counseling	9.28	.0857	18.06
Testing	7.67	.1326	14.92
Supervision	5.39	.0502	10.49
Total Scheduling Time	5.34	.0743	10.39
Meetings	4.61	.0422	8.96
Parent Consultation[a]	4.56	.0491	8.88
Classroom Guidance	3.97	.0546	7.72
Individual Scheduling[b]	3.55	.0597	6.90

Note. [a] Included in computation of Total Consultation Time.
[b] Included in computation of Total Scheduling Time.
[c] Based on a 1750 hour school year.

creating reports, writing emails,) together accounted for 22.84%, 14.41%, and 22.05%

of elementary, middle, and high school interns' time, respectively. Finally, the

combination of professional development and supervision time covered about 11 to

16% of counseling interns' time. The large proportion of time devoted to professional

development and supervision is an encouraging finding. Practicing school counselors

have indicated a desire for supervision although most do not receive it (Page, Pietrzak,

& Sutton, 2001), and supervision has been demonstrated to be predictive of career

satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). However, the finding in the present

investigation is likely influenced by the sample being school counseling interns.

It is also interesting to note the variety of tasks coded in the interns' logs. The

many hats that school counselors wear has been identified as a source of stress (Coll &

Freeman, 1997). Of the 67 possible activity codes, 44 different activities were identified in the elementary school counseling intern's logs, with 36 codes for middle school interns, and 46 different codes among high school interns. This breadth of tasks underscores the wide variety of expectations placed upon school counselors.

The second goal of the present investigation was comparison of counseling interns' activities to the time allocation recommendations outlined in the ASCA National Model (2003; 2005). The 67 coded activities were grouped into one of the following categories: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support, inappropriate activities, or preparation time. Gysbers and Henderson's (2000; 2006) descriptions of each service delivery mechanism were used to group activities into the four mechanisms. Guidance curriculum was comprised of classroom guidance, curriculum development, and advising student groups. Individual student planning included career counseling, developing an academic plan, financial aid planning, scholarship applications, and mentoring. Responsive services comprised the largest number of activities, including individual and group counseling, teacher and administrative consultation, referrals, Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, and building wide crisis management. System support variables included school counseling program development and evaluation, meeting with an advisory board for the counseling program, consultation with community members, program visibility, and meetings.

Inappropriate activities and planning time were the other two groups developed for data analysis. Inappropriate activities were coded based on the ASCA (2005, p. 56) statement of appropriate and inappropriate roles of school counselors. Inappropriate

activities included roles such as, managing the student attendance system, monitoring the lunch room, scheduling activities, administering standardized tests, and substitute teaching. Planning time was analyzed as a separate group of activities due to the way these activities were recorded in the activity logs. Any counselor intern activity that served to prepare for a direct interaction with students was coded as planning time. For example, an intern could have researched relaxation exercises for test anxiety, planned a guidance lesson, or collected scholarship resources for a student. Ideally these activities could be coded as responsive services, classroom guidance, and individual student planning, respectively. However, attempting to code planning time at this level of detail was not a practical approach with the data set. Further, holding out planning time as a separate delivery system highlights the amount of time counselors are devoting to research and preparation for interactions with students while at the same time not directly interacting with students, teachers, or parents. Once all groupings were developed, an individual outside the research team, who was a school counselor and adjunct professor of school counseling, reviewed and made recommendations.

To explore how closely the logged activity of school counselors matched ASCA (2005) recommendations, the mean percentage of time for each of the four service delivery systems was compared to the average percentage of time advocated by Gysbers and Henderson (2000; 2006). One-sample t-tests were conducted to examine if the mean percentage of time in each of the four service delivery areas was different than the mid point of the time allocation range. The results of these analyses, as well as mean percentage of time for planning time and inappropriate tasks are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Counselor Intern Time to the American School Counselor Association National Model.

Service Delivery	Elementary School % of Time			Middle School % of Time			High School % of Time		
	ASCA	Mean	SD	ASCA	Mean	SD	ASCA	Mean	SD
Guidance Curriculum	35-45	19.05**	12.4120	25-35	24.02	27.2021	15-25	4.14**	5.5724
Student Planning	5-10	0.54**	1.4361	15-25	1.64**	2.7244	25-35	3.29**	4.0585
Responsive Services	30-40	31.37	14.0705	30-40	29.23	20.5524	25-35	23.49*	13.2113
System Support	10-15	27.52**	12.3736	10-15	26.93*	11.9596	15-20	35.50**	10.2572
Planning Time	--	15.93	13.5815	--	7.92	3.2435	--	11.93	13.0704
Inappropriate Tasks	--	5.66	7.7103	--	9.82	11.5207	--	21.91	13.5697

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

At the elementary level, time on responsive services was consistent with the National Model while guidance and individual student planning were significantly below and system support was significantly above time recommendations. The counseling interns in a middle school setting were devoting appropriate time to the guidance curriculum and responsive services, while little time went to individual student planning and too much time was devoted to support services. None of the delivery mechanisms for high school counseling interns matched ASCA (2005) recommendations. These interns devoted significantly less time to the guidance curriculum, student planning, and responsive services, while nearly one third (35.50%) of their time was consumed by system support activities.

Finally, time devoted to planning and inappropriate activities was calculated from interns' activity logs. The meant percentage of time for each grade level can be found in Table 2. Approximately 8 to 16% of counselor interns' time was devoted to planning for interactions with students. An ANOVA examined the mean percentage of time on planning across grade level and found no significant differences. However, there were significant differences in the mean percentage of time on inappropriate activities across grade level, $F(2,56) = 14.034$, p < .001, with a small effect size of $\eta^2 = .342$. Post hoc Scheffé tests were conducted and found that high school counseling interns time on inappropriate activities was significantly higher than middle school (p < .05) and elementary school counseling interns (p < .001). To further explore differences in the amount of time consumed by inappropriate activities a series of ANOVAs were conducted on the inappropriate roles. From these analyses, calculating student grade point averages (GPA) $F(2,56) = 9.219$, p < .001, effect size $\eta^2 = .255$, and total

scheduling time $F(2,56) = 7.184$, p < .01, effect size $\eta^2 = .210$, were significantly

different across elementary, middle, and high school counselor interns' logs. Not

surprisingly, post hoc examination demonstrated that school counseling interns in the

high school spent significantly more time calculating GPAs (2.36%) than interns in an

elementary setting (0.03%, p < .001), while interns at both the high school (5.34%, p <

.01) and middle school levels (6.19%, p < .05) devoted significantly more time to

scheduling than those in elementary settings (0.21%).

Taken together these findings draw an accurate picture of the actual time on task

and the numerous responsibilities of school counseling interns across grade levels. The

comparison of actual counseling intern time to ASCA (2005) recommendations finds

that across grade levels too little time is devoted to individual student planning, while

system support consumes too much time. Middle school counseling interns were the

only counselors who devoted an appropriate proportion of time to delivery of the

guidance curriculum. Elementary and middle school counseling interns both averaged

an appropriate amount of time on responsive services, although both findings were at

the bottom of the ASCA time recommendations.

Discussion

This investigation advances the methodology of describing the roles, activities,

and time expectations of school counseling interns. Through coding of 57 activity logs, a

total of 6,556 hours of activity for school counseling interns in elementary, middle, and

high school settings were examined to draw a detailed picture of their roles and

responsibilities. Myrick (2003) argued that counselors must have a clear understanding

of their roles and use this knowledge to inform others of their role in the school. He

further stated that role understanding, "clarifies expectations, opens doors for creative innovations, and improves the chances counselors will be seen as part of the team of educators in the school" (Myrick, p. 103). Articulation of roles, responsibilities, and time devoted to these tasks also empowers a school counselor to begin the process of demonstrating accountability and student outcomes.

Analysis of activity logs resulted in several important findings regarding the practice of school counseling. The school counseling interns undertook a wide variety of different responsibilities, from 36 (middle school) to 46 (high school) different activities. However, examination of Table 1 finds that the top ten different activities accounted for an average of 79.6% high school counseling interns' time, up to 91.91% of the middle school interns' time. Thus, while school counseling interns in this sample were asked to do a vast array of different tasks, a smaller subset of these comprised the great majority of their time. The impact of these broad expectations is not immediately clear, but research suggests that counselors are experiencing conflict from the increasing number of demands (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Further, role overload and involvement in non-guidance activities have been described as the greatest sources of stress for school counselors (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994; Manthei, 1987).

As noted above, there is a substantial literature base examining school counselor activities and the amount of time devoted to counselor tasks, although the literature lacks consistency (Myrick, 2003). By examining actual counseling intern logs, and coding for a wide variety of tasks, the present investigation sought to more precisely describe the activities of a group of practitioners who were completing their school

counseling internship. Specifically, the present investigation found that school counseling interns spent between 9 and 12% of their time conducting individual counseling. These averages are substantially lower than other studies which have found between 19% (Wilgus & Shelley, 1988) and 42% (Madak & Gieni, 1991) of counselor time on individual counseling. Consultation time in the present investigation (10.39% to 12.5%) was more consistent with previous findings of 8% (Agresta, 2004) to 18% (Burnham & Jackson, 2000) of counselor time. Interns in elementary and middle school settings in the present investigation spent a substantial portion of their time delivering the guidance curriculum (19.05% and 24.02%, respectively). Previous examinations have found much less time in this area, from about 5% (Madak & Gieni; Wilgus & Shelley) to 15.25% (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). It is important to note that findings in the present investigation are actual time on task, compared to time estimation studies (e.g., Agresta, 2004; Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The second goal of this examination was to specifically compare counselor intern activities to recommended time distributions outlined in the ASCA National Model (2005; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Taken together the results demonstrated that counseling intern activities were generally not consistent with the National Model (9 of 12 comparisons were significantly different). Some areas, such as responsive services in the high school, were close to recommendations. However, in other areas the discrepancy between counseling interns' time and ASCA (2005) recommendations were simply startling. Individual student planning across levels and the guidance curriculum at the high school level were clearly inconsistent with the National Model.

In addition to components of the delivery system examination of planning time and inappropriate activities more clearly articulated counselor interns' activities. Planning time consumed about 8 to 16% of counselor interns' time, somewhat higher than Madak and Gieni's (1991) finding of 7.1%. Future investigations would be strengthened by dissecting this category to more clearly articulate how preparation time is allocated across delivery mechanisms. Time to plan guidance and counseling sessions are certainly worthwhile endeavors, while preparing standardized testing materials is not consistent with the ASCA (2005) National Model. The amount of time consumed by inappropriate activities, particularly over 20% of high school counseling interns' time, is a particularly troubling finding. Standardized testing (7.67%), scheduling (5.34%), and calculating GPAs (2.36%), specifically noted as inappropriate school counselor activities (ASCA, 2005), constituted the largest proportion in this category. However, the amount of time on inappropriate activities at the high school level is consistent with previous findings (24.4%, Burnham & Jackson, 2000; 19.65%, Fitch & Marshall, 2004; 15%, Wilgus & Shelley, 1988).

One clear conclusion from these findings is that additional time and effort must be directed at individual student planning efforts, specifically career exploration, academic planning, and transition to work or post-secondary education and training. Classroom guidance is another area where elementary and high school counselor interns were spending much less time than recommended by ASCA (2005). These findings, coupled with very high percentages of time devoted to system support and inappropriate tasks, should lead school counselors, counselor educators, and administrators to ask how well the ASCA National Model is being implemented. This

overall lack of consistency should be a strong call to more systematically evaluate programs with regard to the profession's important statement of how school counselors should allocate their time and resources.

The relatively small percentage of time counselors spend in direct contact with students, particularly at the high school level (19.32%), is another important finding in this research. The dearth of time devoted to classroom guidance and individual student planning, the large percentage of time on system support, and participation in inappropriate tasks combine to create a situation where counselors have little time for direct contact with students. School counselors, students, teachers, administrators, and parents may want to consider what school priorities cause counselors to spend less than 20% of his or her time with students.

The amount of time devoted to administrative tasks (6.5 to 10%) and more importantly inappropriate roles (5.6 to 21.9%), are two areas where school counselors should seek to recoup time to spend with students. These finding are likely an underestimation of paperwork and administrative activities completed by school counselors. Interns in this sample were expected to complete all activities of a school counselor, but it is possible that as interns they were shielded from some administrative tasks completed by employed school counselors. One potentially substantial change to school counseling programs would be the addition of administrative support staff. Many paperwork tasks could be performed by support staff at a lower cost while freeing counselors to spend more time with students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

Finally, it is important to note what was *not* found among the most frequent counselor activities, namely efforts aimed at addressing the accountability and student

outcomes of the school counseling program. Whiston (2002) suggested that counseling programs will cease to exist without concerted efforts toward accountability and demonstration of positive student outcomes. Examination of counselor tasks including: conducting research, program coordination, program evaluation, curriculum development, and participation on an advisory board for the counseling program found that a total of less than 16 hours, out of 6,556 coded hours, were devoted toward these efforts. The fact that school counseling interns' logs served as the data set for this investigation is a plausible explanation for the paucity of efforts in this area. However, given the importance of these efforts and dire warnings such as Whiston's, it is likely that substantially more effort should be afforded to demonstration of accountability and student outcomes.

Practice Implications

The methodology employed in this study could be easily replicated by counselors interested in documenting time and roles in the school. Data analysis is straight forward, including descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test comparisons to the ASCA (2005) National Model. Statistical packages such as SPSS or EZAnalyze (Poynton, 2006), a free program available through Center for School Counseling Outcome Research (n.d.), could be employed to conduct data analysis. At a basic level counselor activity logs demonstrate direct contact time with students, teachers, and parents. Further, counselors can utilize this information to collaborate with administrators to more efficiently allocate counselor time among vast role expectations. Additionally, activity data positions school counselors to draw connections between their efforts and student outcomes. Counselor time can be examined in connection with pre and post-test data

around specific interventions or guidance lessons. Alternatively, students, parents, and teachers could be surveyed about program satisfaction or outcomes and these results compared with counselor time to link effort and results.

Future Research

It is crucial that future research efforts build on this examination to advance the goals of counselors providing more direct service to students and reducing or eliminating non-guidance activities. Future investigations could examine connections between the activities of the school counselor and perceptions of the school counseling program. Are school counselors who do a little bit of everything viewed less positively by administrators, teachers, students, and parents? Counselors that spend significant portions of their day on paperwork or administrative tasks, rather than in direct contact with students may be perceived as unnecessary or not central to the educational mission of the school.

Another important area to examine is the extent to which the perceptions and support of administrators and other primary stakeholders impact the scope of practice of school counselors. Do highly supportive administrators limit the scope of practice and inundation of non-guidance tasks for school counselors? Are administrators aware of the actual percentage of time counselors devote to administrative and non-guidance activities? Do counselors who do not feel supported actively take on more responsibilities out of concern for job security or more subtle feeling of pressure to do so? Future investigations of associations among these variables would be strengthened through use of more sophisticated statistical analysis procedures (e.g., hierarchical

linear modeling) that would allow researchers to draw more direct connections among counselor roles, perceptions, and student outcomes.

The development of a school counselor self-efficacy measure is another important area to explore. Following the clearer articulation of the roles and activities of school counselors, an instrument to assess school counselors' confidence in their ability to successfully complete each of the roles and activities of their profession could be incredibly valuable to counselors, administrators, and counselor educators. Do school counselors gravitate toward activities where they hold higher efficacy beliefs? Do they avoid classroom guidance or collaboration with teachers because they are not confident in their skills in these areas? The impact of self-efficacy beliefs on the efforts and preferred activities of school counselors is another avenue to build on the findings of the present investigation.

Articulating a clearer understanding of all student service activities that are occurring in the school today, and who is performing these services, is another area to examine. Are school counselors serving as leaders and coordinators of all services in the school as some have suggested (Gerler, 1992; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000)? Explication of these roles could lead to more efficient and effective service delivery systems that would allow the counselors to perform appropriate activities (ASCA, 2005) and spend more time meeting students' educational, personal, and career goals.

Finally, an examination of school counselor training programs and school counselor roles could provide valuable information on how well new graduates are prepared to enter the field, based on the activities of current practitioners. Are counselors being trained to spend 80% of their time in direct contact with students and

then put into positions where 50% of their time is consumed by administrative and non-guidance responsibilities? Johnson (2000) suggested that counselor training programs are not adequately preparing students for the challenges to professional identity and expectations they will face. Further, how well are counselors trained to carry out program evaluation, program coordination, and guidance curriculum development? Examination of these issues could provide an opportunity to increase dialogue between counselors, counselor educators, and administrators and policy decision-makers.

Limitations of the Present Investigation

There are several limitations to the present investigation, including the characteristics of the data sample, nature of the data set, and coding mechanisms. The data set for this investigation was drawn from counseling intern logs from one counseling program. In addition, the data sample was comprised of predominantly female, Euro-American, and novice counselors. Another limitation is that the data for this investigation was developed from a records review of counseling intern logs rather than collecting data from counselors as they performed their jobs. The time intensive nature of logging daily activities is a barrier to collecting this type of data, but the breadth and quality of the data is a strong incentive for this more difficult research. Finally, future studies could improve on the current methodology by providing a comprehensive list of counselor activities with brief descriptors to ensure that all counselors are using a uniform coding system, rather than interpreting activities and coding them using only their perception of the roles. Research efforts into school counselor roles and responsibilities will be strengthened by examinations that address these issues.

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