

# Reichert earns top marks in ACAF's Corey Student Essay Competition

Jeremy Reichert of Colorado Christian University earned the grand prize in the ACA Foundation's Gerald and Marianne Corey Graduate Student Essay Competition for his essay on the need to pay increased attention to career development and career counseling in graduate counseling programs.

For submitting the top-rated essay, Reichert received a \$1,500 scholarship grant and free registration to this year's ACA Annual Conference & Exposition in New Orleans. Each of the four authors of the winning runners-up essays received a \$500 scholarship grant. The contest was open to any counseling student currently taking one or more graduate courses at an accredited college or university.

**Note:** The following essays have been edited only for spelling and minor style issues. The views expressed are those of the essay authors.

## Grand Prize Winner



### Jeremy Reichert

Jeremy Reichert received his bachelor's degree in psychology with an emphasis in philosophy from the University of Colorado, Denver and is currently attending Colorado Christian University in pursuit of his master's in counseling. His ambitions are diverse, including pursuing his doctorate, entering private practice and drastically impacting the field of counseling.

**Career development and career counseling seem to be receiving less and less attention in many graduate counseling programs. Is this a good thing or not? Why?**

We need to be reminded that the alternative to being relevant is to perish. University curriculum must equip students with a full spectrum of skills in order to meet an array of needs. Indeed these needs are in flux, and that is why counseling programs must adapt. Our current economic state of affairs puts counselors with a working knowledge of career development in a high-demand market. Career counseling skills have become invaluable. Lifestyle satisfaction, meaning and fulfillment are objectives of career counseling, and we are seeing an increase in people who are in devastating circumstances and in need of such services.

The counseling field has been fragmented into innumerable specializations so that a general working knowledge of all areas is considered an *obesity of the mind*. This mentality is appealing *prima facie*. However, it becomes counterintuitive when investigated more thoroughly. *Career* is something of a misnomer in today's academia and contributes to the misconception that there is no utility in career development and counseling competence. Universities are lagging as the concept of *career* develops from a strict designation of job title to a lifestyle concept. This may include maturity, awareness in fulfilling life roles, discernment, interpersonal skills and more specific elements — for instance, whether attitudes and behaviors are constructive or maladaptive. To recognize and appreciate the need for career counseling competence, we need to understand that the development of a career is not an isolated occurrence in an individual's life. The term *career* must be conceptualized as a lifestyle concept.

Have you ever noticed when attending a social gathering and meeting new people, the most common question asked is "What do you do for a living?" Furthermore, have you noticed the different responses and body language received from the various answers? There is a great deal of meaning attached to this question. When someone asks this

question, they are not referring to a job title, but an identity; a series of complex judgments begin to take form. In today's dominant culture, one's career choice expresses desire or indifference, joy or depression, success or failure, intelligence or mediocrity. A career is an extension of what a person represents. Career counseling is not merely locating a job for a client and helping them secure it through strengths and weaknesses analysis. It is guiding them in a quest of personal identity and how best to express it through the form of *career*. Career counseling includes helping individuals communicate more effectively, increasing their emotional intelligence and ability to regulate, and aiding them in problem investigation and solutions. Does this sound familiar? Career counseling and development involves the same psychotherapeutic inquiries, investigations, interventions and treatment plans as general counseling, only directed at a specific context of one's life.

Life roles are dynamically interconnected; never will you find them functionally isolated. Clients have a life narrative, and their career is a pervasive element within it. Counselors need to possess the knowledge and ability to skillfully navigate through this lifestyle concept.

### Tracie Self



Tracie Self is a licensed mental health counselor in Iowa who is pursuing a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision from the University of Iowa. She has worked as a counselor in a college counseling center and is currently working in a private practice.

**Through the initiative 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling, delegates from 31 organizations within the profession of counseling have promulgated a consensus definition of counseling that can be used with the public and legislators: “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals.” Should all counselors, regardless of specialty, use this definition? Why or why not?**

There would be great value in counselors adopting a consensual definition of counseling. Lynn Linde (Rollins, 2007) noted one of the greatest challenges facing counselors has been our fractured identity. Without a consensual definition of counseling, counselors have been at a disadvantage when attempting to define our objectives and mission. The general populace may have experienced uncertainty about the work counselors perform because of the lack of a clear definition. Adoption of a singular definition by counseling professionals would assist the profession to more clearly identify not only who we are, but help to solidify our roles within our respective communities.

As a doctoral student, I have often been challenged to consider the role of counselors from varying disciplines, including how alike or dissimilar we are in our specialties. With this challenge comes the notion that if we are to accept our similarities as greater than our differences, we must find a common ground with which we may each identify and yet maintain the integrity of our individual ideology. By doing so, we may be able to correct the fissures among our ranks and present a commonly accepted position. This would assist us with public relations, as counselors would be able to aid members of their local community in establishing a better understanding of counseling tasks along with professional practice parameters.

Yet, even when considering one comprehensive definition, it must be understood that to insist upon adoption of this definition would be at odds with the definition itself. The recognition of diversity within the context of the definition concedes the possibility that no one definition will ever be able to fully

encompass the breadth and scope of all counselors who generally ascribe to the philosophy of counseling held within the membership of the American Counseling Association and its branches. However, this should not imply that we should not establish an acceptable definition of counseling. Instead, we should consider the definition as dynamic and ever evolving.

The process of obtaining a consensual definition of counseling has been the achievement of a major developmental milestone in the counseling profession. The purposeful nature with which this definition was constructed is indicative of the time, concern and serious nature of establishing a single primary description of the counseling profession. The definition of counseling put forth by the 20/20 delegates is illuminating not only because it seeks to define the ideas, theories and complex notions of counselors who are part of the American Counseling Association; it must also contain within its context an ability to be fluid and malleable, while still being foundational. The definition provides for the counseling world a lens through which we may focus our activities and goals, by capitalizing on advancements in our field and working toward mutual objectives which continue to establish the counseling profession.



Rollins, J. (2007). Oversight committee asking for feedback from counseling community as delegates continue discussions. *Counseling Today Online*. Retrieved from: [counseling.org/Publications/CounselingTodayArticles.aspx?AGuid=325d2403-e63e-4b2c-ba28-495391a055cb](http://counseling.org/Publications/CounselingTodayArticles.aspx?AGuid=325d2403-e63e-4b2c-ba28-495391a055cb)

### **Melanie A. Kautzman-East**

Melanie A. Kautzman-East is a graduate student at Youngstown State University.

**Recent court cases have focused on whether practicum students can refer a client because of value conflicts. What is your view on whether counselors may refer a client to another counselor because of strongly held beliefs and values by the counselor?**

The counseling profession is unlike many other professions in that it requires you to fully propose yourself to the betterment of another. It is a profession where respect and consideration of a client's worldview is paramount in the therapeutic process. Its key dynamics lie in justice, respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, fidelity and veracity. However, at its core is the striving for beneficence. In thinking of the referral process from the counselor's perspective, the matter comes down to will versus skill.

In working with individuals who have differing characteristics, skill sets, backgrounds and so on, it becomes the work of the counselor to identify the client's particular worldview. When viewing the world from this vantage point, the counselor then has the capability to apply their professional skill set to assist the client in reaching their therapeutic goals. Regarding the referral process, a counselor must determine whether it is a skill issue or one of will. If a counselor were making a referral based on the rationale that they have beliefs that may be contradictory to those of a client, then it would further make sense that they would be referring the majority of their caseload, in that comparing worldviews of a client with that of a counselor would unfold multiple areas of discord. When it comes down to the root of the dilemma, the issue is usually one of will.

Authentic therapeutic interactions are necessary in the counseling profession. Most meaningful clinical gains are a product of this genuineness; however, a counselor must maintain boundaries throughout these interactions. Continuing work with a client who holds opposing views or beliefs only affects a counselor's belief system if beneficence is not at the core of this process. This belief of having a higher obligation to society allows counselors of individuals experiencing domestic violence to provide a comprehensive safety plan to those planning on return to their abuser. It allows adolescents to become informed about safer sex practices. Promoting wellness, at its best, is about giving your client the skills to live their best life, as defined by them.

The referral process is designed for the protection of the client, not for the convenience of the counselor. As a professional-in-training, practicum hours serve as an opportunity to practice counseling skills and dynamics in an atmosphere where clinical support serves to allow students to strive toward mastery. The will of these counseling students must be to allow each individual to determine their own superlative course in life and to withhold judgment on this course. Only then, with integrity and grace, does a counselor allow their skill to prevail for the purpose of attaining the calling of this profession: to serve as an instrument of empowerment.

### Joelle Drader



Joelle Drader obtained her undergraduate degree from Albion College and her medical degree from Wayne State University School of Medicine. She began her medical training in obstetrics and gynecology but took a sabbatical from medicine to raise a family with her husband Dan. After their three children reached school age, she wanted to work in a helping profession but realized the medical field was no longer a good match for her or her family. She began pursuit of a master's in counseling in fall 2009.

#### **Career development and career counseling seem to be receiving less and less attention in many graduate counseling programs. Is this a good thing or not? Why?**

Carl Jung said, "You are what you do, not what you say you'll do." For many, the choice of a career becomes their personal identity. In the past, it was not unusual to go to school, secure a job and then retire from that job 40 years later. In this scenario, a person could have received initial career guidance at the high school level that would have possibly lasted a lifetime. However, in more recent times of downsizing, layoffs and overall unemployment, this notion of

the security of a single job for a lifetime is becoming less realistic. In today's dynamic work climate, individuals may need to have help with career development and counseling more than once during their lifetime.

With an unemployment rate hovering around 10 percent, according to the United States Department of Labor, it is likely that most counselors will encounter a client presenting with concerns regarding career or work role. It therefore seems prudent that all counselors need to be prepared to assist those who are experiencing transitions in their employment. Furthermore, a change in occupation cannot be addressed in a vacuum. Most likely, along with a career change, the client may experience stress or other difficulties as a result of the effect a change or loss of job has on other life roles.

Counselors-in-training should receive an education that will prepare them to help with a variety of client problems, whether they be concerning careers, relationships, addictions, etc. As a counselor gains experience and knowledge, he or she may feel passionate about specializing in a certain discipline of counseling. This can be beneficial. However, it is still important to maintain a broad knowledge base.

It could be precarious if the counseling profession were to become as subspecialized as our current medical model. This could potentially lead to fragmentation of the client's care that does not serve to maintain viewing an individual as a whole person with interwoven roles.

This contemporary state of more frequent job or career transitions could be viewed in a positive light if one considers this time of change to be an occasion to re-create oneself or complete life goals that may have been put on hold for family or finances. However, even "good" change can be stressful and have ramifications for which one may seek counseling. Presenting for a career-related issue could potentially be a window of opportunity to promote overall mental health wellness for the client.

After recently completing a master's-level career counseling class, it is this student's opinion that the material learned was both invaluable and applicable to a variety of client case studies. It appears evident that it is almost impossible to tease apart one's career role from other life roles and concerns. Career counseling isn't just about choosing a well-fitting job; it can be viewed as one important aspect of an individual's lifetime journey of productivity and fulfillment.

### Kelly G. Fleenor



Kelly G. Fleenor is a graduate student in the counselor education master's program at the University of New Orleans and is currently in the practicum/internship stage of her studies. With this degree and certification, she hopes to practice as a high school counselor and eventually obtain a doctorate in counselor education to become a professor and researcher in the field.

#### **Career development and career counseling seem to be receiving less and less attention in many graduate counseling programs. Is this a good thing? Why?**

Many graduate counseling programs have lost sight of career counseling because, I believe, the traditional material has become outdated and disconnected with the ever-changing global world of work. Counseling professionals should prevent this area of study from becoming antiquated, since it is such an integral part of our everyday lives. I propose that career counseling courses focus instead on providing appropriate career-related tools, technology-based information and applied experiences for students. Thus, clients would be prepared and equipped to make important career decisions through self-exploration and to face other work-related encounters such as transitioning from learning to earning, conquering the competitive job search, negotiating raises and coping with work-related stressors. Furthermore, every gender, ethnicity and religion experiences career-related issues — it is a very multicultural field indeed!

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American worker holds 11 jobs from ages 18 to 44, with anywhere from three to six actual career changes. With such transition in the workplace, what is the role of career counselors? At the University of New Orleans, for example, the counseling

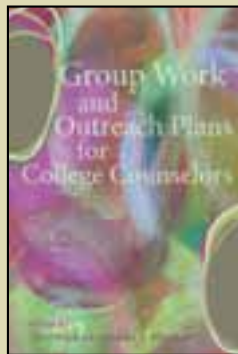
program conveys that this area of counseling is much more than just delivering assessments and conducting mock interviews. The career-counselor-in-training should be prepared to address a larger range of personal and social stressors, such as anxiety when networking, low self-esteem when transitioning careers, preconceived notions about a profession or feeling stuck in a certain job. In other words, one's career can greatly influence his or her mental well-being, just as one's mental well-being can greatly impact his or her career.

With a more current and innovative approach to career counseling, the profession can take a proactive stance to careers, addressing future challenges to be faced in the workplace. Backed with knowledge of financial obligations, personal values, familial influences and career pathways, a counselor could conceptualize a more holistic view of a client's situation. For example, a client who identifies with the LGBTQ community may be struggling to accept a position at a Fortune 500 company with fantastic growth opportunities simply because of the company's lack of partner benefits and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Multiculturalism and diversity always come into play in this field, since understanding a client's worldview is essential when exploring career options. More so than ever before, nontraditional career pathways, such as men in elementary education or women in the engineering arena, are becoming a reality. Empowering clients to prioritize and pursue their career goals and providing targeted resources to cope with actual or perceived roadblocks are just two of the essential roles of future career counselors.

Gaining knowledge specific to the world of work and career management will better equip any counselor, in any setting, dealing with any type of client. From "What will you be when you grow up?" to the retiree struggling to find a postcareer identity, career counseling could be beneficial. Providing restructured training in this area will help to combat experiences of work-related stress and offer our workforce an effective outlet of support and avenues of advancement. ♦

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