

# The Alabama Counseling Association: A Legacy of Community and Professional Service

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## **Abstract**

The Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA) has an ongoing plan for professional growth and development reflective of the multiple counseling professions and the diversity of its members. Based on the development and history of the organization, this research project was designed to assess ALCA's progress toward achieving its stated outcome goals. A telephone interview survey of the ALCA's past presidents was conducted to assess efforts toward diversity and inclusiveness of all counseling professions.

## **Background**

According to Cooley, Johnson, & McCullers (1986), a need was recognized and concerns developed for a guidance and counseling affiliate as part of the Alabama Education Association (AEA). Based on a teacher response survey developed in 1953 by Nelson and Nunn (as cited in Cooley et al., 1986), AEA sponsored the first meeting in Gadsden, Alabama and officers were elected for the specific purpose of establishing an organization designed to promote programs of guidance in the schools and colleges in the state of Alabama. These guidance programs were to encompass all educational levels from the elementary school to advanced college degrees. Through this grassroots meeting, close cooperation, and collaborate efforts of all agencies of guidance, counseling, and education within the state, the Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA) has evolved into a nationally recognized organization with over 2,000 active members and community leaders.

In order to ensure that all voices are heard and represented throughout the organization, the elected presidents of ALCA designed programs and themes reflective of the interest of its members and addressed community concerns (see Table 1). This process is evidenced through the Annual Conference where all members are encouraged to develop outlined proposals for presentations of research or current issues reflective of the needs of the profession and the community. Furthermore, to ensure Alabama counselors, educators, and other helping professionals are exposed to the most current trends in the profession, nationally and internationally recognized experts in the field present their research, theoretical perspective, and statistical data relative to the dynamics of healthy relationships when working with others.

## **Organizational Structure**

The ALCA's original bylaws were adopted in 1967 under the leadership of Clay Sheffield (Cooley et al., 1986) and are continually amended to reflect the needs of its growing membership and the diversity of the organization. The bylaws provide organizational structure pertinent to how Chapters, Divisions, Programs, and Publications are conducted to better serve the counseling profession and the community.

According to Cooley et al. (1986), the nine ALCA Chapters (see Table 2) were chartered by the State Association using Alabama Senate districts as a reflective map. Through this geographical mapping, all ALCA members have easy access to an identifiable group through organizational structure insuring that all voices are heard and that all ALCA members are given the

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opportunity for professional growth and development.

Simultaneously, the thirteen ALCA Divisions (see Table 3) provide specialty training and educational opportunities for personal and professional growth and development as well as provide community service opportunities targeting diverse populations. Because of the close working relationship and collaborative efforts between the Chapters and Divisions, ALCA maintains a superior entity as a state branch of the American Counseling Association.

The ALCA currently has greater than 2,000 active members including private practitioners, counselor educators, mental health therapists, substance abuse counselors, school counselors, and community activists. ALCA is striving to make sure that the diverse needs of the counseling profession and the community are met through campaigns conducted to recruit and maintain new graduate counseling and education students entering the profession as well as assessing the needs of the influx of minorities migrating to the state and throughout the southeast.

### Programs

The Alabama Counseling Association offers a variety of opportunities for professional growth and development, including Annual Fall Conference, Chapter and Division Workshops, Information Website, Liability Insurance, Legal Services, and Listerv. Likewise, The ALCA through its various awards programs recognizes excellence in leadership, research, and community involvement. ALCA's growth and presence in the state is a clear reflection of its goals to identify and respond to the critical issues and counseling needs affecting Alabama.

### Organization Publications

The first edition of the Alabama Counseling Association *Quarterly* was edited by John Seymour and published in 1964 (Cooley et al., 1986). This newsletter highlighted the organization's accomplishments, various meetings, membership growth, new and innovative programs implemented in schools and community organizations, counselor and teacher accomplishments, as well as outlined the programs and themes of the Annual Conference.

The first edition of *The Alabama Counseling Association Journal* was edited by Dick Warner and published in September 1974 and circulated among its members. Currently, this nationally recognized journal is published twice yearly and provides its members an opportunity to present their research as well as articles of interest to the counseling and education profession.

The Alabama Counseling Association over the years has been nationally recognized numerous times for its accomplishments including the prestigious American Counseling Association Awards for Best Journal Award, Best Newsletter Award, Best Consumer Client Service Program Project Award, Best Leadership Development Program Award, Best Membership Service Award, and Best Membership Recruitment Campaign Award.

Consequently, in 2005 Alabama Counseling Association received five (5) national awards in recognition for its accomplishments and outstanding leadership roles.

### Forces Shaping the Association

According to Cooley et al. (1986), since its inception, ALCA has been affected by many factors. The National Defense Education Act

Guidance Institutes led to well-trained counselors who were able to significantly impact the directions of the association as well as ALCA's push for certification standards for all counselors. Likewise, legislative issues and changes in the counseling profession have had major impacts on the structure of the organization. ALCA has always been influenced by racial, sexual, and other minority issues that impact counselors as evidenced by its bylaws and adherence to the *Code of Ethic* of the American Counseling Association.

### **Interview Questions**

In order to assess whether ALCA has maintained its focus by actively addressing its goals of diversity within the organization, diversity issues within the state, and advancing toward inclusiveness of all counselors regardless of practice, a telephone interview with past presidents (see Table 1) was conducted. Each past president was asked to respond to three questions designed to address the progress of the organization relative to its diversity goals. Of the twenty past presidents, only eleven could be reached by telephone. Of the eleven respondents contacted, only seven remained active in the organization. Because ALCA's goals have always been to include all counseling professions and cultural backgrounds, the main focus of the telephone interview questions was diversity and whether the organization is actively moving in positive directions to address the unique needs of its members and the community. The three interview questions were:

- a) Is the Alabama Counseling Association inclusive of all counselors regardless of practice?
  
- b) Is the Alabama Counseling Association adequately addressing the diversity issues in the community?

- c) What are the Alabama Counseling Association's strengths and weakness relative to diversity?

### **Interview Responses**

Although the telephone interview process was designed to have each ALCA Past President respond to each of the three questions in ten-minute intervals, some respondents exceeded the allotted thirty minutes for the full interview. However, during the interview process, all respondents expressed their passion for the organization's success. The respondents answered the questions posed in the telephone interview as follows:

- a) The first question relative to ALCA being inclusive of all counselors, eight of the eleven respondents reported that the organizations is doing an excellent job with including all counselors of various backgrounds and professions. Three of the eleven respondents reported that ALCA is making a very good effort to be inclusive of all counseling professions. However, their concerns for improving the organization centered around similar issues. Three of the respondents reported that since the organization was started by school counselors and continue to maintain very close ties to school counselors, most programs and specifically the Annual Conference are targeted to that specific group. They reported a strong concern that Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and other mental health practitioners have limited choices for workshops and therefore their presence is not as visible. However, they did say that the ALCA Annual Conference request for proposals does not get a favorable response from that specific population.

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b) The second question relative to whether the organization is addressing diversity issues within the community, eleven out of the eleven respondents reported that the organization is doing an excellent job with some exceptions. The exceptions varied. Seven of the respondents reported that in the past few years the organization has really advanced in putting forth efforts to include sexual minorities but has not focused so much on aging and lifespan issues nor individuals with disabilities. One respondent reported that there has not been enough done within the organization to address the GLBT issues within the community. However, all eleven respondents agreed that more focus should be placed on addressing the growing concerns of the aging population (Baby Boomers) and the Hispanic populations within the community.

c) The third question was designed to assess ALCA strengths and weaknesses relative to diversity issues and to summarize questions A and B. All past presidents surveyed reported that the organization is inclusive of all counseling professionals or positively moving in that direction. Likewise, nine of the eleven respondents reported that because the current membership is greater for school counselors than LPCs, the perception of the ALCA Annual Conference may be distorted. They reported that ALCA is constantly seeking avenues to insure that all counseling professions have equal access to opportunities for professional growth and development.

Overall, the past presidents surveyed reported that as with all organizations, there is always room for improvement. They also reported that Alabama Counseling Association is far ahead of other states in actively progressing toward successful compliance with its stated goals;

specifically, the goals that were identified as necessary to address the diversity of its members as well as the counseling profession and community concerns.

### Summary

The Alabama Counseling Association has a rich history. Although some past presidents admit that the road to excellence has been difficult, they all agreed that the organization has made significant gains to be inclusive of all individuals representing all counseling professions. The past presidents emphasized that diversity has always been a major influence shaping ALCA goals and objectives and that Alabama leads other states in the quest for inclusion of all individuals regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, or national origin. These advancements can be recognized in the more recent ALCA Divisions specifically implemented to address the needs and concerns of special population

Furthermore, to insure that ALCA maintains its focus and keeps a healthy balance, the organization has a full-time Executive Director as well as an on-call legal consultant. Based on the interviews with the past presidents of ALCA, the organization is moving in a positive direction in its efforts to make sure that all Alabama counselors have opportunities for personal and professional growth and development in their areas of expertise.

With over 40 years of quality service through the dedication of its members, the Alabama Counseling Association has evolved into an organization reflective of diversity in the community and inclusive of all counseling professions. Because of its family oriented environment and collaborative efforts, the Alabama Counseling Association, continues to grow

in its commitment to being an advocate and leader in the helping professions. ♦

### **AUTHOR NOTE**

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**Table 1:**  
**Past Presidents, Programs, and Themes**

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<i>President</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Keynote Speaker</i>
Linda Mahan	1986	Right, Responsibilities, and realities: Celebrating Human Potential	Toody Byrd
Anne Hartline	1987	Human Responsibility: Facing The Challenge	William Glasser & Bill Curry
Bob Comas	1988	Transformation of the Profession: The Challenge of Diversity	William Purkey & Maxie Maultsby
Ervin Wood	1989	Global Visions: Creating Community	Sam Gladding, Thomas Sweeney, & Sharon Whittaker
Helen McAlpine	1990	Wellness Throughout The Lifespan	Jane Myers & Thomas Parham
Paulette Pearson	1991	Building Societal Excellence	Judith Viorst, Beverly O'Bryant, & Jean Fetter
Karole Ohme	1992	Diversity; Development; Dignity	Jackie Pflug & John Alston
Joe Creel	1993	Professional Counselors: A Resource For Life	Kevin Leman, Jamie Wax, & Beverly O'Bryant
Thelma Robinson	1994	Celebrating Diversity through The Art of Counseling	Fred Krieg and Dorothy & Robert Debolt
Margaret Smith	1995	Confluence in Counseling: Working Together For The Profession	Bernie Siegel & Edward Wheeler
Cheri Fitzhugh	1996	Embracing Challenges: From Crisis Comes Opportunity	Ed Jacobs & Courtland Lee
Marcheta Evans	1997	Empowerment through Social Action with COPE: Cooperation, Organization, Participation & Education	Allen Ivey & Don Locke
Sherry Quan	1998	Advocacy: Counselor, Client, Community	Jogn Wagner & Resha Miles
Ingie Givens	1999	Celebrating Unity through Diversity	Albert Miles, David Kaplan & Cheewa James

**Table 1 (cont.)**

<i><b>President</b></i>	<i><b>Year</b></i>	<i><b>Theme</b></i>	<i><b>Keynote Speaker</b></i>
Carol Turner	2000	Counselors are STARS: Supportive, Tolerant, Accessible, Responsive, Sensitive	Adolph Brown, Suellen Fried, & Jerry Patterson
Nancy Cole	2001	Celebrating the Human Spirit: Counseling at its Best	Phil Gugliuzza, Larry Little, & Michael Hart
Annette Bohannon	2002	Counseling throughout the Circle of Life: Mind, Body, & Spirit	Gerald Corey & Sam Gladding
Irene McIntosh	2003	The Professional Counselor: Practice and Advocacy	Scott Barstow, Michael Ingram, Dean & HollyKem Sunseri
Michael Lebeau	2004	The Counselor as Leader: Courage, Compassion, Character	Ann White, Mark Pope, Adolph Brown, & Bryan Townsend
Paul Hard	2005	We are family: One Vision ~ Many Voices	Sam Gladding, Cheewa James, & Darin Green
Shirley Barnes	2006	Celebrating Our Past, Embracing Our Present, Envisioning our Future	Marie Wakefield, Tonea Stewart & William Glasser

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**Table 2**

**ALCA Chapters:**

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<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Counties</i>
<b>Chapter I:</b>	Colbert, Cullman, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Morgan, & Winston
<b>Chapter II:</b>	Blunt, Jackson, Madison, & Marshall
<b>Chapter III:</b>	Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Marion, Pickens, Sumter, Tuscaloosa, & Walker
<b>Chapter IV:</b>	Jefferson & Shelby
<b>Chapter V:</b>	Calhoun, Cherokee, Cleburne, Dekalb, Etowah, St. Clair, & Talladega
<b>Chapter VI:</b>	Autauga, Bibb, Butler, Chilton, Choctaw, Dallas, Lowndes, Marengo, Perry, & Wilcox
<b>Chapter VII:</b>	Bullock, Chambers, Clay, Coosa, Elmore, Lee, Macon, Montgomery, Randolph, Russell, & Tallapoosa
<b>Chapter VIII:</b>	Baldwin, Clarke, Conecuh, Escambia, Mobile, Monroe, & Washington
<b>Chapter IX:</b>	Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Crenshaw, Geneva, Henry, Houston, & Pike



Table 3  
ALCA Divisions

<b>Division</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>ALAADA:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Adult Development and Aging</u> provides leadership, information, and professional development to counselors and service providers in the helping profession on matters related to counseling and development across the life-span
<b>ALAAOC:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Addictions and Offenders Counselors</u> strives to support and enhance the practice of addictions and offenders counseling
<b>ALACES:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Counselor Education and Supervision</u> emphasizes the need for quality education and supervision of counselors in all work settings
<b>ALADARCA:</b>	<u>Alabama Division of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association</u> promotes the welfare of people with disabilities through rehabilitation counseling, research, education, and practice
<b>ALAMCD:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development</u> develops programs specifically to improve ethnic and racial empathy and understanding
<b>ALAMFC:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Marriage and Family Counseling</u> serves to enhance marriage and families by fostering programs of education, promoting and conducting research, and working to remove family and couple difficulties
<b>ALASGW:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Specialist in Group Work</u> assists and furthers interests of children, youth, and adults by providing effective services through the program medium
<b>ALCCA:</b>	<u>Alabama College Counseling Association</u> serves professionals who are fostering and promoting student development in post-secondary education
<b>ALCDA:</b>	<u>Alabama Career Development Association</u> provides vital career counseling services to counselors and allied professionals working in schools, colleges, military services, correctional institutions, business, and community agencies
<b>ALMHCA:</b>	<u>Alabama Mental Health Counselors Association</u> maintains and improves quality of mental health services statewide and promotes prevention practices
<b>ALSCA:</b>	<u>Alabama School Counselor Association</u> provides a common framework for all professionals engaged in school counseling
<b>ALSERVIC:</b>	<u>Alabama Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values issues in Counseling</u> seeks to examine the role of values, theological, philosophical, and ethical principles in counseling and personnel practices
<b>AGLBICAL:</b>	<u>Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling in Alabama</u> serves as an educational resource for counselors regarding GLBT individuals and related issues