

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Students: Enhancing School Counselors' Experiences

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The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is the premier teacher education program accreditation body. In addition to reviewing teacher preparation programs in institutions of higher learning, NCATE also reviews school administration programs and other school specialist programs, including school counseling programs. The Kansas State University (KSU) graduate program in school counseling was reviewed and fully reaccredited during the 2009 NCATE visit. Additionally, the College's advanced programs in counselor education, including the master's degree in school counseling, were reviewed and reaccredited in 2009 by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).¹

Both NCATE and CACREP accreditations place high value on candidates in advanced programs who clearly demonstrate knowledge, competencies, and dispositions in diversity. Diversity is infused throughout NCATE and CACREP standards, with the goals being to maximize experiences for candidates to achieve competency with multicultural students; to increase knowledge and skill in multicultural counseling; to revise and update curriculum to ensure multicultural competencies are reflected in all coursework; and to prepare counselors to effectively communicate, collaborate, and participate in outreach. The KSU master's in school counseling program met all NCATE and CACREP standards for diversity in 2009, and the program passed both accreditation visits with acceptable ratings for all standards. However, the reality for candidates in school counseling is that more depth and meaningful experiences would greatly enhance the preparation for counselors to serve as effective change agents with students in today's schools, particularly since school counseling candidates often begin their master's programs with limited exposure to diversity. In effect, the emergent research on which the NCATE standards are created, and the research and recent demographic data discussed in this article, increasingly demonstrate that merely meeting standards is not sufficient to truly meet the needs of candidates earning a degree in school counseling. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to discuss how a project led by counselor educators at Kansas State University is teaming with actual school counselors and

academic advisors to significantly enhance the experiences of school counseling candidates to better meet the needs of all diverse learners.

Basis for the Changing Role of School Counselors in Meeting the Needs of All Diverse Students

Professional school counselors promote and maximize success for all students and help to create a climate where diversity is celebrated.² This success is built on providing a counseling and educational environment/climate that embraces the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students. Like many other educators, the roles of school counselors are being restructured and expanded to meet the ever-changing needs of students, families, and schools due to changes in demographics across the country. School counselors and school counseling programs impact school communities including teachers, students, and families. Given that school counselors are counseling a variety of diverse students, including multicultural students, who have many learning needs, there is a need for new strategies and resources to enhance and maximize the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students.

Preparing professional school counselors to be leaders and advocates in schools with multicultural competencies and to counsel effectively with students and their families from multicultural backgrounds is of national significance. In a position paper adopted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) it was stated: "Effective and ethical school counselors need to possess cultural competence."³ According to the ASCA National Model, schools should ensure that all students have equitable access to school counseling programs.⁴ The model supports schools' mission to promote all students' learning, academic achievement, career development, and personal/social development. Clark and Breman⁵ discussed the model and the "Transforming School Counseling Initiative" which places increased emphasis on the role of consultation and collaboration for school counselors, teachers, parents, and administrators;⁶ in effect, ASCA (2009) described leadership, advocacy, and collaboration as the keys to rigorous educational experiences for all students.

Counselor educators must prepare professional school counselors to "...specifically address the needs of every student, particularly students of culturally diverse, low socio-economic status, and other underserved or underperforming populations."⁷ It is critical for school counselors to be perceived as student advocates and leaders in academic venues. School counselors must create and nurture an environment for all students to experience success and opportunities for access to postsecondary education.⁸ Counselors must work as advocates for those students who do not have a voice to address inequities in schools.⁹ Yet school counseling candidates often begin their master's degree programs with limited exposure to diversity, making it difficult to effectively emphasize the importance of these additional experiences designed to enhance the skills, competencies, and dispositions of counseling candidates. The need is therefore great to better prepare professional school counselors to lead, advocate, collaborate, and consult in schools in order to enhance all students' academic achievement, socialization skills, school retention, and knowledge of and access to postsecondary options.

Need Due to Changing Demographics

At the root analysis, changing demographics are driving the need for enhanced diversity training for school counselors. The change is widespread and endemic, taking in all locales including those that

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traditionally have been bastions of monoculturism and which have been slow to respond to the need for enhanced training. For example, based on a survey of school counselors in Kansas, 80% of counselors reported now having linguistically diverse students in their schools.¹⁰ By contrast, fewer than 10% of these same counselors indicated that they regularly provide counseling services specifically focus on the needs of these students or their families.¹¹ A possible reason for this is the lack of preparation and knowledge in the unique needs and characteristics of these students. This need is widely repeated elsewhere and is of national significance, as between 1972 and 2007 white public school students decreased as a proportion of total pupil population from 78% to 56% and is continuing to diminish. Multiple data sources indicate that the Hispanic/Latino population is now the largest group of diverse individuals and is growing at a rate of three to five times faster than the general population.¹² It is estimated that by 2050 half of the U.S. population will be linguistically diverse, and by 2030 25% of the total school population will be Hispanic/Latino.¹³ These changing school demographics, and the needs that accompany these students, present a challenge to school and college personnel.

These data provide strong evidence of the need for more educated, competent, and skilled counselors and advisors to work with diverse students. Clemente and Collison recommended culturally appropriate interventions, and concluded that students deserve "...attention not only from ESL staff but from school counselors in order to provide academic options for the future and to facilitate the adjustment process within the school system."¹⁴ According to Planty et al., in 2007 white students accounted for 64% of college student enrollment.¹⁵ Thirteen percent of college students were black, 11% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% was American Indian/Alaska Native, and 3% were nonresident students. Yet only 12% of Hispanics earned bachelor's degrees or higher, compared to almost 18% of blacks and almost 31% of whites.¹⁶ With Clark and Breman¹⁷ indicating public school enrollment estimated to be at 51.2 million by 2015 and with the Hispanic population accounting for 50% of all growth in the United States from 2004-2006,¹⁸ it is a significant challenge to expect educators today to effectively serve the 9.9 million students who speak a language other than English and the 6.6 million students identified with a disability and receiving educational services.¹⁹ In addition, diversity in schools today includes a growing student population of individuals living in poverty, as more than 13 million children under the age of 18 are currently living below the federal poverty level. Adelman and Taylor stated, "...school counselors are especially well-suited to play proactive, catalytic roles in defining the future for programs that support the education of all students."²⁰ Adelman and Taylor also noted that teachers are increasingly requesting assistance and support in facilitating academic achievement, in addition to development of learner-healthy social and emotional development.

Addressing diversity in learner circumstance is made even more challenging as Lapan, Kardash, and Turner also stated, "Schools must empower students to enhance their academic achievement and become motivated, lifelong learners"²¹ and as Lapan et al. discussed the need to teach all students to thrive in an information age and technology driven society. For school counselors, the issue takes on conclusive meaning, as Clark and Breman stated: "Teachers appreciate the extra support and collaborative efforts by the counselor in what might otherwise be a frustrating situation in working with students who are struggling academically and/or behaviorally,"²² and as Ramos-Sanchez and Atkinson's research supports practitioners engaging in

outreach programs to educate multicultural families to encourage and promote help seeking behaviors.²³

The data on changing demographics are also imperative relating to providing school counselors with the necessary information, data, strategies, consultation, and support to help counselors themselves "...feel efficacious about working with culturally diverse students."²⁴ According to Campbell and Dahir, "The primary goal of the school counseling program is to promote and enhance student learning."²⁵ School counselors work with all students, school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program and mission of the school. School counselors consult and collaborate with teachers to facilitate achievement for all students. As such, school counseling programs promote school success through a focus on academic achievement and learning, prevention and intervention activities, advocacy, and social/emotional and career development. According to ASCA's role statement, school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement.²⁶ Professional school counselors promote equity and access in their schools by being leaders, advocates, and collaborators to opportunities that challenge all students to rigorous educational experiences. By collaborating with other stakeholders to advance student achievement, school counselors address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of comprehensive school counseling programs.²⁷ If school counselors are intentionally prepared in multicultural approaches, they become the primary personnel in the provision of services to students with specific needs in school communities.²⁸ According to Holcomb-McCoy, "...one of the major challenges facing the field of school counseling today is the preparation of school counselors who are able to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population."²⁹

The result becomes that the growing population of diverse learners needing to prepare to attend college will greatly increase over the next few years, and that these students often have special, complex needs that "...must be addressed by school counselors so that all students may have the same opportunities for appropriate and challenging higher education."³⁰ School counselors are being challenged to become more proactive and engaged in the educational processes to enhance the learning of all students³¹ and school counselors' involvement in these efforts is based on the principles of access, equity, and social justice.³² As Lee stated, "These principles reflect a commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, have the opportunity to achieve to their fullest potential."³³ Portman has even proposed that school counselors become cultural mediators and engage "...in prevention, intervention, and/or remediation activities that facilitate communication and understanding between culturally diverse human systems (e.g., school, family, community, and federal and state agencies) that aid the educational progress of all students."³⁴ Given how an American College Testing study recently found that the strongest factors affecting college retention were the academic factors of high school grade point average (GPA) and ACT score,³⁵ and given how the non-academic factors of SES, institutional commitment, academic goals, social support, academic self-confidence, and social involvement had a strong correlation to retention, it is imperative that the new demographics should drive high levels of intentional counselor education preparation in order to enhance the future of multicultural students and the nation.

Project to Enhance School Counseling Candidates' Meaningful Experiences With Diversity

Professional school counselors are in a unique position to impact the entire school and community by direct interaction with teachers, students, families, school personnel, academic advisors, and community stakeholders. Counselors who are sensitive and skilled in counseling diverse multicultural students and families are critical in facilitating communication, enhancing academic achievement, and enhancing success with postsecondary options. As a result, Kansas State University's faculty in school counseling, the National Association of Academic Advising (NACADA), and select community college advisors are currently teaming with field-based school counselors and academic advisors to engage in outreach and counseling education to provide meaningful experiences to better prepare graduate candidates in school counseling to work with multicultural students.

Referred to as the project team consisting of school counselors and academic advisors, and often others as needed in different communities, subsets of the team are regularly meeting and interviewing teachers, parents, students, and community stakeholders to research, review, and discuss data on the counseling and advising needs of multicultural students. The team is engaging students, families, and teachers with the goal of learning about the needs and effective strategies and interventions for diverse students. Such discussion focuses on topics that facilitate the transition from high school to college, including student achievement, socialization, knowledge, access, and services in postsecondary options resulting in higher student retention. This engagement is one example of the outreach intended to enhance the meaningful diversity experiences of the candidates in school counseling.

The project especially serves as an impetus for faculty in school counseling to be more intentional about preparing school counselors to be advocates and leaders in multicultural education, and to be responsive professionals prepared to work with teachers, diverse students and families. The project informs counselor preparation instruction and educational experiences that develop leadership skills, refine counseling skills, and enhance multicultural competencies by infusing results throughout the counseling program's coursework.

The professional school counselor collaborates with community stakeholders to create a positive learning environment. Teachers, school counselors, academic advisors, and administrators are all affected by the climate and culture of the school. The relationships formed from the collaborations will help to create a foundation for coordination and networking of services intended to facilitate students' educational services. Counseling diverse learners involves teaching self-advocacy, self-empowerment, and strategies to enhance self-esteem through valued achievement. Providing this information in a collaborative manner to teachers who can also use the strategies with students will provide additional opportunities for academic success. ASCA encourages school counselors to become leaders in their districts by becoming advocates for system-wide change to ensure opportunities for success for all students. It is clearly a responsibility of counselor education programs to prepare school counselors to be leaders and advocates in their school districts.³⁶ Self-efficacy and competency are two important keys to counselors assuming these critical roles.³⁷

ASCA noted that when counselors assume the roles of leader and advocate for students, success is significantly promoted and the existing achievement gap is closed among students of diversity.³⁸

Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun, and Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski found that students who attend schools with comprehensive counseling programs rated their school climate, and that these same students reported enhanced opportunity for learning without disruption by peers, reported better relationships with teachers, received higher grades, and expressed higher satisfaction with the quality of education.³⁹ Based on a solid research base and ethical, moral, and economical reasoning, Kansas State counselor educators leading the KSU project feel an imperative to enhance the school counseling program in order to meet the needs of multicultural learners.

The following issues for diverse learners are being addressed in the KSU project: Planning for academic success; strengthening postsecondary retention; growing relationships with families; curriculum review and revisions; and candidate recruitment. Strategies and interventions implemented to address these issues include meaningful engagement, discussions and outreach with counselors and academic advisors, parent and student meetings, review and discussion of postsecondary expectations and resources, examination of candidate multicultural competencies, discovery of leadership dispositions and skills, and creation of plans to address and remediate areas of need.

Planning for Academic Success

In planning for academic counseling intervention implementation, Lee stated: "Counseling interventions are greatly impacted by language issues and value differences that come with the cultural diversity."⁴⁰ Olson and Jerald provided a framework for the discussion of school contextual factors and challenges as counselors, advisors, and teachers plan appropriate interventions to communicate, collaborate, and consult for student success.⁴¹ The following frames the various discussions being carried out by the project team:

1. Achievement gap—Students experience difficulty achieving academic success and have difficulty transitioning to college and/or meaningful work settings.
2. Concentrated poverty—Living in poverty often means families lack resources (health insurance, health care, mental health care) that could enhance learning opportunities.
3. Teaching challenge—Schools are unable to hire adequate numbers of diverse qualified teachers and counselors. Issues that complicate the teaching and counseling of diverse learners include high absenteeism, lack of parental involvement, lack of knowledge regarding language and culture issues, K-12 and postsecondary school retention, and effective teaching strategies.
4. School climate—Significant social and academic issues (conflict resolution, academic success, and socialization) exist in teaching diverse students.
5. Access to resources—diverse students often do not have access or awareness to the same technology or other resources as their classmates.

Short and Echevarria reported that few states currently require specific background or preparation in instructional techniques.⁴² Because of inadequate preparation for teachers in the new and very different classroom of today, teachers have not received enough professional preparation related to successful practices in the teaching of diverse students.⁴³

When fully knowledgeable about learning preference assessment instruments and multi-modal teaching and learning strategies, school

counselors are better able to provide teachers with the latest research on best practices to increase academic achievement for diverse learners. Because effective instruction requires a variety of teaching styles, different in-class methods, and flexibility/open mindedness, the school counselor is the best person in the school to assist teachers and to provide support as teachers implement multi-modal techniques. Successful strategies include: more interaction with peers in controlled environments, active learning, small group cooperative learning tasks, oral presentations, meaningful and relevant learning in a contextual format, multi-sensory presentation, informal assessment, performance-based assessment, extra time, and one-on-one instruction.⁴⁴ In these ways, counselors can provide teachers with information regarding cultural family issues that greatly impact students' achievement. "School counselors and school psychologists also can help teachers better understand how the child's home experiences and cultural background affect values related to learning, use of language, and style of interaction."⁴⁵

Additionally, the affect (feelings) shown by teachers is positively correlated to academic achievement. These teacher characteristics are even more critical in teaching diverse students. Counselors are in a position to assist teachers in understanding the importance of developing personal relationships with diverse students and families. This allows teachers to "...affirm their own support of children and their families and emphasize the need for classroom teachers to provide emotional support for students and communicate the belief that students can be successful."⁴⁶ Thus, the role of the counselor in the consultant role with instructional expertise is pivotal.

Through the project, KSU counselor educators are providing school counselors with a toolbox of instructional strategies and techniques for diverse learners and the consultation and collaboration expertise to share the tools. The toolbox includes both process (general how to study) and content (domain-specific) academic assistance. Examples are active learning tools, such as how to take class notes, graphic organization, questioning techniques, participating in peer tutoring, forming study groups, studying in contextual formats, elaborating on new ideas to connect to prior knowledge, vocabulary acquisition, and test-taking skills). School counselors are educated in universal design for learning and consultation to provide learning support for all students. Specific instruction is provided to counselors on consultation with teachers, parents, and community counselors for students with behavioral, emotional, learning, and other disabilities that are a barrier to learning.

Strengthening Postsecondary Retention

A second area of focus for the KSU project is studying retention issues for diverse students at both secondary and postsecondary levels. Increasingly, students see education as the opportunity to improve their economic status. "In 2003, the average national unemployment rate for those 20-24 years of age at all education levels was 10%. Individuals with a bachelor's degree had an average unemployment rate of 6%, while those with a high school diploma or less had an average unemployment rate of 14%."⁴⁷ In 2007, individuals aged 25-34 with a bachelor's degree earned 29% more than individuals whose highest educational attainment was an associate's degree, and 55% more than individuals whose highest educational attainment was a high school diploma or its equivalent.⁴⁸ Further, NCES (2009) data indicated only 49% of Hispanics, 42% of blacks, and 40% of American Indians graduated with a bachelor's degree within

six years, compared to a 60% graduation rate for whites.⁴⁹ These statistics emphasize the importance of strengthening programs that will help to retain all students in sufficient time to increase likelihood of completing a degree. According to ACT, postsecondary institutions' low retention rates do not take full advantage of the available human talent and resources, jeopardize the workforce and economic development of the future, and pose a threat to the financial viability of postsecondary institutions.⁵⁰

As in many states, diverse students in Kansas leave school prior to graduation at a significantly higher rate than white students.⁵¹ Preparation for postsecondary options and retention and success issues in postsecondary options for diverse students are major concerns for all educators and educational institutions. There is a great cost to institutions, families, and societies when individuals do not succeed in a postsecondary institution which would lead them to better careers and more productive employment.

In the KSU project, activities based on best practices, research, and discussions are created and implemented. Prospective school counselors are taught the theory and strategies of brief counseling which have been proved effective with diverse learners.⁵² Brief counseling is a solution focused on short-term goals, which has appeal to diverse learners. This approach can be implemented in a group, in classroom guidance, or in personal-social guidance program activities. This approach is also effective when counselors and advisors are meeting with parents in small group meetings to discuss postsecondary options.

The academic interventions addressed in the KSU project (discussed earlier) are important counseling tools in enhancing student retention. However, as noted earlier, non-academic factors are also highly significant in reducing risk factors leading to students leaving school prior to completion. In the KSU project, school counselors are taught the importance of infusing these non-academic factors into a guidance program. Examples include how to motivate students, assess and improve students' self-efficacy and self-confidence, and strategies to improve in-school and out-of-school self-concept. In addition, school counselors are prepared to teach students to be socially adept with other students from all backgrounds and cultures, and to become socially involved with professional, interest, honorary, and social organizations at the institutional level. Counselors are also prepared to teach students about the importance of self-advocacy. These non-academic factors have been shown to lead to higher levels of commitment and more defined goals toward higher education on the part of students in schools. Teaching students how to set goals and how to be self-motivated to meet those goals are important components in strengthening retention.

To help students meet those goals and self-advocate, collaboration is key. In the KSU project, school counselors are creating and nurturing collaborative relationships with parents, students, teachers, academic advisors, and key agency personnel for the purpose of enhancing eventual access and success of diverse learners at postsecondary institutions. The counselor and advisor team meetings, interviews, and consultations with teachers, parents, and stakeholders form a basis for solid collaboration. These collaborative relationships are providing a foundation for the future counselor and advisor networking, and student and parent sources of resources and assistance.

Growing Relationships with Families

A third area of focus for the KSU project is the contextual factors that impact the academic achievement of diverse students. The project is helping counselors enhance counseling competence and increase their knowledge of resources to assist with issues, including family stability, student mobility and transience issues, lack of advocacy, teenage substance use, health care, pregnancy, and lack of knowledge regarding educational and career options.⁵³

Simcox, Nuijens, and Lee recommended that programs include student-centered interventions, family empowerment, collegial consultation, and community services brokering.⁵⁴ Consequently, educating school counseling candidates about cultural and family priorities of diverse students is critical to the project's experiences being meaningful and successful. Of particular importance is that Ramirez reported that, while parents of diverse students want to be involved in their children's education, they often do not feel comfortable or do not feel they have the skills to approach the school with their questions or concerns.⁵⁵ The project therefore asserts that if schools had more competent, multicultural responsive counselors and teachers, a greater effort would be made to reach out to all students' parents, and critical education and information could be communicated to better support students' academic achievement and postsecondary options. To remedy the issue of school counselors not providing needed program components, the KSU project has taken the approach that different strategies must be used to teach parents and students about the services available and how to utilize the resources in their community.⁵⁶ To address all these issues, the KSU project promotes skills for school counselors, academic advisors, students, and families in creating communication networks to identify and discuss factors that research indicates have the strongest correlation to postsecondary success. More specifically, counselors are developing programs to better prepare students in the areas of traditional warning signs of students leaving prior to completion of program. An example is an initiative to encourage future postsecondary students to engage in extracurricular clubs and organizations; to seek out tutorial and assistance providers; and to advocate for oneself with professors and teachers. Small group parent seminars are also scheduled for students and families to discuss these issues. For example, as discussed earlier, brief counseling is an approach demonstrated to be effective in these groups such as small group meetings scheduled where teachers, parents, and students discuss access to postsecondary education, financial aid, strategies for college success, counseling availability, advising, and support services. These sessions are co-facilitated by counselors and academic advisors. These small group sessions are particularly critical for parents and students of diverse learners and students from families of first generation college students, and the privacy of the small group provides protection against embarrassment or humiliation. Very importantly, small groups provide valuable feedback to KSU project counselors and advisors on academic needs, socialization and transition needs of students.

Curriculum Review and Revision

A fourth area of focus for the KSU project arises by allowing school counselors new opportunities for the team to discuss, process, and evaluate appropriate assessment, student and candidate data, and participant feedback; to discuss outreach opportunities; to consider and revise curriculum as appropriate; and, to modify teaching materials, assignments, activities, and assessments in graduate counsel-

ing coursework. A result of the collaborative project effort is the development of a more culturally responsive curriculum designed to expand the meaningful experiences of school counseling candidates significantly farther than the experiences that NCATE and CACREP outcomes require. The resulting recommended curricular revisions and revised teaching materials are being fully implemented in counseling coursework, with the goal of increasing mastery of multicultural competencies and meeting professional standards. The School Counselor Multicultural Competencies, CACREP standards, and the Kansas State Department of Education's counseling standards then jointly serve as a framework for the project team as it interviews and discusses issues with multicultural students, families, and academic advisors, and as it plans to infuse in all appropriate course components.⁵⁷ Holcomb-McCoy's research also indicated that the schools most successful in closing achievement gaps were those with counselors who were purposeful leaders; who understood data and who could make accurate implications of data; who implemented data-driven decision making in all areas including professional development; and who included all stakeholders in the communication process.⁵⁸ The KSU project consequently advocates that all school counseling courses must include infusing theory and best practices related to counseling diverse students; must include an active learning component related to counseling diverse students; must include leadership and advocacy development; must provide instruction on learning and cognition strategies appropriate for diverse learners; must focus on collaboration and partnership needs for counselors and teachers providing services to diverse students; must provide mentoring opportunities; and must provide supervised counseling practicum and internship experiences with multicultural students. Of additional critical importance is instruction infused in coursework relating to assessment and testing needs of diverse students, a skill addressed in the school counseling program which currently requires nine hours of research and assessment credit aimed at wise data-driven decision making.

Results of the KSU project have led to required counselor coursework focusing on best practices and effective counseling strategies, and addressing linguistics, learning strategies, academic achievement, cognitive strategies, career development, postsecondary preparation and transitions, family and home relationships, and community resources. Selected coursework in school counseling now includes leadership development and strategies for advocacy as recommended by Holcomb-McCoy.⁵⁹ Faculty members in the school counseling program now teach, consult, and supervise school counselor candidates and work with other educators or stakeholders who have an interest in participating. The counseling practicum also now includes best practice research aimed at the needs of diverse learners, with participants required to provide 40 hours of counseling and required to undergo weekly supervision of counseling and weekly class meetings. It is believed future research will indicate that the KSU project's focus on mastery of multicultural competencies will result in more effective counseling candidates' mastery of competencies and will facilitate students' academic achievement, socialization, preparation for, access to, and success in postsecondary education.

Candidate Recruitment

A fifth area of focus for the KSU project has been aimed at recruiting new counselors from diverse personal backgrounds. Recruitment efforts are specifically focused on teachers who are bilingual,

or who are licensed as English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. KSU counseling graduate program brochures and graduate program Web/Facebook pages are being created to serve as recruitment tools aimed at recruiting in areas of Kansas where there are concentrated numbers of diverse students and teachers. Teachers are being recruited to engage in distance-delivered graduate counseling coursework emphasizing multicultural competencies. Kansas State's school counseling master's program endeavors to prepare counselors with multicultural expertise to be not only licensed as school counselors, but also to be prepared to counsel effectively and to be school leaders and student advocates. To assist in these efforts, the KSU project provides for professional development or consultation opportunities to be provided to teachers, counselors, community college, university, and NACADA academic advisors—all with the goal of promotion of academic excellence and postsecondary opportunities and success with multicultural students. Simcox et al. recommended exactly such an approach for collaboration between school counselors and psychologists for "...promoting culturally competent, academically successful schools."⁶⁰ In effect, these professional development opportunities provided to teachers allow for more opportunity to nurture and facilitate relationships to help keep students in school and expand postsecondary options.

Technology Implementation

Preliminary data indicate that the KSU project has worked well. Success has been significantly aided through the use of technology, including video conferencing and other Web-based communications. The College of Education at Kansas State University has excellent resources in web-based, videoconferencing, and online instruction and support which has made the project's travel and professional development funds much more cost-effective. Graduate students are able to remain in their school districts while completing coursework via online and videoconferencing. Most specifically, the distance education approach enables participants to be involved in the project in a family/professional friendly medium. By allowing participants to earn a master's degree while teaching, the project promotes advanced degrees and provides an avenue for professional development in an area of critical need.

Summary

The initial positive results and likely long-term outcomes of this project are intended to result in preparation of more proactive and more responsive school counselors who effectively serve diverse student learners. The resultant revisions in graduate coursework in school counseling will benefit all counselors and students through high skill development and through the process of outreach and engagement. Counselors and advisors engaging in meaningful dialogue with students and families builds long-term relationships and improved understandings of context for learning and counseling. It is believed this project will result in significantly improved student achievement, recruitment, and retention. Likewise, relationships between schools, families of multicultural students, and the university will be improved due to increased dialogue and attention to student needs.

As a bottom line, culturally competent counselors and advisors will result in academic and social success experienced by students in all educational environments. Likewise, it will result in more culturally responsive counseling, improved collaboration with parents, and

better data collection and interpretation for the benefit of the multicultural community. Ultimately, this project should lead to retention that is positively correlated with increased numbers of educators, counselors, and advisors, and—of greatest importance—students who are empowered for academic success.

Endnotes

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