

## Professional Counselors' Experiences Pursuing State Licensure

R. Tyler Wilkinson, Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling, Auburn University.

Suhyun Suh, Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling, Auburn University.

R. Tyler Wilkinson is now at the Department of Counseling, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Alabama Counseling Association.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to R. Tyler Wilkinson, Department of Counseling, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 222 Stouffer Hall, 1175 Maple Street, Indiana, PA 15705.

### Abstract

A phenomenological study was conducted to gather the essence of professional counselors' experiences regarding their pursuit of professional licensure in a Southeastern state. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six females via the telephone. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Findings indicate that these individuals experienced financial difficulties, felt inadequately prepared, and had to deal with unexpected circumstances.

### Professional Counselors' Experiences Pursuing State Licensure

Currently all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have laws in place that establish a minimum set of standards necessary to practice as a professional counselor (American Counseling Association[ACA], 2010). California completed the list by licensing professional counselors beginning in October 2009 (ACA, 2010). As graduates of counseling programs enter into the professional community, they will find that they have a new set of challenges to address as they begin to pursue state licensure. Licensure requirements are in place to protect the public from unethical, incompetent, and unlawful practice. Each state establishes its own licensing board that oversees licensing laws, which are intended to establish a minimum set of standards expected of a licensed professional counselor (ACA, 2010). The licensing board exists to protect the public consumer by issuing professional licenses, handling ethical complaints, and enforcing state regulations (ACA, 2010; Robiner, DeWolfe, & Yozwiak, 2010).

Because no national licensure exists, each state legislates and governs the practices and procedures of the professionals residing in that particular state. This process is in accord with the 10th amendment as counseling is considered a form of healthcare that is seen as intrastate commerce; thus allowing the state to have jurisdiction over the licensing process (Jost, 1997). Since each state maintains its own licensing laws, heterogeneity of processes quickly develops (ACA, 2010). These differences have created a great deal of disparity within the process of licensing counselors. The American Counseling Association recently published a review of each state's licensing requirements (ACA, 2010). There is much disagreement between states in the number of clinical and supervisory hours required, the educational

requirements, the examination, and the title of the credential. In fact, there are at least six different titles currently being used to identify professional counselors (ACA, 2010). The heterogeneity of counseling licensing boards requirements creates confusion for students in counseling training programs and professionals pursuing licensure (Robiner, DeWolfe, & Yozwiak, 2010). Most counseling programs develop their course work and practicum experiences to meet the licensing requirements for the state in which the program is located; however, this may create unforeseen difficulties for the counselors as they begins to pursue licensure in a state other than the one in which they graduated or in which they are currently licensed.

The disparity between state licensing requirements has not gone unnoticed by most professional counseling organizations (Rollins, 2006). In 1985, the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB) was created to encourage communication among state licensing boards (AASCB, n.d.). A few years later in 1988, Walz, Gazda, and Shertzer presented a series of lectures at the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision conference (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011) addressing the future of counseling. These lectures were later published (Walz, Gazda, & Shertzer, 1991) and were influential in the development of the more recent *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling* initiative (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). This initiative, which is cosponsored by the ACA and the AASCB, is comprised of representatives from 30 “major organizational stakeholders in the profession of counseling” (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011, p. 369) that exist to reach consensus on key principles that are critical to advancing the counseling profession. One of these principles is the desire to create a portable system of licensure, which would require more agreement among licensing requirements in each state (ACA, 2010).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of professional counselors as they pursue state licensure in a state in the southeastern United States. The researchers wished to capture the common experiences that are shared among professionals pursuing similar licensing requirements in a single state. The results of this study hope to provide students with realistic, accurate expectations regarding the process of pursuing professional licensure. The results will also provide organizations like AASCB and the delegates of the *20/20: A vision of the future of counseling* initiative with an understanding of the experiences of some counselors as they have pursued state licensure, which will inform the work of these two groups. Also, it is anticipated that the results will inform counselor educators so they can thoughtfully prepare their students for the professional world in which they will soon embark.

## Methods

### *Research Tradition*

Social constructivism is the paradigm that was adopted by the researchers. According to social constructivism meanings are varied and multiple, co-created in the intersubjective exchange between individuals (Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). From this philosophical paradigm, the study was conducted from a phenomenological framework using the methods influenced by Moustakas (1994) and Miles and Huberman (1994). A phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry is appropriate when describing a group of participants’ common experience of a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the researchers have various levels of lived experience with the studied phenomenon; as such, Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology was chosen so that by bracketing out the researcher’s experiences they can approach this study with a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007).

*Bracket of author's experience*

Researchers must address and bracket their prior experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The first researcher moved to his current state of residency to pursue a doctoral degree. Prior to this move, he was working at a private practice as a Licensed Associate Professional Counselor in another state. Once he moved, the researcher decided to pursue licensure in the state in which he currently resides. His choice to pursue licensure was based upon his understanding of the licensing laws, which led him to believe that he would be able to open a private practice while being under supervision from a state approved supervisor. The lead researcher found the experience pursuing licensure to be discouraging. Multiple attempts to get the board to approve his educational background, which at the time of his graduation was not CACREP-accredited but met the educational requirements, led to frustration and confusion. Additionally, he found the process of finding a supervisor to be quite difficult. He obtained a list of Approved Supervisors from the state Board of Examiners in Counseling. He began to call supervisors on the list within a 20-mile radius. Of the supervisors that he was able to contact, many stated that they were no longer acting as supervisors or they only supervise employees at their place of employment. Moreover, he was frustrated by the amount of supervisors who were unavailable or who never returned his phone calls. Eventually, the researcher found an available supervisor; however, this individual was over an hour away. By this point the lead researcher was involved with his doctoral studies and teaching assignments, and thus he decided to forego pursuing licensure in the state of residency. Curiosity led him to wonder if other counselors were having similar experiences. After speaking with colleagues in various states who were at similar stages of their professional development and hearing similar experiences regarding their licensure pursuits, he decided to conduct a formal study. The researcher understands that the licensing requirements in his state of residency are stringent and he believes he initially misunderstood some of these requirements. The researcher anticipated that potential participants would also express similar difficulties with pursuing licensure. The researcher noted and acknowledged his potential biases at the outset of this study.

Different from the first author of this study, the second author has never pursued licensure during her 11 years as counselor educator. She considered pursuing licensure from time to time, but never transferred the thoughts into action because of the amount of time it takes and the expenses associated with supervision. As such, the second author entered into the study with much interest in learning about the experiences that other professional counselors experience as they pursue licensure.

**Participants**

Six total individuals residing in a state in the Southeastern United States participated in this study. The licensure requirements of this state included: 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience from a board approved supervisor, supervision that includes 100 hours of annual supervision, of which 50 of the hours must be one-to-one, face-to-face, individual supervision, and successfully passing the NCE. Five of the participants were at various stages of pursuing licensure, while one individual recently completed licensure three months prior to the interview. Purposive sampling was conducted by sending an email through a counseling email listserv. All of the participants were female and they lived in various locations throughout the state. Two of the participants completed their graduate counselor training outside of their current state of residency, while the other participants graduated from programs within the state. Currently, all of the programs from which the participants graduated are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009); however, one of the in-state programs was not accredited at the time when one of the participants completed her

degree. Each participant received an information letter prior to the interviews, which was attached to the recruitment email.

### Data Collection

All participants consented to participate prior to the beginning of the interview. A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was utilized to discover the essence of the participants' experiences (Kvale, 2009). The first researcher conducted the interviews with each of the participants. Five of the interviews were conducted via the telephone and one of the interviews was conducted via a video chat service called Skype. All interviews were audio recorded for analysis. The semi-structured format was utilized only to provide a starting point for the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The scope of the study was to arrive at the essence of the participants' lived experience of pursuing professional counseling licensure. As the researcher conducted the interviews, he summarized and reflected on the participants' statements. This allowed for the interpretation and descriptions of the experiences to be discovered and to emerge (Kvale, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sequence and the structure of the questions were influenced by the responses of each individual participant. The process of data collection continued until saturation occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Data analyses*

All interviews were transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2007) and uploaded into Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Software. Each interview was read through completely to gain a sense of the overall essence of the participants' experiences. Inductive coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were utilized that were both descriptive and interpretive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were used to identify non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements in the interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Codes were used to assist in summarizing descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Textural and structural descriptions, the *what* and the *how* of the phenomenon, were developed of the participants' experiences that provide the essence of the experienced phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

### *Trustworthiness*

In keeping with our philosophical paradigm of the study, the researchers hoped to leave the ultimate decision of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to the reader by providing an interpretative space between the reader and the presented text (Angen, 2000). Interpretive indeterminacy resulting from ambiguity (Atkinson & Mitchell, 2010) was addressed by bracketing research biases, collecting data until saturation, providing thick descriptions, triangulation, and conducting member checks (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Both researchers reviewed and analyzed the data separately to allow for multiple interpretation sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation of sources provides corroborating evidence to support the emergent themes (Creswell, 2007). After separately reviewing and analyzing the transcriptions, the researchers discussed the emerging themes and the language as to which best describe these themes. Consensus was collaboratively reached in describing the essence of the participants' experiences.

Member checking was conducted by providing the participants with the researchers' interpretations of the experiences of pursuing licensure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were emailed a summary, including quotations, of the textural and structural descriptions of the findings. Five of the participants

responded with affirmation regarding the interpretation of the findings. The other participant never responded to the invitation to provide feedback of the themes.

### Findings

The participants in this study had experiences in their pursuit of licensure that lead to the emergence of common themes. Findings indicated that these individuals experienced financial difficulties, had to face unwanted decisions, and struggled with feelings of helplessness as they pursued state licensure.

#### *Financial Predicament*

Entering into the process of licensure, most professional counselors were optimistic about their professional development. The pursuit of professional licensure was initially seen as an opportunity to establish or develop one's professional identity and to create career opportunities. One participant stated her rationale for pursuing licensure by saying, "I wanted to have some different opportunities afforded to me...I wanted something to, you know identify me as a proficient professional in this vocation." Another participant identified the license's relationship to her professional identity as follows:

To me, [licensure] was the second step after obtaining my Master's degree, it was the next step. I couldn't imagine why someone would not pursue licensure. Because to me it was a professional credential; without it, it was almost a two-pronged process. Without it, how worthwhile, how valuable would the degree be? Part of it was being told, you know, you will make more money with licensure.

Such optimism seemed to turn into pessimism when professional counselors began to pursue licensing procedures. Focusing on the financial strain of pursuing licensure was the pervading theme for all but one of the participants. A sense of being exploited and neglected saturated the interviews of these participants as these counselors faced financial strain even after earning their master's degree. As a single, female participant stated, "I am going to cry right now. It's frustrating and overwhelming. You work so much and don't get compensated for what you do. It's hard, it's difficult, it's humbling too". Obtaining professional licensure as a counselor was an opportunity that seemed to be reserved for the privileged. The pursuit of licensure was a draining, frustrating process if one was not "fortunate enough to work at a facility that provides licensure". Those who did have this "perk" of free supervision stated that this helped alleviate any "financial concerns" during their pursuit of licensure. However, it did not appear that this simplistic solution to a more complex situation worked for everyone as indicated by the reports of individuals working in jobs that they "hate". One stated that "There are agencies in [our town] that will pay for supervision. Places will pay for the supervision. I know people who went to work there just to get their supervision paid but I know they hate working where they are".

Participants reported salaries around \$36,000/year, which is a little less than the National median for mental health counselors at \$38,100 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). When the cost of supervision is factored in, which was reported between \$50-\$80 per week, the pursuit of licensure became an expensive endeavor for most individuals, as was stated by one participant:

The fee weekly was \$50, which was the most affordable I could find but I just didn't have the extra couple hundred of dollars a month especially having to pay student loans. You know, student loans and paying for licensure is like paying rent. So when you don't make a whole lot of

money and you are already paying mortgage or rent and you have to pay another payment like that, I just couldn't afford it.

According to one participant she spent approximately \$5,000 in supervision costs over the last two years. These "unfortunate" counselors were placed into difficult, crippling situation that had forced them either to stop pursuing licensure, consider a career change, or rely on external support, which will be described in other emergent themes.

### *Unwanted Decisions*

**Stopped pursuing licensure.** As the financial stress built, one response for participants was to stop pursuing licensure completely: "It was becoming very expensive to continue to pay for supervision, to continue to seek hours but I wasn't getting any individual hours so I ...that's when I turned in my license". The financial costs of pursuing licensure potentially placed an individual in the difficult position of having to decide if they could realistically continue in the licensure process because of their financial wherewithal. The individual decided that she needed to save money before pursuing the licensure process. Another had reached a point where they stopped pursuing licensure while contemplating leaving the profession: "I haven't seen anything in the process that is facilitative to make you feel encouraged to continue through with the process". Another participant specified her intentions to pursue another profession: "Put it this way, um, I am to the point that I am actually looking to pursue an RN degree, not a degree, but RN education so that I can get licensed or registered as nurse and look to make 50 or 60,000 dollars per year, um, and having credentials that are portable from state to state". One participant is even telling others to pursue a different profession:

I usually tell other people they should go get a Master's in Social Work...You don't have to get licensed to find more jobs and their process seems easier...Compared to paying a couple of years \$3,000 a year for supervision...I don't want to have to work two jobs. I don't want to have to teach, supervise, and have a private practice. I don't want to have to do all those things.

**Recruiting external support.** For the participants who were unable to receive supervision from their place of employment, they found it difficult to support themselves and to pay for supervision on their starting salaries. Continuing with supervision required some form of external support. Trying to establish this external support was a humbling experience that elicited embarrassment from the counselor. Having to find additional employment to supplement the participants' income was a reoccurring theme. One participant discussed the number of hours in addition to her full-time job that she had to work to support herself and supervision: "I still do contract, not much, but I still do some. That is another 5-10 hours in the work week because I do need the extra income." Some were fortunate to find additional work within the counseling field: "So I have had to ... make sure I get the second job. I am going to be an interviewer at [a local hospital's] emergency department for a study that is going on through the department of psychiatry". However, another participant had to find work outside of counseling all together: "I would do seasonal employment. I would work at malls." Moreover, reflecting on this experience during the interview led one participant to tears: "I mean I am 32 and I didn't want to ask family. I have talked to my family (starts to cry), it's frustrating". She continued to describe the humility of moving in with a roommate and having to get another job to pay for licensure. Other participants were able to receive external support from a partner or a loved one: "My partner was paying all the bills. So I was kind of fortunate in that aspect as well". Another participant stated that she used the inheritance from her father's recent death to support the expense of supervision.

I inherited money from him that I was able to use to put towards that without having to sweat it and I knew I could use it as a tax write off on my income taxes...Otherwise it would probably require a part-time job just to, just with these extra fees. Because the meager amount of earnings I was making at my last job in community mental health, I was bringing home \$2100/month net. So I literally in paying my bills and basic monthly expenses I literally had \$10/month left over so.

For many of the participants who had to pay out of pocket for supervision, they had to establish some form of external support to assist with the process.

### *Sense of Helplessness*

Another prominent theme that emerged during this study was that participants' were getting stuck in the process. Counselors experienced confusion and lack of support from the licensing board and the profession as a whole, which led to strong feelings of helplessness. The pursuit of licensure created a sense of alienation that leaved the counselor searching for support. "It seemed like it wasn't a supportive process at all...it makes you feel helpless", a participant noted as she discussed her experience of trying to have some of her questions answered by the board regarding licensure. This sense of helplessness and having to go through this frustrating experience seemed to emerge during the initial phases of the process when participants were trying to have questions answered by the board or when the participants were in the situation of finding a job.

Multiple experiences emerged as it relates to interacting with the licensing board. One participant shared her positive experience with the board. However, there was a consensus to expect the board to have a question or to lose a document and that future licensees should keep a detailed paper trail. One participant reported an expected difficulty with the licensing board: "Now, I did have a problem with the board, they lost some of my recommendation forms...But honestly, I was warned by a lot of other counselors in the field that they lose paperwork..."; The general consensus among the participants was that they all frequently had questions that they wanted answered. One participant reported "getting the run around" when trying to have questions answered. Another participant provided a recommendation to "utilize the website to greater capabilities [with] FAQs, emails, etc.", to provide greater accessibility. When individuals pursuing licensure felt unable to access the board during the time of needs and they found the website to be unclear, they seemed to develop feelings of being unsupported, helpless, discouraged, and frustrated.

These feelings also emerged for participants who have a difficult time finding employment after graduation. One participant described the "Catch-22 of needing experience". This participant moved from another state and once she arrived to the current state she described a felt lack of support from the professional community and felt helplessness to find a way to establish herself in a professional counseling role:

Yea, most of the places I applied to stated either I needed a license to be there to work or more experience to be there to work. I had a year experience at least ... But I guess that wasn't enough experience for most places and then not being able to get the job...And so that made it difficult for me, because I was in a Catch-22 type situation... It's like, bam! Slam the door in your face.

One participant decided to pursue licensure 11 years after graduation. The program from which she graduated was not CACREP-accredited at the time of her graduation. When asked to produce all of her

syllabi from that time period, she was able to elicit the help of a former professor that attempted to help her move forward in the licensure process when she felt stuck. Though the professor was able to produce these syllabi, it seemed that this process became just as confusing for the professor when the licensing board asked for additional information. This participant and this professor were still working with the licensing board to get the appropriate information at the time of the interview. She stated she was mindful of the time she continued to ask of this particular, willing professor:

Even the professor was like well you turned in your transcripts, those are the dates you attended...you do feel a level of "Oh my goodness" I have to keep bothering them now because you know they have a lot of things going on too. I was just very appreciative of what the one professor did. We literally sat for three hours going through all of her paperwork finding old syllabi that she just so happened to keep.

When the counselors got stuck they did not seem to have anywhere to go to find clear answers to their questions. Participants described the licensing board as understaffed and not adequately prepared to field questions efficiently. Additionally, these participants were no longer formally affiliated with an academic institution. This left them feeling unsupported with no clear source of support from the professional community.

#### *Insufficient Preparation*

Another theme that emerged from the participants was the experience of being insufficiently prepared for the licensure process. It seemed that some counseling programs were making their students aware of the existence of licensure and, for some other programs, even creating a rationale for the importance of obtaining a license. As one participant who attended a counseling program that was taught mostly by adjunct clinicians stated, "...licensure was something that was always discussed from the beginning, from the get go in my course work. Because many of the professors I had were in private practice". At this specific school the professors even tried to address the financial concerns by emphasizing the importance of working at a clinic that provides licensure or to think about saving for the cost of supervision. However that type of emphasis on the importance of professional licensure and how to prepare for licensure was not an experience shared by many of the participants. Another participant described her counseling program by saying, "They mentioned it, um. I don't remember them at all stressing the importance of getting the license and, you know, the benefits of getting licensed would offer". Counseling programs seem to be insufficiently preparing graduates regarding how to actually pursue licensure and what to realistically expect when beginning the process. One participant stated:

In school, I wasn't given a whole lot of information, regarding what I need to do to start the process. I wasn't told...it would have been a great idea for me to go ahead and take the NCE directly upon graduation as opposed to waiting. Here I am six years post graduation and I still haven't taken the NCE, yet.

#### **Discussion**

In this study, the authors were seeking to obtain the essence of individual's experiences of pursuing licensure as a professional counselor. There was an overall essence of frustration, discouragement, self-doubt, and helplessness experienced by the individuals in this study. These emotions varied in intensity as the participants encountered various situations within this process. Counselors began this process with aspirations of solidifying their professional identity. Much of these individuals' identities were wrapped up in their profession and pursuing licensure has as much to say about their sense of self-



worth as it does about their competency as a counselor. In the beginning finding a job and understanding the idiosyncratic requirements of the licensure application began a trajectory of emotional experiences that created a lot of self-doubt. Couple this initial experience with the financial stresses of working in a fiscally prohibitive career and having to pay for supervision, the aspiring professional began to question their desire to be in this profession and their ability to do without the support of another. The expression of so much angst over being financially stable and the confession of some of these professionals to pursue a different career were unexpected. Financial strain is to be expected; however, the degree to which this strain pushed individuals to stop the process of pursuing licensure or contemplating a career change was surprising.

### Implications

The findings from this study have implications for counselor educators, counselors considering pursuing licensure, licensing boards, and those who advocate and legislate for laws that address counseling licensure. One of the comments expressed by some of the participants is that they did not feel that they were adequately prepared to pursue licensure by their academic program. The significant impact of pursuing licensure was not adequately explained to them. It seems that counselor educators could do a better job informing future counselors as to the benefits and the costs of professional licensure. An ethical protocol emerges that future counselors should be properly informed as to the potential costs associated with pursuing a career in counseling. It is unethical to not make students and future counselors aware of the costs associated with the process of pursuing licensure during their tenure in a counselor-training program.

These findings should help direct the ongoing efforts by state legislation and licensing boards to create a set of laws and standards that allow for competency to be demonstrated so as to protect the public but aren't preventing future competent counselors from reaching their goals. Initiatives, like the *20/20: A vision for the future of counseling* and organization like the AASCB, intend to address issues related to licensure and transferability. The results of this study should encourage the establishment of a rationale for the requirements of professional licensure. As a profession, we need to understand the effects licensing requirements have on those who are pursuing licensure, especially as it relates to the future of the profession. These requirements exist to protect the public from unethical, harmful practice; however, further research is needed to direct efforts like the *20/20* initiative and to support a rationale for a minimum set of standards that professional counselors must meet that protects the public but yet is reasonably attainable for emerging professionals. The financial struggles that emerged in this study forced the researchers to consider the ethical dilemma of self-care. The counselors highlighted their need to work additional jobs and hours to support the licensure pursuit. However, more research is needed to understand the impact this additional strain on the counselor has on the work with the client. Do counselors' attempts to meet these licensing requirements impact the quality of work being done with clients? If the state licensing board exists to protect the welfare of the client, one should wonder if some of the requirements that are in place actually having the opposite effect than the intended purpose.

### Limitations

The data collected in this study conveyed the essence of the experiences of 6 emerging counselors. Larger studies are needed to explore the prevalence of these themes among other groups of individuals. Another limitation of this study was that some interviews were conducted via the telephone and the depth of observation was limited to the individuals' tone of voice, which may have impacted the way in

which data was interpreted (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Kwong Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Additionally, the use of the telephone created an interpersonal barrier that impacted the flow of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). At various points the conversation would cut out due to static creating an interruption in the conversation or a misunderstanding in what was said. However, the use of the telephone did enhance anonymity which may have led to more transparent disclosure of the participants' experience (Suzuki et. al, 2007). This method of interviewing was used out of convenience and accessibility to participants located over large distances. Another limitation of the study was the participants were all female and urban areas of practice were heavily represented. It is anticipated that those practicing in rural areas would experience the same essence of experiences but the difficulties may manifest itself in other ways.

### Conclusion

With professional organizations and state laws requiring counselors to obtain a professional license, the rationale and requirements should be evaluated for their pragmatic utility. None of the participants wanted to extinguish counseling licensure and they all understood its purpose of protecting the public; however, the experience from these participants was that some of the requirements asked of them were unrealistic and unmanageable. This led to feelings of frustration, discouragement, and helplessness, which led some to stop pursuing licensure and others to consider a career change. Counselor educators should not only prepare their graduates for clinical practice but also properly inform them of the professional environment they are about to enter. Current professional counselors should be aware of the potential difficulties of their junior colleagues and work to support and advocate for their future development. Legislative bodies and state licensing boards should consider the impact licensing requirements have not only on the counselor but also on the client. Longitudinal studies of counselors' experiences of pursuing licensure are needed; additionally, studies exploring the rationale of state licensing requirements that explores what is a minimal set of competent standards should be developed.

### References

- American Association of State Counseling Boards. (n.d.). *History of AASCB*. Retrieved from <http://www.aascb.org/aws/AASCB/pt/sp/history>
- American Counseling Association. (2010). *Licensure requirements for professional counselors: A state-by-state report*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*, 373–395.
- Atkinson, B., & Mitchell, R. (2010). "Why didn't they get it?" "Did they have to get it?": What reader response theory has to offer narrative research and pedagogy. *International Journal of Education and the Arts, 11*(7), 1-24.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (2010). Retrieved from [http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ\\_rep.asp?optstatus=011000000&soccode=211014&id=1&nodeid=2&stfips=01&search=Go](http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ_rep.asp?optstatus=011000000&soccode=211014&id=1&nodeid=2&stfips=01&search=Go)
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2009). *CACREP 2009 Standards*. Retrieved from [http://www.cacrep.org/doc/2009\\_standards\\_with\\_a\\_cover.pdf](http://www.cacrep.org/doc/2009_standards_with_a_cover.pdf)

- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jost, T. S. (1997). Introduction-regulation of the healthcare professions. In T. S. Jost (Ed.), *Regulation of the healthcare professions* (pp. 71–101). Chicago: Health Administration Press.
- Kaplan, D., & Gladding, S. (2011). A vision for the future of counseling: The 20/20 principles for unifying and strengthening the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 89*, 367-372.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robiner, W. N., DeWolfe, J. R., & Yozwiak, J. A. (2010). Applicants' perspectives on applying for psychology licensure: Experiences, problems, and recommendations. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings, 17*, 1-13. doi:10.1007/s10880-009-9185-4
- Rollins, J. (2006, May). Counseling summit could shape profession's future. *Counseling Today*, pp. 1, 26-27.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Suzuki, L. A., Ahluwalia, M. K., Kwong Arora, A., & Mattis, J. S. (2007). The pond you fish in determines the fish you catch: Exploring strategies for qualitative data collection. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 95-327. doi:10.1177/0011000006290983
- Walz, G. R., Gazda, G. M., & Shertzer, B. (1991). *Counseling futures* (Report No. ISBN-56109-005-0). Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED329862.pdf>