

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE COUNSELORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING
PROGRAMS AND THE FIELD OF MENTAL HEALTH

by

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(Under the direction of Georgia B. Calhoun)

ABSTRACT

This retrospective study was designed to ascertain if certain preadmission and programmatic variables used in The University of Georgia's Community Counseling program adequately predict which students will be effective counselors. Data were obtained from 62 students who were initially enrolled in the Community Counseling program between August 1997 and August 2002. Ex post facto correlational methods were used to test the relationship between counselor effectiveness, which was defined by cumulative graduate grade point average, scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and faculty ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE), and preadmission variables, which included undergraduate grade point average, Graduate Record Exam scores, and ratings of personal statements. The relationship between CPCE scores, which also served as a programmatic variable, and counselor effectiveness as defined by cumulative graduate grade point average and faculty ratings on the PCPE was also examined. The implications of the results for training programs and the field of mental health are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Counselor Effectiveness, Community Counseling, Admissions Variables, Programmatic Variables, Faculty Ratings, Predictive Validity

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Counseling can be defined as a dynamic process that incorporates a variety of strategies designed to assist individuals in making positive changes in their lives (Nystul, 1999). Counselors are trained to assist the individuals with whom they work in resolving problems and conflicts within the unique social and cultural contexts in which they live (Nugent, 2000). Additional hallmarks of counseling include a focus on wellness, prevention of problems, and empowerment of clients (Remley, 1992, as cited in Hershenson, Power, & Waldo, 1996). Essentially then, counseling can be defined as “...using empirically validated methods to empower clients to set and achieve feasible goals, to cope with problems of living, and to grow by a process of identifying and mobilizing their personal and environmental resources” (Hershenson, Power, & Waldo, 1996, p. 17). Although related in many ways to mental health fields such as social work, school counseling, and psychology, counseling as a profession has an identity that is unique unto itself.

Much of the history of the counseling profession is rooted in the Vocational Guidance movement (Hershenson, Power, & Waldo, 1996; Nugent, 2000). In fact, the first theory developed specifically for counseling focused on the relationship between personality and occupational choice (Nugent). That particular theory published in 1939 was based on E. G. Williamson’s work at the University of Minnesota’s student counseling center, which was one of the first counseling centers of its kind in the United States (Nugent).

The expansion of counseling as a profession continued with the development of relational forms of therapy inspired by Otto Rank and followers such as Carl Rogers (Nugent, 2000). While interest in client-centered therapy continued to grow, emphasis on testing and the counselor as the authority declined, and greater attention was paid to the client and counseling techniques (Zunker, 1994).

The end of World War II was yet another pivotal point in the development of counseling as a unique profession. At that time, the federal government recognized the tremendous transitional needs of military service members returning from the war and subsequently allocated funds to meet those needs by providing free vocational counseling to all veterans (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). The result was a tremendous increase in the number of university counseling centers across the country, which inevitably led to an increase in the need for trained counselors (Nugent, 2000). Additionally, for the first time, government officials began to recognize that services should be available to assist individuals with more typical types of concerns (Nugent). Prior to those events, mental health services were largely focused on the treatment of severe pathological issues.

The conclusion of World War II was also the advent of counselor training programs. In order to fill the newly formed counseling positions, the Veteran's Administration began funding doctoral level training programs for counseling and clinical psychology (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Unlike clinical psychologists who were trained primarily to treat individuals with severe pathological conditions, counseling psychologists were trained to treat more typical problems that interfered with normal development (Nugent, 2000). For several years, the newly developing field of counseling and its requisite training programs remained within the confines of the educational

system (Hershenson, Power, & Waldo, 1996). However, with its allocation of federal funds to states for the purpose of developing community-based mental health programs, the Community Mental Health Act of 1963 expanded the scope of counseling beyond the educational system (Nugent, 2000).

As with many federally funded programs, the need for community counseling services increased while funding remained scarce (Nugent, 2000). Volunteers answered the call to staff crisis centers, shelters for battered women, and rape counseling centers. The need for more professionally trained mental health practitioners quickly became evident. However, laws dictated that the only individuals who could establish private practices were licensed psychologists trained at the doctoral level. Despite the growing need for master's level psychologists, the American Psychological Association remained somewhat reluctant to recognize a terminal master's degree in psychology (Nugent). Subsequently, master's level community counseling and mental health training programs were developed, and shortly thereafter, guidelines and laws for licensure followed (Nugent). Thus, the profession of counseling gained credibility and became a recognized member of the community of mental health traditions. However, significant challenges to the effectiveness of mental health treatment were yet to come.

Much like psychology, the counseling process is often considered both an art and a science (Nystul, 1999). Over the past three decades, it has been the science side of counseling, psychology, and other subdivisions of the mental health field that has received substantial attention in the literature. The emphasis on scientific aspects of practice can be attributed in part to managed care's demand for evidenced based treatments (Gelso & Fretz, 2001) and greater efficiency of services (Sanchez & Turner,

2003). The necessity of validating psychotherapy's effectiveness was also the result of a history of intense scrutiny among the members of the profession itself (Dryden & Feltham, 1992; Eysenck, 1952; Eysenck, 1966; Eysenck, 1992) as well as members of the general public.

Prior to the 1980s, mental health providers frequently treated patients for long periods of time without much accountability for the outcome or cost of the treatment (Sanchez & Turner, 2003). However, huge increases in the cost of health care forced a reexamination of management issues, the result of which was the precursor to the current system of managed care. Docherty (1999) has suggested that the primary purpose of managed care is to control both the input and output of health care delivery. While some professionals connote managed care with the rather negative view that it is essentially an elaborate method of rationing various health care services to the public (Cummings, Budman, & Thomas, 1998), there are some resultant positive changes, such as the identification of effective practices, that the managed care system has helped foster within the mental health field (Gelso & Fretz, 2001; Sanchez & Turner, 2003).

In addition to managed care's role in facilitating positive changes within mental health, the scrutiny of the general public and even researchers within the field cannot be overlooked as factors contributing to the demand for evidentiary support of mental health treatments. Consider the flurry of controversy that erupted with the publication of Eysenck's (1952) article suggesting that there was no empirical support for the effectiveness of psychotherapy. For decades, Eysenck's vocal criticism of psychotherapy has continued to fan the flames of controversy surrounding the effectiveness of therapy (Eysenck, 1952; Eysenck, 1966; Eysenck, 1992).

Sparking a similarly strong firestorm of reaction among mental health professionals was a 1995 study conducted by Martin Seligman in conjunction with *Consumer Reports*. Although the article reflected favorably on the overall effectiveness of psychotherapy, practitioners and researchers alike were quite critical of the methodological foundation of the findings (Brock, Green, & Reich, 1998) and what were, in their opinions, inherently flawed conclusions about the effectiveness of psychotherapy (Brock, Green, Reich, & Evans, 1996).

While it is important for mental health professionals be confident in their own practices and believe in their effectiveness, it is ultimately members of the general public who must trust that the services practitioners have to offer them will be helpful. Historically, the credibility of psychology and related fields has been subject to rather intense public scrutiny. According to Dennis (2002), prior to World War I, psychologists were considered to be little more than purveyors of common sense. At that time, they also struggled to disassociate themselves from the public's perception that the practice of psychology was similar to that of mind readers and spiritualists (Dennis).

Even in contemporary times, the field continues to fight for credibility in the face of harsh criticism by influential public figures. Consider Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's dissenting opinion in the 1996 *Jaffe v. Redmond* dispute over psychotherapist-patient privilege. By arguing that since there is no cause for legally privileged communications between family, friends, and one's bartender, there is no cause for privileged communications between a psychotherapist and her or his patient. Essentially, Justice Scalia seemed to qualify the psychotherapist's role as that of a glorified listener (DeBell & Jones, 1997). Compare the potential damage to credibility resulting from

Justice Scalia's innuendo to an even more recent disparaging statement from actor Tom Cruise who said of psychiatry, "I think it's an utter waste of time. There's nothing scientific about it. Communication is a good thing, but I think people get more mentally out of having a good meal or going for a walk" (*Houston Chronicle*, January 19, 2004).

Faced with the demand from managed care for evidenced based practices as well as the reality of having to earn credibility with the general public and other health care professionals, the search for more effective treatments and the identification of variables that contribute to effectiveness across various schools of thought gained momentum. Numerous studies attempted to ascertain the efficacy of various treatments for specific disorders (Lambert & Bergin, 1994), prompting the development of practice guidelines. Concurrently with the development of practice guidelines and the growth of manualization of treatments that arose from the identification of specific factors, came the resurgence in interest in common factors, which are those elements that cross the bounds of theoretical orientation and are believed to facilitate effective outcomes.

The rekindling of the interest in common factors was prompted in part by research indicating that techniques from various orientations were equally effective in treating certain disorders (Elkin et al., 1989; Oei & Shuttlewood, 1996). In 1977, the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) determined that the field was ready and willing to take on a collaborative study of the outpatient treatment of depression. One goal of that study was to test the efficacy of two forms of psychotherapy (i.e. interpersonal psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy) that had been empirically supported in the treatment of depression (Elkin et al.).

From its inception, the NIMH Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program (TDCRP) was considered to be the largest and most meticulously designed comparative study of psychotherapy ever assumed (Garfield & Bergin, 1986). Subsequently, when the primary analyses of the research data yielded no significant differences between cognitive behavioral theory and interpersonal therapy as measured by the mitigation of symptoms of depression and improvement in functioning, researchers suggested that finding seemed to support the contention that there were factors (i.e. common factors) that transcended the boundaries of theoretical perspectives and facilitated positive therapeutic outcomes (Elkin et al., 1989). Thus, the focus on treatment variables, or common factors, that spanned the scope of various orientations became increasingly more prevalent.

Since that time, several common factors, such as extratherapeutic factors, relationship factors, expectancy, and model factors, have been identified (Lambert, 1992). Of those common factors, one of the most heavily researched is the therapeutic relationship. While the role of the relationship is an important component of virtually any service related field, it is a particularly salient aspect of counseling (Kolden, Howard, & Maling, 1994). Its importance to the process may stem from the fact that not only does the counseling relationship serve as the context for change, but it is also a primary instrument for change (Kolden, Howard, & Maling, 1994; Rogers, 1957). Second only to client factors, relationship factors are generally considered to be the element of therapy most responsible for the gains that result from therapeutic intervention (Lambert & Bergin, 1994). In fact, Lambert (1992) has indicated that in one particular study, relationship variables accounted for as much as 30 percent of the outcome variance.

Numerous studies provide support for the influence relationship variables have on therapeutic outcomes. For example, the therapist's capacity for demonstrating empathy has been shown to be a factor that distinguishes more effective therapists from their less effective counterparts (Lafferty, Beutler, & Crago, 1989). Additionally, therapists' empathy and positive feelings toward clients have been linked to continuation of therapy (Altmann, 1973). Patterson (1984) examined the results of nine separate studies pertaining to relationship variables and found substantial evidence for the necessity of therapists to be able to convey empathy, respect, warmth, and genuineness in order to achieve a successful outcome. Williams and Chambless (1990) found that the quality of the therapeutic relationship was a predictor of the successful treatment of clients with agoraphobia. Similarly, Orlinsky, Grawe, and Parks (1994), in their review of more than 2000 outcome studies, determined that therapist variables such as empathy, credibility, and affirmation of the patient were strongly related to successful outcomes.

Research has further demonstrated that the degree of benefit clients receive from psychotherapy is more closely associated with the identity of the therapist than with the model of therapy the therapist practices (Crits-Christoph & Mintz, 1991). Essentially, within all therapeutic models, there are some therapists who are able to facilitate more positive effects than other therapists (Lambert, 1989; Luborsky, et al., 1986). Bachelor and Horvath (1999) assert, "...there is strong agreement on the proposition that the therapeutic relationship is an important component of all forms of therapy, and that its overall quality influences the final outcome of therapy" (p. 138). Furthermore, there is significant support for the contention that the personal qualities a therapist possesses determines her or his ability to establish working alliances (Herman, 1993). With such

substantial evidence for the contribution therapist variables make to successful treatment outcomes, it would seem that there is value in training therapists who are most likely to be able to effect positive changes in their clients. Thus, it is clear that the questions of who makes effective therapists and how can they most effectively be identified should be considered when admitting students to counseling training programs.

These questions become increasingly important when one considers the much debated issue of whether or not facilitative therapist variables, such as accurate empathy, warmth, and genuineness, can be taught. Since some prior research has suggested that training and experience are not predictive of counselor effectiveness (Hattie, Sharpley, & Rogers, 1984), training programs may benefit more substantially from focusing their energies on identifying individuals who already seem to possess qualities proven to facilitate effective psychotherapy outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

In general, counseling training programs in the United States today make use of several sources of information in making selection decisions (Federici & Schuerger, 1974; Hirschberg & Itkin, 1978; Littlepage, Brass, & Rust, 1978; Omizo & Michael, 1979). Numerous programs use standardized test scores (Kirnan & Geisinger, 1981) such as the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and the Miller Analogy Test (MAT) to set minimally acceptable criteria for applicants. Grade point averages (GPA) are also typically considered in conjunction with letters of recommendation (Federici & Schuerger, 1974), personal statements (Glenmayer & Oakes, 2002), and professional experience. However, in light of what variables truly play a role in therapeutic outcomes, one must wonder if admissions criteria, such as GRE scores or positive letters of

recommendation, are reliable and valid predictors of overall counselor effectiveness. If counselor effectiveness is largely determined by factors less tangible than GRE scores or one's GPA for example, then it would seem admissions criteria should assess those factors in some way. The question remains, are current selection criteria congruent with what the research says about who will make effective counselors?

Alexander, Heineman, Zarin, and Larson (2002) assert that individuals admitted to graduate programs in mental health related fields determine the future make up of the profession. If it is true, "The quality of the student selected will eventually determine the quality of the graduate" (da Roza, 1988), then it is logical to conclude that the quality of the graduate will determine the quality of the practicing therapist. To take the premise a step further then, the quality of the practicing therapist will determine the quality of therapy, which has significant implications for the effectiveness of psychotherapy in general. Ultimately, who we train as counselors may be as important as how we train them. Thus, if current admissions criteria do not effectively predict which applicants will make the most effective counselors, then there are likely to be broader ramifications within the mental health field as a whole in terms of the effectiveness of therapy and its related credibility.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if certain criteria used in the admissions process in The University of Georgia's Community Counseling program adequately predicts which students will be effective counselors where effectiveness is defined by cumulative graduate grade point average (GPA), scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and faculty ratings on the Professional Counseling

Performance Evaluation (PCPE). In addition, the study is designed to ascertain if successful performance on the CPCE, a programmatic variable, predicts which students will be effective counselors where effectiveness is defined by cumulative graduate GPA and faculty ratings on the PCPE.

Significance of the Study

Most counseling programs spend a fairly substantial amount of time determining who they believe to be worthy of entry into their training programs. The ultimate goal of the selection processes in which programs immerse themselves is to recruit the best students (Sternberg & Williams, 1997) who have the greatest potential to be both academically and professionally successful (da Roza, 1988). The application process can be costly in terms of time and money for both the applicant and the graduate training program (Nevid & Gildea, 1984). Determining which selection variables are most likely to predict who will be successful, may preclude the unnecessary loss of those two commodities.

Perhaps even more significant than a loss of time or money is the psychological and emotional turmoil that results when a student is found to be performing below expectations for training. While that situation is often distressing to faculty members, who must either spend additional time remediating the student or dismiss the student, the student may experience even greater psychological turmoil. Many graduate students sacrifice a tremendous amount of time and energy to fulfill the goal of earning an advanced degree. Often, they resign from jobs to begin full time study and/or are forced to re-prioritize important elements of their lives such as family obligations.

Subsequently, the realization that they are not performing well in their training can be devastating.

In addition to saving time and money and possibly sparing faculty and potential students from psychological distress, the identification of predictive factors for counselor effectiveness has implications for contributing to the overall effectiveness of the mental health field, thereby increasing the credibility of the profession in general. Sternberg and Williams (1997) suggest that recruiting top students to graduate programs in psychology will enrich the field. Again, who we train to be mental health practitioners may be as important as how we train them.

Research Questions

There were two primary research questions governing this study: (1) Which specific admissions requirements and variables were most likely to predict which individuals would make the most effective master's level counselors, where effectiveness was defined as cumulative graduate grade point average (GPA), scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE)? (2) Which programmatic requirements and variables were most likely to predict which individuals would make the most effective master's level counselors, where effectiveness was defined as ratings on the PCPE? Specific research questions pertaining to each admissions and programmatic variable were as follows:

- 1) Does the GRE Verbal subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

- 2) Does the GRE Quantitative subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 3) Does undergraduate GPA predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 4) Do ratings of personal statements predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 5) Do CPCE scores predict cumulative graduate GPA and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

It was hypothesized that admissions variables, specifically GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, and ratings of personal statements, would predict cumulative graduate GPA, performance on the CPCE, and faculty ratings as measured by the PCPE. It was further hypothesized that programmatic variables, namely scores on the CPCE, would predict cumulative graduate GPA and ratings from the PCPE.

The stated hypotheses were based on current research pertaining to admissions and programmatic variables. Findings surrounding the relationships between admissions variables and counselor effectiveness and programmatic variables and counselor effectiveness had implications for criteria used in the selection of applicants to master's level counseling programs. Broader implications of the study concern the effectiveness of trainees in their future careers in the mental health field.

Definitions and Operational Terms

Trainee. A student in a graduate program who is engaged in ongoing training to become a counselor.

Admissions Variables. The set of criteria graduate programs in counseling use to distinguish acceptable applicants from unacceptable applicants to the program.

Outcome Variables. The set of criterion variables use to evaluate counselor effectiveness.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Verbal Subtest (Preadmission Variable). Subtest used to assess an applicant's verbal skills.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Quantitative Subtest (Preadmission Variable). Subtest used to assess an applicant's quantitative abilities.

Undergraduate Grade Point Average (UGPA) (Preadmission Variable). The average sum of points earned per grade at the baccalaureate level.

Personal Statement (Preadmission Variable). A composition written by an applicant and designed to provide information related to the applicant's life experiences, goals for the future, and motivation to succeed.

Cumulative Graduate Grade Point Average (GGPA) (Outcome Variable). The overall average sum of grade points earned at the graduate level of training.

Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) Scores (Programmatic and Outcome Variable). An examination that assesses several essential areas of knowledge, such as human growth and development, social and cultural foundations, helping relationships, group work, career and lifestyle development, appraisal, research and program evaluation, and professional orientation and ethics, within the counseling field.

Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE) (Outcome Variable). A rating scale devised to assess general counseling competencies including basic

communication skills, specific counseling skills, ethical practice, and certain behaviors and personality variables (Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002).

Although they were eventually determined to be so restricted in variance as to be of limited value to this study, the merit of the following predictor variables is still discussed.

Letters of Recommendation. A description, written on behalf of an applicant, providing information related to prior work or academic performance and opinions regarding the applicant's potential to succeed in future endeavors.

Prior Work Experience. The length of time an applicant has been paid to work and the types of tasks she or he undertook in that endeavor.

Volunteer Experience. The types of work activities and the length of time an applicant has engaged in those activities without exchange for payment.

Summary

The current study was designed to ascertain the relationship between admissions variables and counselor effectiveness. It further attempted to determine the relationship between programmatic variables and counselor effectiveness. While both purposes have implications for the graduate training program in Community Counseling at The University of Georgia, they also have broad implications for the mental health field as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to identify variables that predict who will be effective counselors. The predictive validity of preadmission variables, such as GRE scores, GPA, and personal statements, for counselor effectiveness as it relates to content oriented and process oriented skills was examined. In addition to the examination of those preadmission variables, the predictive validity of performance on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), a programmatic variable, was studied. Reviewed in this section are studies pertaining to each of the aforementioned areas, as well as studies pertinent to admissions variables that are frequently used but were deselected for inclusion in this study due to their limited variability.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

The GRE is one of the most frequently used criterion measures in graduate program admissions (Sternberg & Williams, 1997). Additionally, the importance placed on GRE scores for discriminating between who has the potential to succeed in graduate school and who does not continues to be fairly pervasive in spite of sparse empirical support for the GRE's predictive validity (Merenda & Reilly, 1971). Even in the face of inconsistent empirical support for the use of the GRE in discerning potential for success among applicants to graduate programs, the GRE is still used widely today not only as one criterion for admission to graduate programs but also for a variety of other decisions, such as the allocation of university wide funding opportunities (Sternberg & Williams,

1997) and National Science Foundation grants (Merenda & Reilly, 1971; Sternberg & Williams, 1997).

While numerous studies have attempted to determine the level of predictive validity of the GRE, the findings have been relatively inconsistent overall (Littlepage, Bragg, & Rust, 1978; Omizo & Michael, 1979). Sternberg and Williams (1997) conducted a study examining the predictive validity of the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, Analytical, and Advanced tests for GPA and other measures of performance. Using a seven-point scale, primary advisors to forty doctoral level psychology students rated students on five separate scales, namely analytical ability, creative ability, practical ability, research ability, and teaching ability. Other members of the psychology faculty provided ratings of dissertation quality based on a four-point scale.

Sternberg and Williams (1997) found that for students in a doctoral level psychology program, GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores had only "...modest value for predicting grades, at least in the first year of graduate study" (p. 636), but when correlations between GRE scores and grades during the second year of study were examined none were found to be statistically significant. Conversely, the GRE Advanced test of psychology was strongly correlated with first year GPA. In general, GRE scores were not found to be significantly predictive of other important elements of graduate school performance, such as creativity, analytical thinking skills, and research and teaching ability. However, for men, the Analytical subtest of the GRE did predict those types of graduate school performance. Because that finding was limited to men, one must consider the question of whether or not certain subtests of the GRE should be

weighted differentially for men and women when considering their applications to graduate programs.

Newman (1968) conducted a study to ascertain the predictive validity of the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Psychology subtests for the GPAs of 66 psychology graduate students. The results demonstrated that the only variable that correlated statistically significantly with GPA was the GRE Quantitative subtest. However, Newman noted that because the effect size was so small (accounting for only 4.45 percent of the variance) the Quantitative subtest was of limited predictive value. In general, Newman concluded that the GRE was not an effective predictor of grade point averages among psychology students.

Daehnert and Carter (1987) investigated the relationship between pre-admission variables and the performance of 40 to 192 students in graduate programs in psychology. Preadmission variables included undergraduate grade point average (UGPA), Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, personality variables, letters of recommendation, and biographical information. Performance was evaluated through the use of a Preliminary Oral Interview (POI), Graduate Grade Point Average (GGPA), Comprehensive Examinations, Professional Qualifying Exam, Practicum Evaluations, Internship Evaluations, faculty ratings, and peer ratings. Of particular interest here is the fact that the only performance criteria with which the GRE was correlated were comprehensive examination variables. Additionally, it is important to note that only the GRE Quantitative was correlated with those outcome measures.

In another study examining the predictive validity of the GRE, Omizo and Michael (1979) attempted to determine whether or not Verbal scores, Quantitative scores,

and Total scores on the GRE predicted academic performance within a Counselor Education Master's degree program. Using a sample of 107 students, Omizo and Michael found that the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Total scores were not significant predictors of grades in counselor education or psychology courses. Conversely, the GRE Quantitative and Total scores were predictive of grades in educational foundations courses. Omizo and Michael noted that that finding is not surprising considering the fact that the educational foundations courses were frequently comprised of quantitative elements. Finally, it was noted that GRE Verbal scores were predictive of performance on master's level comprehensive examination. Omizo and Michael reasoned that it is logical that verbal ability and performance on comprehensive examinations would be correlated.

Using a sample of 42 doctoral students in psychology, Hackman, Wiggins, and Bass (1970) conducted a study designed to ascertain whether or not GRE scores, indicators of foreign language facility, GPA, and ratings of the academic quality of students' undergraduate institutions were predictive of first year and long-term success in graduate school. Using departmental faculty's definition of what constitutes success, a nine point rating scale was devised and used as the criterion defining long term success. Indicators of first year success included grades in graduate level courses, students' own perceptions of their progress, and faculty assessments of students' progress.

Results pertinent to this section revealed the GRE Verbal score was not significantly predictive of first year grades, but the Advanced subtest was predictive of grades in first year core psychology courses as well as overall GPA at the end of the first year. Furthermore, the GRE Quantitative subtest was found to be related to grades

doctoral students earned in first year quantitative courses. With regard to faculty perceptions of long term success, only the GRE Quantitative subtest was related to that criterion.

In a related study focusing on master's level graduate students in psychology and counseling, Littlepage, Bragg, and Rust (1978) attempted to discern the relationships between admissions criteria, graduate school performance, and professional success. Data such as graduate GPA, undergraduate major, Miller's Analogy Test (MAT) scores, English Cooperative Test Scores, and GRE scores were gathered from student records. Graduate school performance measures consisted of GPA, scores on comprehensive exams, and advisor ratings of academic performance. Using survey data, such as employer ratings and subjective ratings of the quality of the job, Littlepage, Bragg, and Rust obtained information pertaining to professional success. Many of the findings were consistent with the findings of other studies pertaining to the predictive validity of the GRE in that the GRE Verbal score was not predictive of graduate school GPA. That subtest was, however, predictive of performance on comprehensive exams, while the GRE Quantitative subtest was predictive of graduate GPA.

The predictive validity of the GRE Verbal subtest, and other variables, for 19 to 57 master's level psychology students' success in graduate school was further examined by Federici and Schuerger (1974). Within their study, two criterion variables were employed: graduate GPA and faculty ratings of various elements related to performance, such as interpersonal skills and work habits. The entire set of predictor variables included GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, file ratings based on a seven-point scale, and interview ratings. Much like Littlepage, Bragg, and Rust's (1978) findings, Federici and

Schuerger found that GRE Verbal scores were related to graduate GPA, much as GRE Advanced scores were. However, those same GRE Verbal subtest scores were not found to be statistically significant predictors of any of the criterion measures.

In a more recent study, Kirnan and Geisinger (1981) examined the predictive validity of 114 experimental and clinical psychology graduate students' undergraduate GPAs and scores from the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) and the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Advanced subtest for scores on a master's level comprehensive examination. Kirnan and Geisinger reported that although there were no statistically significant correlations between various pairs of variables, the GRE Verbal subtest scores were statistically significantly predictive of success on the master's level comprehensive examination.

In an effort to determine the predictive validity of the GRE for students' performance graduate school, House, Johnson, and Tolone (1987) designed a study using individual psychology course grades and overall graduate GPA as the criterion measures. Records were obtained for 76 former students in a master's level psychology program. Data from all three subtests of the GRE, Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical, as well as data comparing combined scores (Verbal + Quantitative; Verbal + Quantitative + Analytical) were correlated with grades from the following courses: Theories of Personality, Statistics II, Test Theory, Theories of Learning, Theories and Techniques of Counseling, Physiological Psychology, Psychodiagnostics I, Psychological Measurement, Vocational Counseling, and Diagnostic Procedures. Results of the data analysis revealed that only the GRE Quantitative scores were predictive of grades. Specifically, the GRE Quantitative was predictive of grades in one course, namely Psychodiagnostics I.

For comparison purposes, House, Johnson, and Tolone (1987) replicated their procedures using data from 116 students who had enrolled in the same program at an earlier point in time. Similar relationships were found between those students' GRE scores and GPAs. However, none of those relationships were reported to be statistically significant.

Dunlap, Henley, and Fraser (1998) examined the predictive validity of age, gender, race, paid social work experience, undergraduate major, type of degree, school status, undergraduate GPA, and GRE scores for the academic performance of students in a master's level social work program. Academic performance was defined by the scores students earned on their comprehensive examinations. Dunlap, Henley, and Fraser found that of the 654 students in the sample, those who had obtained higher GRE Total scores were more likely to experience academic success in the program. Thus the higher the student's GRE Total scores were, the higher his or her scores on the comprehensive examinations were likely to be.

Holmes and Beishline (1996) elected to ascertain the predictive validity of the GRE for an obvious criterion of success, namely completion of doctoral programs in psychology. According to their results, which were based on a total sample size of 24 students, the GRE Verbal and Quantitative subtest scores, as well as the GRE Total scores, accurately predicted whether or not all 24 students completed or left their respective programs. However, of the remaining students in the sample, the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Total scores resulted in 24 false positives (i.e. the scores suggested the student would complete the program, but she or he did not) or false negatives (i.e. the scores suggested the student would not complete the program, but she or he was

successful in doing so). Holmes and Beishline also point out that there were a substantially greater number of false negatives (16) than there were false positives (8). Thus, one must begin to wonder how many applicants who might well be successful in graduate programs in psychology are being eliminated from consideration based on their GRE scores.

Amidst the concerns already raised about the GRE is the issue of possible gender bias (Sternberg & Williams, 1997). Glanz (1996) concluded that the GRE's Physics Advanced Subtest was not only found to be a marginal predictor of performance of graduate students, but it also favored men. In addition, as previously mentioned, Sternberg and Williams (1997) found that the Analytical subtest of the GRE was predictive of certain salient aspects of graduate school success other than GPA, but it was predictive only for men.

While the majority of the literature suggests that the GRE's predictive validity is poor to modest, there has been some research that yielded more positive results regarding the GRE's predictive validity. For example, Ewen (1969) conducted a study pertaining to the predictive validity of the GRE for male students' success in psychology programs. Ewen found that although the GRE aptitude tests failed to predict male students' performance in their respective psychology programs, the GRE Advanced Test in Psychology did yield significant predictive validity for earning A's in coursework and for completing the degree.

Merenda and Reilly (1971) conducted a retrospective study designed to ascertain the predictive validity of total undergraduate GPA, undergraduate GPA in psychology courses, GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Advanced subtest scores, and ratings of the

caliber of the undergraduate institution for the graduate school performance of 77 psychology students. The criterion variable consisted of classifying students into three discrete groups distinguished by their progress toward earning their degrees. Thus, the most successful group of students was characterized as having earned their degrees (or being in the process of doing so) without any significant delays. The next most successful group was comprised of students who had also earned degrees (or were in the process of doing so) but for whom some delays in progress had been encountered. The reasons for those delays consisted of things such as course failures or failure on comprehensive exams. The third and final group of students was generally considered to be the least successful. That particular group was comprised of students who, during the time of the study, had failed to earn their degrees. The inability to obtain the degree was attributed primarily to academic failure. Thus, those three groups defined the criterion measure.

The results of the study revealed that students who completed their degrees without any significant delays earned higher averages on each of the six predictor variables than students in either of the other two groups. The reverse was true of students who encountered appreciable delays in earning their degrees. Merenda and Reilly (1971) note that of the variables they examined, the most accurate predictors were total undergraduate GPA, GRE Advanced, and grades earned in undergraduate psychology courses.

As evidenced by the research findings presented here, the predictive validity of the GRE seems to be highly inconsistent. Ingram (1983) sums it up by going so far as to say, "...empirical evidence cannot support the validity of the GRE" (p. 711).

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Many of the same studies which examined the predictive validity of GRE scores for success in graduate school also examined the predictive validity of GPA, another admissions variable utilized by most graduate programs in counseling. Daehnert and Carter (1987), in their study of the predictive validity of academic variables, personality variables, letters of recommendation, and biographical variables for performance in doctoral level and master's level psychology programs, found that undergraduate GPA was predictive of performance on one type of programmatic comprehensive exam, but it was predictive of little else.

Similarly, in their study of the predictive validity of aptitude and ability measures, undergraduate academic performance, foreign language facility, and quality of undergraduate institution for first year and long term success, Hackman, Wiggins, and Bass (1970) found that psychology doctoral students' GPAs in their last two years of undergraduate work were not predictive of grades in any core psychology courses or end of the year GPA in a psychology doctoral program. Furthermore, those same grades were not predictive of faculty ratings of performance, self-ratings of performance, or the overall criterion of long-term success. However, it is interesting to note that when undergraduate grades in psychology were correlated with grades in the doctoral program, statistically significant relationships between core psychology courses and end of the year GPA were found. Additionally, undergraduate grades in biology and physical science courses were found to be correlated with faculty ratings of progress and the long-term success criterion.

As described previously, Littlepage, Bragg, and Rust's (1978) study of the relationship between admissions variables and success in a master's level psychology program, demonstrated that undergraduate GPA was not predictive of overall graduate GPA or professors' ratings of performance for psychology and counseling students. When undergraduate GPA was compared to scores on the comprehensive examination though, it was found to be a statistically significant predictor for those scores. Similar support for the predictive validity of undergraduate GPA for performance on comprehensive examinations was found in a study of students in a master's level social work program (Dunlap, Henley, & Fraser, 1998). Data analyzed by Dunlap, Henley, and Fraser yielded statistically significant correlations between undergraduate GPA and scores on comprehensive examinations.

In contrast to some findings that undergraduate GPA is not a reliable predictor of success in graduate school, Omizo and Michael (1979) found that undergraduate GPA was a statistically significant predictor of several criterion variables of success within a counselor education master's degree program. In their study, Omizo and Michael attempted to ascertain whether or not undergraduate GPAs and GRE scores were predictive of students' (N = 107) grades in courses, scores on comprehensive exams, and cumulative graduate GPAs. Using a sample of 107 students, Omizo and Michael found that undergraduate GPA was predictive of scores in educational foundations courses and scores on a master's level comprehensive examination. In addition, undergraduate GPA was also a statistically significant predictor of graduate GPA.

Similar results were found by Merenda and Reilly (1971) in their study of 77 graduate students in psychology. The study was designed to ascertain the predictive

validity of total undergraduate GPA, undergraduate GPA in psychology courses, GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Advanced subtest scores, and ratings of the caliber of the undergraduate institution for performance in a graduate level psychology program. Merenda and Reilly found that total undergraduate GPA and grades earned in undergraduate psychology courses were two of three variables found to be significant predictors for success, where success was defined in terms of students' progress toward the degree.

Unlike Omizo and Michael's (1979) and Merenda and Reilly's (1971) findings, Kirnan and Geisinger (1981) found that undergraduate GPA was not predictive of performance on a master's level comprehensive examination. Kirnan and Geisinger attempted to determine the predictive validity of undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, and scores on the MAT for psychology students' performance on a master's level comprehensive examination. The discrepancies between Omizo and Michael's findings and those of Kirnan and Geisinger seem consistent with Bean's (1975) assertion that what grades actually represent varies from institution to institution.

Federici and Schuerger (1974) also examined the predictive validity of undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, and file ratings for master's level psychology students' success in graduate school. Success was defined in relation to faculty ratings of certain interpersonal skills as well as graduate GPA. The results supported the predictive validity of undergraduate GPA for graduate GPA, but undergraduate GPA was not found to be significantly predictive of faculty ratings of students' interpersonal skills.

Ayers (1971) designed a study to determine the relationship between undergraduate GPA, MAT scores, scores on the New Purdue Placement Test in English

(PET), scores on the National Teacher Examination (NTE), and graduate GPA. The entire subject pool consisted of 241 graduates who had completed a Master of Arts in education. The data revealed that undergraduate GPA was, in fact, a better predictor of graduate GPA in Administration and Supervision (N = 86) and Curriculum and Instruction (N = 47) than in Guidance and Counseling (N = 108). Ayers asserted that success in counseling courses may not be dependent upon the same factors that success in other types of courses is dependent upon.

Just as research pertaining to the GRE suggests its predictive validity is relatively inconsistent, so to does research pertinent to GPA. The studies presented here seem to support the contention that the predictive validity of GPA is uncertain. It seems likely that restrictions in the range of grade point averages as well as the significant variability of the true meaning of grades from one institution or program to another might be causally related to the inconclusive results concerning the predictive validity of GPA.

Personal Statements

Although the personal statement is frequently used as an admissions variable in many graduate programs (Gibbs, 1994; Miller & Koerin, 1998), its value, much like the value of letters of recommendation, has not been studied to a great extent. Over the course of nine years, Piercy, Dickey, Case, Sprenkle, Beer, Nelson, et al. (1995) studied the predictive validity of certain admissions criteria for a marriage and family therapy doctoral program. Using data from 34 marriage and family doctoral students, they attempted to ascertain whether certain admissions criteria, such as student autobiographies, were predictive of job related performance criteria, including clinical skills, academic skill, and research related skills. Results of the study revealed a positive

relationship between student autobiographies, which are similar to personal statements, and both the quantity and quality of publications.

GlenMaye and Oakes (2002) attempted to evaluate the suitability of applicants to a master's level social work program by devising an objective method of scoring personal statements. The instrument assessed five areas, namely self-awareness, life experience and motivation, writing proficiency, social work commitment, and social work career goals. The predictive validity of those scores for the field practicum evaluation scores of the 64 students enrolled in full or part-time study in a master's level social work program was then examined.

All applicants were divided into two groups, top fifty percent and bottom fifty percent, based on where they fell in relation to the median overall rating score. Then, the relationships between various admissions variables, such as undergraduate GPA and personal statement, undergraduate GPA and work experience, undergraduate GPA and letters of recommendation, personal statement and experience, personal statement and letters of recommendation, were compared. The correlation between personal statements and GPA was statistically significant but low. Similarly, the correlation between personal statement and experience was statistically significant but low as well. Of additional relevance, personal statements were negatively correlated with letters of recommendation but not statistically so.

GlenMaye and Oakes did further comparisons by dividing the 33 students who were admitted to the full time social work program into quartiles based on their field experience ratings. Relationships between personal statements and field experience scores, GPA and field experience scores, experience and field scores, and letters of

recommendation and field scores were then examined among students within the highest and lowest quartiles. When those comparisons were made, personal statements and field experience scores were not found to be statistically significant. In general, none of the admissions variables were significantly correlated with field experience scores. With specific regard to personal statements, GlenMaye and Oakes concluded that they did not predict academic success in the program, where success was defined as both field experience scores and GPA at the end of the first year of the program.

In a study conducted by Powers and Fowles (1996), the relationship between the personal statement and other indicators of writing ability was examined. Personal statements were compared to essays written under controlled conditions. The essays, as well as the personal statements, were then scored by trained readers using the same scoring criteria. Due to the fact that the correlations between the personal statement and the essay were low, it was concluded that the personal statement and the essay were not likely to be measuring the same elements.

Correlations between students' personal statements, essays, and various "non-test" indicators of writing skill were also examined. Results of those analyses suggested that the essay, much more so than the personal statement, correlated significantly with self-ratings of writing skill in comparison to peers, grades on recent writing assignments, perceived success with writing, and demonstrable accomplishments related to writing.

Finally, the relationship between personal statements, essays, and performance on the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical subtests was examined. The essay, which was written under controlled circumstances, correlated much more strongly with the GRE Verbal and Analytical subtests than did the personal statement. The personal statement

correlated more consistently but relatively weakly with all three subtests. It was concluded that there is value in the capacity of the personal statement to provide information about individuals' attributes and experiences, but it does not appear to be as effective a measure of writing ability as is the structured essay.

Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination

In most studies, comprehensive examination scores were used as dependent rather than independent variables. However, in a previously described study conducted by Littlepage, Bragg, and Rust (1978), the predictive validity of graduates' comprehensive exam percentiles for faculty members' subjective ratings of jobs and employers' perceptions of potential for advancement was ascertained. The results of the study demonstrated that comprehensive exam percentiles were positively related to faculty job ratings and employers' perceptions of graduates' potential for advancement. The higher the graduate's comprehensive exam percentile was, the higher the job ratings and advancement potential were.

Most comprehensive examinations are designed to ascertain the level of mastery students have obtained in terms of the content taught in their courses. Essentially, comprehensive exams are largely a cognitive achievement measure as opposed to a practical skills measure. Although there is very little research pertaining to the predictive validity of comprehensive examinations, it seems logical to assume that they are likely to be predictive of GPA, since both grades and comprehensive examinations are generally intended to measure similar elements of training.

Letters of Recommendation

Overall, there is scant research pertaining to letters of recommendation, especially with regard to their predictive validity for success. The paucity of research pertaining to letters of recommendation is of particular concern when one considers how much influence letters of recommendation often hold in selection decisions. For example, Ingram and Zurawski (1981) found that the majority of variance in one committee's ratings of applicants to a clinical psychology doctoral program could be attributed to letters of recommendation. Landrum, Jeglum, and Cashin (1994) obtained information pertaining to the weights assigned to various admissions variables from 55 different graduate institutions offering doctorates in psychology. They found evidence for the substantial importance placed on GPA, GRE scores, research experience, biographical information, and letters of recommendation.

In their 1974 study, Federici and Schuerger considered the predictive validity of letters of recommendation for their capacity to predict graduate level GPA and faculty ratings of certain interpersonal skills. Data were obtained from applicants admitted to a master's degree program in professional psychology and were collected over the course of a three year period. During that time, admissions criteria were changed, resulting in the absence of some data for some participants. In general, the number of subjects ranged from 19 to 61. While other variables were somewhat predictive of graduate GPA, letters of recommendation were not. Furthermore, unlike interviews and biographical information, letters of recommendation were not found to be significantly related to certain interpersonal skills of importance to the program being studied.

In contrast to Federici and Schuerger's (1974) findings, Daehnert and Carter (1987) found that letters of recommendation were predictive of success in graduate school. Using 192 doctoral level and masters level students from a psychology program, they designed a study to ascertain the relationships between pre-admission variables and within program performance measures. Within program performance measures consisted of oral interviews, graduate GPA, comprehensive examination scores, professional qualifying examination scores, practicum evaluations, internship evaluations, faculty ratings, and peer ratings. Some data were not available for all 192 subjects.

Within the study, letters of recommendation were assigned scores based on the strength of the recommender's evaluation, the dynamic, personal nature of the letter, whether or not the letter was written by a psychologist, the strength of the endorsement, and the percentile rankings provided in the letter. Analysis of the results revealed that dynamic letters written by psychologists were predictive of performance on an advanced comprehensive examination. In specific relation to letters of recommendation, letters written by psychologists in general were predictive of performance on a developmental exam, while dynamic letters written by professionals other than psychologists were predictive of performance on an advanced comprehensive exam.

As mentioned previously, Piercy, Dickey, Case, Sprenkle, Beer, Nelson, et al. (1995) studied the predictive validity of certain admissions criteria for a marriage and family therapy doctoral program. In addition to several other admissions variables, Piercy et al. examined whether or not letters of recommendation were predictive of clinical, academic, and research related skills. Their results suggested that letters of recommendation were in fact predictive of research related skills. To be more specific,

letters of recommendation, like student autobiographies, were positively related to both the quality and quantity of students' publications. However, they were not predictive of performance on other outcome measures such as academic, clinical, and research ratings.

In contrast to the findings of Piercy et al. (1995) that letters of recommendation have a positive relationship to performance in graduate school, a study by Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, and Jacobs (1999) yielded different results. Pelech et al. attempted to determine the relationship between specific pre-admissions variables and students' later difficulties in courses and practicum experiences. The participants consisted of 22 master's students, in a social work program, who were identified as having problems in the program if two or more faculty members indicated the students had had problems in one or more competency areas. The comparison group consisted of randomly selected students who had not been "identified" by faculty members. Problems for which students were identified included: difficulty adapting to the practice setting, necessity of extending the practicum experience, poor academic performance, and/or difficulties managing interpersonal relationships in the classroom or practicum setting. The pre-admission data of the identified students, which consisted of faculty ratings of references, demographic information, admissions source, academic preparation, and work experience were subsequently compared with the pre-admission data of the random selection of students who had not been identified.

The results of the Pelech et al. (1999) study suggested that ratings of letters of reference had little predictive validity. Pelech et al. noted that ratings of letters did not distinguish students who were identified as having problems with elements of their training program from students who had not been identified as having problems.

Much as is the case with other admissions variables, letters of recommendation appear to be rather inconsistent in terms of their ability to predict success in graduate programs within the mental health field. It seems plausible that some individuals who write letters of recommendation may in fact have a tendency to provide the same level of support to all students. Subsequently, they may be less candid in expressing their opinion of the applicant's true suitability. Those issues have the potential to limit the variability of letters of recommendation. Such was the case for letters of recommendation written for students applying to The University of Georgia's Community Counseling program. Therefore, although data from letters of recommendation were available, the decision was made not to include them in this study.

Prior Work Experience

Using 33 participants from a master's level counselor education program, Hurst and Shatkin (1974) examined the relationship between admissions variables and certain interpersonal skills deemed important for counseling, namely empathic understanding, respect, and facilitative genuineness. In their study, prior work experience was included among several other predictor variables, such as undergraduate GPA, scores on the Miller Analogy Test, undergraduate major, recommendations, and work experience. Results of the study suggested there was a negative relationship, albeit not statistically significant, between work experience and performance, where performance was defined as levels of empathy, respect, and genuineness. Although Hurst and Shatkin concluded that work experience and other nonintellective variables may not be very useful in discerning the facilitative skills of individuals, they also acknowledge that their small sample size and method of scoring limits the generalizability of the findings.

Dunlap (1979) conducted a study designed to examine whether or not various admissions variables predicted students' professional potential and academic performance in a graduate program in social work. The data were obtained from 87 social work students, presumably from a master's level program. The independent variables examined included undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, type of degree, interview ratings, letters of reference, and the amount of prior work experience in the social work field. The dependent variables were students' graduate school grade point averages and faculty ratings of professional potential.

Of particular relevance to this section, Dunlap (1979) found that having two or more years of prior experience in the field was negatively related to faculty ratings of professional potential and to graduate GPA. Conversely, it was noted that having six months to two years of prior experience in social work or a related field was positively related to academic performance and ratings of professional potential. Thus, this study seems to suggest that some work experience in the field of human services may be positive, but too much of a good thing may hinder academic achievement and professional potential.

In a related study, K. M. Dunlap, Henley, and Fraser (1998) examined the predictive validity of a variety of admissions criteria such as demographic information, social work experience, undergraduate major, undergraduate degree, baccalaureate school status, GPA for the last two years of undergraduate study, and GRE scores for scores on master's level comprehensive examinations. The sample consisted of 654 social work students ranging in age from 21 to 65 with an average age of 33. Analysis of the results was consistent with Dunlap's (1979) findings pertaining to the predictive validity of

professional work experience. Students with prior professional social work experience scored significantly lower on comprehensive examinations than did students who did not have professional social work experience.

Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, and Jacobs (1999) conducted a preliminary study to ascertain the relationship between pre-admission data for students applying to a social work program and difficulties students faced later in their courses and practicum experiences. The participants consisted of 22 master's students, in a social work program, who were identified as having problems in the program if two or more faculty members indicated the students had had problems in one or more competency areas. The comparison group consisted of randomly selected students who had not been "identified" by faculty members. Problems for which students were identified included: difficulty adapting to the practice setting, necessity of extending the practicum experience, poor academic performance, and/or difficulties managing interpersonal relationships in the classroom or practicum setting. The pre-admission data of the identified students, which consisted of demographic information, admissions source, academic preparation, work experience, and faculty ratings and references were subsequently compared with the pre-admission data of the random selection of students who had not been identified.

The findings of the study suggest that in comparison to students who were not identified, students who were identified were more likely to be older males with lower undergraduate GPAs and more experience in a related field of work. Identified students were also considered to be less emotionally mature, as evidenced by evaluations based on several sources of information such as personal statements, references, and an application form. Thus, in this particular study, individuals who were identified as having problems

in the program entered with significantly more work experience in the social service setting. They also tended to hold a larger number of social service related positions than their counterparts who had not been identified. Consistent with the findings of previous research, Pelech et al. (1999) found a negative relationship between work experience and performance in graduate programs related to the mental health profession.

Though it focused primarily on personal statements, the results of the GlenMaye and Oakes (2002) study described previously also examined findings pertaining to the relationship between practicum evaluation ratings and prior work and volunteer experiences as well as the relationship between personal statements and experience. Like other studies, GlenMaye and Oakes found that the correlation between prior work experience and practicum ratings was negative, but unlike other findings, it was not statistically significant. With regard to the relationship between personal statements and experience, GlenMaye and Oakes indicated that the correlation was, in fact, statistically significant, but they characterized it as being quite low.

Volunteer Experience

While there has been research conducted on the relationship between prior work experience and performance in graduate programs in mental health related fields, it appears as though volunteer work has not been examined to the same extent. It may be that programs value applicants' volunteer experiences but do not consider those types of experiences as likely to define students' success in the program.

It would seem that volunteer experiences in areas related to mental health might provide students with helpful background information upon which to build future learning. However, based on the results of studies related to professional work

experience, some might conclude that a significant amount of volunteer experience might have the potential to later hinder students' performance in training.

In general, the vast majority of applicants to The University of Georgia's Community Counseling program had relevant volunteer and/or professional work experience. However, because the variability of those experiences was so limited, the decision was made to omit that data from this study.

Summary

Much of the current research related to the predictive validity of GRE scores, GPA, comprehensive examinations, and personal statements for counselor effectiveness has yielded inconsistent findings. Limited conclusions can be drawn about the predictive validity of a programmatic variable, such as comprehensive examinations, due to the severely restricted quantity of research that has been done using comprehensive exam scores as a predictive variable rather than as an outcome measure. For the purposes of this study, the predictive validity of those variables was examined in relation to measures of counselor effectiveness that reflected the values of the Community Counseling program at The University of Georgia.

Letters of recommendation, prior work experience, and volunteer experience are used by many programs across the country, including the Community Counseling program at The University of Georgia, to make admissions decisions. However, they were deselected for inclusion in this study due to the limited amount of variability present in those variables among applicants to The University of Georgia's program.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study was designed to ascertain the relationship between counselor effectiveness and certain preadmission and programmatic variables of The University of Georgia's master's level Community Counseling program. For the purposes of this study, effectiveness was defined by scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), faculty ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE), and cumulative graduate grade point average (GPA). The preadmission variables examined included undergraduate GPA, Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, and ratings of personal statements. Students' scores on the CPCE, a programmatic variable, were examined as both an outcome variable and as a predictor variable.

It was hypothesized that GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, and ratings of personal statements would predict cumulative graduate GPA, performance on the CPCE, and faculty ratings as measured by the PCPE. It was further hypothesized that scores on the CPCE would predict cumulative graduate GPA and ratings from the PCPE.

Description of the Sample

Preadmission and programmatic data from 62 graduate students from The University of Georgia's Community Counseling program were examined retrospectively. The students were initially enrolled in the program between August of 1997 and August of 2002. Within the sample, there were 54 female students and eight male students. Fourteen of the students identified themselves as African American; one student

identified as Asian Pacific Islander; 44 students identified themselves as White, and three students did not identify their race.

The mean undergraduate GPA was 3.47 with a range of 2.68 to 4.0.

Approximately 90% of the students in the sample had an undergraduate GPA at or above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, while 10% had undergraduate GPAs below 3.0. Graduate level GPAs ranged from 3.63 to 4.0.

Procedures

Preadmission and programmatic data were obtained from cumulative records the department keeps on every student. A faculty member who, under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), was eligible to access students' academic records eliminated all identifying information from the data and later assigned each student's data file a number. Subsequently, students' identities were concealed from the principle investigator, thereby preserving their confidentiality. Specific information obtained from cumulative records consisted of preadmission variables: GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, personal statements, age, race, and gender. Additional information obtained from students' cumulative records included programmatic variables such as cumulative graduate GPA and scores from the CPCE.

Copies of each of the personal statements belonging to the individuals in the research sample were made by a faculty member eligible to do so under FERPA. Identifying information contained in the personal statements was subsequently removed before giving the statements to the principle investigator who was responsible for rating each of them.

The personal statements were rated based on a rubric that was developed specifically for this study (see Appendix A). The primary investigator read each statement in its entirety one time. Each statement was then read a second time and evaluated using the Personal Statement Rubric. Finally, the statements were read a third time to ensure accurate ratings had been made.

Counselor effectiveness was assessed through scores on the CPCE as well as cumulative GPA and faculty ratings on the PCPE. After consenting to participate in the study (see Appendix B), two faculty members who oversee the Community Counseling program, and therefore were familiar with the performance of all the Community Counseling students, used the PCPE (see Appendix C) to retrospectively rate each of the master's students for effectiveness. Once the faculty members rated the students, they discussed discrepant items to determine if they could come to consensus on those particular ratings. Thus, ratings on the PCPE, as well as scores on the CPCE and cumulative graduate GPA, served as the criterion measures by which the predictive validity of the independent variables was judged.

Research Design and Analyses

Ex post facto correlation methods were used to test the relationships between counselor effectiveness and certain preadmission and programmatic variables. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Canonical correlations, which provide a quantitative measure of the relationship between a specific set of predictor variables and a specific set of criterion variables, were also computed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Regression analyses were run subsequent to

the canonical correlations. Statistically significant results were identified and examined in greater detail.

Table 1 delineates the primary relationships that were examined within the scope of this study.

Table 1

Primary Correlations

Ratings of Personal Statements	x	Faculty Ratings of Counselor Effectiveness
Objective Preadmission Variables	x	Objective Measures of Effectiveness
Objective Measures of Effectiveness	x	Faculty Ratings of Counselor Effectiveness

Secondary correlation analyses were run in order to ascertain the relationship between ratings of personal statements and objective preadmission variables, such as GRE scores and undergraduate GPA.

The two primary research questions addressed in this study were: (1) Which specific admissions requirements and variables are most likely to identify the individuals who will make the most effective master’s level counselors, where effectiveness is defined as cumulative graduate GPA, scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE)? (2) Which programmatic requirements and variables are most likely to identify the individuals who will make the most effective master’s level counselors, where effectiveness is defined as ratings on the PCPE? The following research questions define more specifically the relationships examined within this study:

- 1) Does the GRE Verbal subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

- 2) Does the GRE Quantitative subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 3) Does undergraduate GPA predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 4) Do ratings of personal statements predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 5) Do CPCE scores predict cumulative graduate GPA and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were the GRE, the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE). A measure related to the evaluation of personal statements was also used and will be described here as well.

Graduate Record Exam (GRE). The Graduate Record Exam is designed to assess verbal, quantitative, and analytical skills that individuals have acquired over an extended period of time (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2003). The GRE General Test consists of three subtests: Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical.

The Verbal subtest of the exam measures one's ability to evaluate and analyze information gleaned from written documents and subsequently integrate that information effectively. It also assesses a person's ability to analyze the relationships among parts of sentences and between words and concepts (ETS, 2003). Finally, the Verbal subtest examines the test taker's skill at using word reasoning to solve problems (ETS). The Quantitative subtest of the GRE purports to measure mathematical skills along with

quantitative reasoning abilities and comprehension of basic mathematical concepts (ETS). The most recent version of the Analytical subtest of the GRE tests an individual's ability to think critically and write analytically. The quality of written articulation and the ability to devise a coherent and focused composition is evaluated within the scope of the Analytical subtest (ETS).

In a recent document produced by ETS (2003), reliability coefficients were provided for each of the subtests within the GRE General Test. The reliability coefficients were based on the median score derived from twelve computerized administrations of the GRE. The reliability of the Verbal subtest was noted to be .92, while the reliability of the Quantitative measure was of similar strength at .91. Of the three subtests comprising the GRE General Test, the GRE Analytical measure had the lowest reliability at .72.

ETS (2003) also provided average estimations of correlations between the GRE General Test, undergraduate GPA, and first year graduate GPA according to department. Of the 4211 examinees within social science departments from which these data were pooled, the Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical subtest correlation coefficients were .33, .32, and .30 respectively for first year graduate grades. Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical correlations were then weighted and combined to provide a single coefficient, which was an indicator of the predictive validity of the compilation of the three variables for first year graduate GPA. That correlation was .37. Similar methods were used to calculate a correlation coefficient for the predictive validity of the combination of the Verbal subtest, Quantitative subtest, Analytical subtest, and undergraduate GPA for first year graduate GPA. Within the social sciences, that coefficient was relatively high at .48.

Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE). The Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination is a nationally standardized test designed to assess counseling students' knowledge of content relevant to the counseling field. The test itself consists of 160 multiple choice questions and is designed to mirror the National Counselor Exam (NCE). Students are tested on eight essential areas of expertise in counseling. Those areas include: Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Career and Lifestyle Development, Appraisal, Research and Program Evaluation, and Professional Orientation.

The Human Growth and Development subscale is designed to assess students' knowledge of general developmental trends, principles of lifespan development, the influence of heredity and environment on development, and the impact of stress on development. Social and Cultural Foundations assesses the knowledge students have gained with regard to the influence historical, environmental, and cultural factors have on individuals and systems. The fundamental concepts assessed within Helping Relationships are related to knowledge of counseling theory, communication skills, and principles of multicultural counseling. The Group Work subtest is designed to test students' knowledge of basic principles of group counseling such as leadership styles, therapeutic factors, group development, and principles of group facilitation.

The Career and Lifestyle Development subscale of the CPCE evaluates knowledge of career development theories and models of decision making. It also assesses students' knowledge of career resources, program development, evaluation, and career counseling techniques. The Appraisal subtest of the CPCE assesses knowledge of the distinctions of various types of tests, relevant statistical concepts and general

principles pertaining to the appraisal of specific elements such as intelligence, attitudes, achievement, interests, and personality. Research and Program Evaluation tests students on their knowledge of general principles of qualitative and quantitative research as well as legal and ethical issues surrounding research. General principles pertaining to the evaluation of programs are also assessed. Finally, the Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE is designed to evaluate students' knowledge of the history of counseling, professional roles and responsibilities, professional organizations, ethical standards of practice, credentialing, and relevant public policy.

At The University of Georgia, the CPCE is administered to students during the fourth semester of their training program. The students are required to pass the exam in order to graduate. If they do not pass the exam the first time, they are provided with the opportunity to take the exam a second time. Each student's exam scores are sent to the director of the Community Counseling program. Additionally, copies of the students' scores are placed in their cumulative files within the department.

Personal Statements. Within each student's original set of application materials was a copy of her or his personal statement. The primary requirements of the personal statements were to describe personal and professional goals, salient life experiences influencing those goals, and the purpose of applying for graduate study. More specifically, applicants were encouraged to discuss past experiences in the role of a helper, important personal attributes or qualities that qualify them for their desired field of study, and important characteristics they seek in a graduate program. Applicants were also asked to comment on how life experiences beyond formal academic courses contribute to their ability to function as a helping professional.

Students' personal statements were evaluated based on a rubric developed explicitly for this study. The rubric was comprised of a total of 16 items, which were grouped to form four subscales: Mechanics and Writing Style (five items), Goals (three items), Self-Awareness (four items), and Maturity (four items). The rating scale for the Personal Statement Rubric was a five point Likert scale that ranged from one, "Strongly Disagree," to five, "Strongly Agree." A rating of 'N' could also be applied to criteria for which there were "No Opportunity to Observe."

Once all the personal statements had been evaluated, averages were obtained for each subscale. In addition to calculating an average for each subscale, a total average score was also calculated for each of the personal statements. Cronbach alpha coefficients were then derived to ascertain the level of internal consistency for the instrument as a whole as well as for the subscales. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the instrument as a whole was .7995. Since a reliability coefficient of .80 is generally acceptable for research purposes, this coefficient was deemed suitable for the purposes of this study. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the subscales were as follows: Mechanics and Writing Style .54, Goals .75, Self-Awareness .42, and Maturity .72. Table 2 provides a summary of the reliability coefficients, means, and standard deviations for the Personal Statement Rubric.

Table 2

Summary of Personal Statement Reliability Statistics (N = 62)

	Alpha	M	SD
Full Scale	.89	4.69	2.81
Mechanics and Writing Style	.54	3.93	.49
Goals	.75	3.99	.26
Self-Awareness	.42	4.10	.38
Maturity	.72	4.11	.24

Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE). The Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002) is designed to assess several areas of skill that have direct relevance to the counseling process. The instrument provides information pertaining to five domains: Counseling Skills and Abilities, Professional Responsibility, Competence, Maturity, and Integrity. Within each domain are several statements to which the evaluator must provide a rating. Originally, the rating scale progressed from zero to two, but for the purposes of this study, it was revised somewhat. Ratings were delineated as follows: N = No opportunity to observe; 1 = Does not meet criteria for program level; 2 = Meets criteria minimally or inconsistently for program level; 3 = Meets criteria consistently at this program level. Each student in this study was retrospectively rated using the PCPE.

The two faculty members who rated the students had substantial knowledge of the students' performance throughout the course of their training. The internal consistency of the PCPE was assessed using Cronbach alpha coefficients. For the first faculty member, alpha was .97. For the second faculty member, alpha was .97 as well.

Subsequently, it can be assumed that the items comprising the instrument are likely measuring the same characteristics. Table 3 provides the reliability coefficients as well as the means and standard deviations for the full scale and each of the subscales.

Table 3

Summary of PCPE Reliability Statistics (N = 62)

	Rater 1			Rater 2		
	Alpha	M _a	SD	Alpha	M _b	SD
Full Scale	.97	2.82	.11	.97	2.82	.11
Skills and Abilities	.97	2.92	.09	.97	2.82	.09
Professional Responsibility	.72	2.90	.08	.72	2.90	.08
Competence	.91	2.88	.05	.91	2.88	.05
Maturity	.89	2.67	.10	.89	2.67	.10
Integrity	.91	2.92	.05	.91	2.92	.05

Correlation coefficients were also obtained to discern interrater reliability for the PCPE. Pearson's *r* was calculated to determine how closely related the first faculty member's responses were to the second faculty member's responses. Interrater reliability for the total scores was 1.00. Agreement for each of the subscales of the PCPE was as follows: Skills and Abilities .99, Professional Responsibility 1.00, Competence 1.00, Maturity .99, and Integrity 1.00. The high interrater reliability coefficients can likely be attributed to the fact that the raters discussed their observations with each other and were subsequently able to reach consensus regarding the ratings assigned to most of the students. Furthermore, because the ratings were so similar, the averages of the faculty members' ratings for each of the PCPE subscales were used in the final data analysis.

Limitations

Some of the instruments within this study were completed retrospectively. Subsequently, it is possible that ratings provided at the time of the study may not be as accurate as if they had been completed when students initially entered the program and throughout the course of their study. Furthermore, to some extent, the instruments were limited by the debate surrounding what are the characteristics of an effective counselor. Although the instruments accurately reflected the qualities and attributes that the faculty at The University of Georgia believe make effective counselors, other individuals may place less emphasis on those qualities and more emphasis on others. Thus, while the instruments evaluated the characteristics of applicants that The University of Georgia faculty believes are important, their applicability to other programs may be limited by differing perspectives regarding the characteristics of effective counselors. For that reason, the generalizability of the results may be limited.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study was designed to ascertain the relationship between counselor effectiveness and certain preadmission and programmatic variables of The University of Georgia's master's level Community Counseling program. For the purposes of this study, effectiveness was defined by scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), faculty ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE), and cumulative graduate GPA. The preadmission variables examined included undergraduate GPA, GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores, and ratings of personal statements. Students' scores on the CPCE were examined as both an outcome variable and as a predictor variable. In addition to using the CPCE as an outcome measure, cumulative graduate GPA and ratings from the PCPE were also used in that capacity. The specific research questions were as follows:

- 1) Does the GRE Verbal subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 2) Does the GRE Quantitative subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 3) Does undergraduate GPA predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 4) Do ratings of personal statements predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

- 5) Do CPCE scores predict cumulative graduate GPA and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

It was hypothesized that admissions variables would predict cumulative graduate GPA, scores on the CPCE, and faculty ratings as measured by the PCPE. It was further hypothesized that performance on the CPCE, a programmatic variable, would predict cumulative graduate GPA and ratings from the PCPE. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). It is important to note that due to the exploratory nature of the study, in order to avoid overlooking or discounting a relationship of significance, all correlations that were significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level or less were reported. Limitations to that approach to data analysis are discussed in chapter five.

As the results are presented, the term “preadmission variables” refers to GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores, undergraduate GPA, and ratings of personal statements, while the phrases “outcome variables” or “criterion variables” refer to CPCE scores, PCPE ratings, and cumulative graduate GPA. The phrase “programmatic variable” refers strictly to CPCE scores.

Relationship Between Predictor Variables and Outcome Variables

GRE Scores, Undergraduate GPA, and CPCE Scores, PCPE Scores, and Graduate GPA. The relationships between objective preadmission variables (GRE Verbal and Quantitative subtest scores and undergraduate GPA) and outcome variables (CPCE scores, PCPE scores, and cumulative graduate GPA) were ascertained by computing Pearson r correlations. Several of the preadmission variables correlated with a number of objective outcome measures. First, the GRE Verbal subtest correlated with

the CPCE Group Work ($p < .05$), Appraisal ($p < .01$), Research and Program Evaluation ($p < .05$), and Professional Orientation ($p < .05$) subscales (see Table 4). However, correlations between GRE Verbal scores and cumulative graduate GPA as well as correlations between GRE Verbal and faculty ratings on the PCPE were not statistically significant.

Table 4

Intercorrelations for GRE Verbal Scores and CPCE Subscales (N = 62)

	GRE Verbal
Human Growth and Development	.234
Social and Cultural Foundations	.082
Helping Relationships	.116
Group Work	.277*
Lifestyle and Career Development	.116
Appraisal	.515**
Research and Program Evaluation	.271*
Professional Orientation	.251*
Total	.447**

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

The relationships between GRE Quantitative scores and cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and faculty ratings on the PCPE were also examined via correlation analyses. Those results suggested there were no statistically significant relationships between GRE Quantitative scores and any of the criterion measures.

In addition to examining correlations between GRE scores and the outcome measures, undergraduate GPA was also correlated with graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and faculty ratings on the PCPE. Those analyses did not suggest any statistically significant relationships between undergraduate GPA and any of the PCPE subscales. However, undergraduate GPA was, in fact, correlated significantly with cumulative graduate GPA ($p < .05$) and the Research and Program Evaluation subscale of the CPCE ($p < .01$). Table 5 provides more detailed statistical information pertaining to the significant correlations just described.

Table 5

Intercorrelations Between Undergraduate GPA and Cumulative Graduate GPA and CPCE Subscales (N = 62)

	UGPA
Graduate GPA	
Cumulative GGPA	.275*
CPCE Subscales	
Human Growth and Development	.245
Social and Cultural Foundations	.039
Helping Relationships	.190
Group Work	-.006
Lifestyle and Career Development	.244
Appraisal	.164
Research and Program Evaluation	.368**
Professional Orientation	.196
Total	.339**

Note. UGPA = undergraduate grade point average. GGPA = graduate grade point average.

**p < .01

*p < .05

Although the GRE Analytical subtest correlated significantly with the Group Work ($p < .05$) and Appraisal ($p < .05$) subscales of the CPCE, those relationships are not addressed here because applicants were told that only GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores would be considered in making selection decisions. Subsequently, there is the chance that applicants' GRE Analytical subtest scores may not reflect an accurate assessment of their abilities. It is quite possible that had the Analytical subtest been required, applicants may have put forth more effort preparing for and completing that section of the exam, thereby increasing scores and potentially resulting in even greater predictive validity of the subtest.

Personal Statements and Graduate GPA, CPCE Scores, and PCPE Ratings.

Pearson r correlations were used to ascertain the relationships between ratings of personal statements and cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and faculty ratings on the PCPE. Those analyses indicated that there were statistically significant relationships between cumulative graduate GPA and ratings on the Mechanics and Writing Style ($p < .05$), Goals ($p < .05$), and Self-Awareness ($p < .05$) subscales of the Personal Statement Rubric (see Table 6).

Table 6

Intercorrelations for Cumulative Graduate GPA and Personal Statement Rubric

Subscales (N = 62)

	Cumulative GGPA
Mechanics and Writing Style	.256*
Goals	.282*
Self-Awareness	.291*
Maturity	.012
Total	.284*

Note. GGPA = graduate grade point average.

* $p < .05$

In addition to those findings, the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric was significantly correlated with the Skills and Abilities subscale ($p < .01$), the Professional Responsibility subscale ($p < .05$), the Maturity subscale ($p < .01$), and the Integrity subscale ($p < .01$) of the PCPE. There was also a significant relationship between the Goals subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric and the Professional Responsibility subscale of the PCPE ($p < .05$) (see Table 7). Of all the correlations examined between ratings of the personal statement and scores on the CPCE, only one was found to be statistically significant; the Goals subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric was correlated significantly with the Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE. Table 8 provides the respective Pearson r correlations for each of the correlations between the CPCE and the Personal Statement.

Table 7

Intercorrelations Between Ratings of Personal Statements and Ratings on the PCPE (N = 62)

	MW	GL	SFA	MAT	Total
Skills and Abilities	.338**	.105	.077	.114	.207
Professional Responsibility	.276*	.301*	.145	-.147	.212
Competence	.193	.087	.217	.152	.204
Maturity	.408**	.246	.075	-.034	.244
Integrity	.339**	.016	-.006	-.111	.087
Total	.393**	.168	.106	-.013	.224

Note. MW = Mechanics and Writing Style. GL = Goals. SFA = Self-Awareness. MAT = Maturity.

**p < .01

*p < .05

Table 8

Intercorrelations Between Ratings of Personal Statements and Scores on the CPCE (N = 62)

	MW	GL	SFA	MAT	Total
Human Growth and Development	.103	-.041	.063	.119	.070
Social and Cultural Foundations	.040	-.058	.008	.068	.011
Helping Relationships	-.093	-.236	-.073	-.143	-.183
Group Work	.144	-.210	.224	.200	.088
Lifestyle and Career Development	-.102	-.074	-.079	-.042	-.097
Appraisal	.009	.002	.089	.000	.030
Research and Program Evaluation	-.011	.072	.115	-.117	.027
Professional Orientation	.090	.279*	.129	.043	.188
Total	.032	-.049	.105	.017	.028

Note. MW = Mechanics and Writing Style. GL = Goals. SFA = Self-Awareness. MAT = Maturity.

**p < .01

*p < .05

Relationship Between Programmatic and Outcome Variables

CPCE Scores and Graduate GPA and PCPE Scores. As noted previously, CPCE scores were used as both a predictor variable and an outcome variable. The relationship between scores on the CPCE and cumulative graduate GPA and faculty ratings on the PCPE were examined using correlation analyses. The correlation between the Research and Program Evaluation subscale of the CPCE and graduate GPA was found to be

statistically significant ($p < .05$). However, none of the subscales of the CPCE were correlated significantly with any of the subscales on the PCPE. Table 9 below highlights the relationship between the CPCE and cumulative graduate GPA.

Table 9

Summary of Correlation Analyses for CPCE Scores and Graduate GPA (N = 62)

Research and Program Evaluation	
Graduate GPA	.266*

* $p < .05$

In addition to the correlations previously described, a canonical correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the CPCE subscale scores and the graduate record examination and grade point average data. This particular analysis was performed due to the fact that there were numerous statistically significant correlations between the respective sets of preadmission and criterion variables. In such cases, canonical correlation analysis facilitates the identification of linear composites of variables from the respective sets and in so doing, provides an estimate of the degree of correlation between the two composites. Essentially, canonical correlations provide information about the relationship between sets of combined variables.

Although a number of correlations between variables making up the two sets were statistically significant, as shown earlier in Tables 5 and 6, the canonical correlation analysis did not reveal any significant dimensions of relationship, $\lambda_{\text{Wilks}'} = .415$, $F(40, 216) = 1.20$, $p = .203$. The most likely reason for this finding is the lack of statistical power that resulted from the limited number of data points for each set of variables. Despite the fact that the results of the canonical correlation were not statistically

significant, there were still some noteworthy trends that are discussed in detail in chapter five.

Subsequent to the canonical correlation analysis, a multiple regression analysis was performed to examine which preadmission variables may predict students' total scores on the CPCE. This analysis differs from the canonical analysis in that a single dependent variable (rather than dimensions or composites of multiple variables) is predicted from a set of independent variables. In this multiple regression analysis, the GRE Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical scores were used as predictors. In addition, the students' cumulative graduate GPA and undergraduate GPA were used as well. All of the variables were entered simultaneously into the regression.

Overall, the analysis revealed a statistically significant regression model, $F(5, 56) = 5.85, p = .0002$. The GRE Verbal subtest and individuals' undergraduate GPA had beta-coefficients that differed significantly from zero. The regression analysis using just these two predictors accounted for 26% of the variance in the CPCE Total score. The regression equation is as follows:

$$\text{CPCE Total Score} = 60.348 + .03825 * (\text{GRE Verbal Score}) + 6.73813 * (\text{Undergraduate GPA}).$$

Ancillary Findings

Additional correlation analyses were conducted to ascertain the relationships between ratings of personal statements and objective preadmission variables, which included GRE scores and undergraduate GPA. Results of those correlations suggested that the only preadmission variable with which ratings from the Personal Statement Rubric correlated was the GRE Quantitative subtest ($p < .05$). To be more specific, the

GRE Quantitative subscale scores were found to be statistically significantly related to the Maturity subscale rating of the Personal Statement Rubric.

Correlations were also run to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between CPCE scores and faculty ratings on the PCPE. None of those correlations was found to be significant. Possible reasons for that finding are discussed in chapter five.

In order to determine if there were any significant gender differences in the ratings female and male students received on the Personal Statement Rubric and on the PCPE, an independent samples t-test was run. Although there were no statistically significant differences in ratings between males and females on the PCPE, there were significant differences between the two groups on the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric (see Table 10). Possible reasons for those group differences are discussed in chapter five.

Table 10

Summary of Independent Samples t-test for Differences Between Females and Males on the Personal Statement Rubric (N = 62)

	Female						Male					
	N	M _a	SD	df	t	p	N	M _b	SD	df	t	
MW	54	4.02	.68	60	2.72	.008**	8	3.33	.49	60	-2.75	
GL	54	4.00	.82	60	.892	.577	8	3.83	.76	60	-.560	
SFA	54	4.07	-.61	60	2.26	.097	8	3.67	.65	60	-1.68	
MAT	54	4.28	.57	60	2.22	.060	8	3.87	.51	60	-1.92	
Total	54	16.36	2.03	60	2.55	.035*	8	14.70	2.09	60	-2.16	

Note. MW = Mechanics and Writing Style. GL = Goals. SFA = Self-Awareness. MAT = Maturity

**p < .01

*p < .05

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

Clearly, the content that is taught in counselor education training programs is a critical component of the developing counselor's skills and abilities. It has, however, become increasingly apparent through the years though that who is trained as a mental health practitioner is likely as important as how the individual is trained. For that reason, discerning the predictive validity of admissions and programmatic variables has taken on even greater significance within the academic community.

This study was designed to examine the predictive validity of several variables, such as GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, ratings of personal statements, and scores on comprehensive examinations, for cumulative graduate GPA, scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), and faculty ratings on the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (PCPE). The overall purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Does the GRE Verbal subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 2) Does the GRE Quantitative subtest predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 3) Does undergraduate GPA predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

- 4) Do ratings of personal statements predict cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?
- 5) Do CPCE scores predict cumulative graduate GPA and/or faculty ratings on the PCPE?

Significant Results

Predictive Validity of the GRE Verbal Subtest. According to the results of the study, GRE Verbal subtest scores correlated significantly with several of the CPCE subscales, namely Group Work, Appraisal, Research and Program Evaluation, and Professional Orientation. The GRE Verbal subtest is purported to provide information about an individual's ability to analyze and synthesize written information, as well as recognize relationships between words. The GRE Verbal subtest is also designed to provide an indication of a person's ability to analyze relationships between various elements of sentences and solve problems through verbal reasoning.

The Group Work subscale of the CPCE is designed to assess students' knowledge of basic principles of group counseling such as leadership styles, therapeutic factors, group development, and principles of group facilitation. Possibly the most salient link between the Group Work subscale of the CPCE and the GRE Verbal subtest is the ability to analyze relationships and manage them effectively. The GRE Verbal subtest assesses some element of relationship analysis utilizing one's verbal skills. Within the scope of the Group Work subscale, knowledge of principles of leadership and group development and facilitation, which may necessitate analysis of relationships, are assessed. Thus the statistically significant relationship between the GRE Verbal subtest and the Group Work subscale of the CPCE is not surprising.

GRE Verbal scores were also correlated significantly with the Appraisal subscale of the CPCE. The Appraisal subscale is designed to assess knowledge of the distinctions of different types of tests, relevant statistical concepts and general principles pertaining to the appraisal of specific elements such as intelligence, attitudes, achievement, interests, and personality. The process of appraisal necessitates the ability to analyze and synthesize various types of information, much of it written, in order to answer a question or solve a problem. Because the GRE Verbal subtest assesses an individual's skill in analysis and synthesis of verbal information, it seems logical then that GRE Verbal subtest scores would be predictive of performance on the Appraisal subtest of the CPCE.

Scores on the GRE Verbal subtest were also statistically significantly correlated with the Research and Program Evaluation and Professional Orientation subscales from the CPCE. Among other things, the Research and Program Evaluation subscale measures students' knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research principles. Much like Appraisal, Research and Program Evaluation require the ability to analyze and synthesize information, which is also a skill assessed by the GRE Verbal subtest. The Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE assesses knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities, which might necessitate skill at analyzing and negotiating relationships (something indicated in GRE Verbal scores). Professional Orientation also evaluates knowledge of ethical standards of practice. The appropriate application of ethical standards requires the ability to analyze and synthesize information that is largely verbal in nature. Subsequently, it is to be expected that GRE Verbal scores relate significantly to the Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE.

Predictive Validity of the GRE Quantitative Subtest. The relationship between GRE Quantitative scores and cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and faculty ratings on the PCPE was also examined via correlation analyses. However, as stated previously, those results suggested there was no statistically significant relationship between GRE Quantitative scores and any of the criterion measures, which is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that several studies have shown the GRE Quantitative subtest to be a statistically significant predictor of grades (Hackman, Wiggins, & Bass, 1970; House, Johnson, & Tolone, 1987; Littlepage, Bragg, & Rust, 1978; Omizo & Michael, 1979; Newman, 1968).

The field of counseling in general is heavily steeped in verbal tradition. It seems likely, therefore, that courses from which the graduate GPA is eventually derived within the Community Counseling program might be heavily laden with evaluative measures and activities that emphasize verbal abilities. That phenomenon might explain why GRE Quantitative scores were not significantly correlated with graduate GPA.

Predictive Validity of Undergraduate GPA. In addition to examining the predictive validity of GRE scores, the predictive validity of undergraduate GPA for cumulative graduate GPA, CPCE scores, and faculty ratings on the PCPE was also examined. The findings revealed a statistically significant correlation between undergraduate GPA and cumulative graduate GPA, which is not surprising given the fact that the variables are measuring similar academic elements. With regard to the relationships between undergraduate GPA and CPCE scores and undergraduate GPA and PCPE ratings, none of the results were statistically significant. While both the CPCE and undergraduate GPA generally tend to evaluate how well an individual has mastered

content knowledge, the content assessed by the CPCE may be so specialized that it does not correlate with undergraduate GPA. Similarly, it seems possible that undergraduate GPA did not correlate with PCPE ratings because the PCPE measures such a narrow range of applied skills.

Predictive Validity of the Personal Statement. There were several correlations noted between ratings on personal statements and various criterion measures. First, the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric was statistically significantly correlated with cumulative graduate GPA, as well as several subscales from the PCPE, specifically Skills and Abilities, Professional Responsibility, Maturity, and Integrity. Mechanics and Writing Style is a measure of both the technical and stylistic aspects of writing. Appropriate use of grammar, syntax, and punctuation are evaluated in conjunction with writer's ability to meet all the requirements outlined for the statement while simultaneously impacting the reader. The relationship between Mechanics and Writing Style and cumulative graduate GPA seems clear, since many counseling courses rely, to some extent, on the students' technical writing abilities. Furthermore, the concept of "impactfulness" within the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale may have an element of creativity and logic to it. Subsequently, when one considers the fact that grades in counseling courses may also reflect the ability to artfully craft persuasive literature and communicate clearly and logically, then the link between cumulative graduate GPA and the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric becomes clear.

The correlation between Mechanics and Writing Style and Skills and Abilities of the PCPE might best be explained by the manner in which one presents oneself.

Especially with regard to the stylistic element, Mechanics and Writing Style seems to, in some way, measure how an individual expresses himself or herself or, framed another way, how he or she communicates something impactful. Elements of communicative style are interwoven throughout the Skills and Abilities subscale of the PCPE. For example, several items make reference to the counselor's ability to create a therapeutic and safe atmosphere, as well as to respond in a facilitative manner to clients' feelings. Thus, communicative style seems to define the relationship between the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric and the Skills and Abilities subscale of the PCPE.

Similar conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between Mechanics and Writing Style and the Professional Responsibility and Maturity subscales of the PCPE. Elements of both Professional Responsibility and Maturity reflect the way in which one responds to and interacts with others in social situations. On the Professional Responsibility subscale for example, one item rates students on their ability to "demonstrate sensitivity," while another item rates students on their ability to interact with others in accordance with professional standards. On the Maturity subscale of the PCPE, one item provides a rating of students' ability to "demonstrate appropriate self-control," while another item evaluates students' exhibition of "appropriate levels of self-assurance, confidence, and trust."

Thus, the items comprising both the Professional Responsibility and Maturity subscales of the PCPE seem to reflect some element of social appropriateness. That element, which is characterized in part by the way in which one presents oneself, also appears to underlie the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement

Rubric because that particular subscale essentially evaluates how one presents oneself in writing.

With regard to the correlation between Mechanics and Writing Style and Integrity, the implicit relationship may be one of compliance with rules or guidelines or a commitment to doing what one believes is right or what one is “supposed” to do. For instance, most individuals who compose personal statements for application purposes recognize that those statements should be grammatically and syntactically correct and should be free of punctuation errors. Essentially, those types of requirements are generally understood as what one is “supposed” to do. Furthermore, within the personal statement, applicants recognize that they are expected to address the criteria outlined for them in the admissions application. The Personal Statement Rubric provides a rating for each of those elements (i.e. punctuation, grammar, syntax, and required elements to be addressed).

On the PCPE, the Integrity subscale is largely based on individuals’ sense of moral obligation. For example, the Integrity subscale rates students’ commitment to refraining from making misleading or false statements, from engaging in improper dual relationships, and from disregarding the rights and worth of other individuals. Again, the relationship between the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric and the Integrity subscale of the PCPE appears to be one of compliance, commitment, and/or moral obligation.

The relationship between the Goals subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric was statistically significantly correlated with graduate GPA and the Professional Responsibility subscale of the PCPE. Additionally, the Goals subscale was correlated

with the Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE. The unifying principle underlying each of those variables appears to be that of responsibility.

The Goals subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric rates students on the clarity of their goals and purpose for applying to graduate school at The University of Georgia. It seems logical to conclude that the element shared among individuals with clear goals and purposes for their lives may well be that of responsibility. The Professional Responsibility subscale of the PCPE rates students on several areas pertaining directly to ethical, personal, and legal responsibilities, and the Professional Orientation subscale of the CPCE specifically assesses, among other things, students' awareness of professional roles and responsibilities. Of course, few people would dispute the fact that in order to earn high grades in graduate school, students must demonstrate responsibility in a variety of ways. Thus, within all the variables noted here (graduate GPA, Professional Responsibility, Goals, and Professional Orientation), the common factor appears to be the element of responsibility.

The Self-Awareness subscale of the Personal Statement was significantly correlated with graduate GPA. One possible explanation for this relationship may be that both variables seem to have the element of learning from experience in common. Most people would agree that grades are ultimately a measure of how much one has learned during the course of academic study. Similarly, the Self-Awareness category of the Personal Statement Rubric clearly reflects how much one has learned not only from one's academic experiences but also from one's life experiences.

Predictive Validity of the CPCE. The CPCE was used as both a dependent variable and as an independent variable. As an independent variable, the Research and

Program Evaluation subscale of the CPCE was statistically significantly correlated with graduate GPA. It is somewhat difficult to discern what the relationship between graduate GPA and Research and Program Evaluation may be. It is possible that the correlation between the two variables has something to do with the fact that strong performance in either area requires adeptness at analysis and synthesis of information as well as knowledge of content and professional issues related to the field. However, this conclusion seems tenuous at best.

The canonical correlations that were performed between the CPCE subscale scores and the GRE scores and GPA data did not yield any significant findings. However, noteworthy trends were still observed. For example, from the CPCE set of variables, scores on the Appraisal and Research and Program Evaluation subscales contributed the most to the first canonical function; the CPCE Total score contributed to this dimension as well. With respect to the preadmission achievement variables (more specifically GRE scores and GPA) the GRE Verbal subtest and the students' undergraduate GPAs appeared to contribute most to the first canonical function. Although the canonical correlation coefficient was .58, it was not statistically significant. Therefore, these results can only be interpreted as a possible trend that could become significant in future research that utilizes a larger sample.

Subsequent to the canonical correlation analysis, a multiple regression analysis was performed to examine which preadmission variables might predict students' CPCE Total scores. Unlike the canonical correlation, the regression analysis was statistically significant, suggesting that the composite of GRE Verbal subtest scores and undergraduate GPA accounted for 26% of the variance in the CPCE Total score. This

finding is not unexpected given the fact that performance within all three domains seems to be based on largely on cognitive skills that require verbal reasoning ability.

Ancillary Findings

In addition to examining data pertinent to the five original research questions, ancillary data was also examined. First, correlation analyses were conducted in order to ascertain the relationship between ratings of personal statements and objective preadmission variables, such as GRE scores and undergraduate GPA. The relationship between the GRE Quantitative subtest scores and ratings on the Maturity subscale of the Personal Statement was the only statistically significant result.

The implications of that finding seem somewhat unusual given the fact that the GRE Quantitative subtest is designed to assess basic mathematical skills and relies heavily on quantitative reasoning skills, while the Maturity subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric examines sophistication, self-assurance, and level of confidence. It seems possible that this finding is largely artifactual. As mentioned previously, this study was exploratory in nature. Thus, in order to guard against making a Type II error and thereby discount or omit a seemingly insignificant relationship that might prove significant in future research, Bonferroni adjustments were not made. Certainly, that approach to the analyses has some disadvantages, one of which is the identification of statistically significant correlations that have little meaning. The relationship between the GRE Quantitative subscale scores and the Maturity subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric appears to be just such a correlation.

The second ancillary finding relates to correlations calculated between CPCE scores and PCPE ratings. Interestingly, none of the subscales on the CPCE correlated

significantly with the subscales on the PCPE. The most obvious explanation for the lack of interrelatedness of the instrument appears to be the content of what each one purports to measure. In general, the CPCE seems to be measuring specific content knowledge learned throughout the course of the students' study, while the PCPE appears to be weighted much more heavily on items designed to assess practical application skills.

The third ancillary finding of this study was related to gender differences. To be more specific, independent samples t-tests were computed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in ratings between females and males on the Personal Statement Rubric and on the PCPE. On the PCPE, no statistically significant differences were identified between males and females. However, a statistically significant difference, favoring women, was noted on the Mechanics and Writing Style, subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric. It seems plausible that the gender differences may be a result of socialization factors. Because women generally tend to be more verbally oriented, the written exercise of the personal statement itself may have been somewhat biased in favor of women.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study suggest that there are stronger relationships between certain predictors and outcome variables than others. Although the relationships between the variables are by no means the only factors that should be taken into account in the admissions process, they certainly have the potential to lead decision makers on a more accurate path toward discerning which applicants might make the most effective counselors.

Findings within this study seem to indicate that the GRE Verbal subtest and various scales on the Personal Statement Rubric may deserve additional attention when making admissions decisions. For example, it seems logical that program faculty may want to pay careful attention to GRE Verbal scores because there is a historical trend, in this particular program, of GRE Verbal scores being predictive of performance on the CPCE. That finding has implications for the level of content knowledge students gain from the program.

While content knowledge is clearly important and essential to a counselor in training, it is probably one of the more easily acquired elements of training. It is typically the practical application of skills, such as those measured by the PCPE, that pose challenges for trainees (Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002). Results of this study indicate that more focused attention on the Mechanics and Writing Style and Goals subscales of the Personal Statement Rubric may provide members of the admissions committee with greater insight into which applicants possess certain skills, abilities, and personal variables that are likely to make them effective counselors.

That observation is particularly important when one considers the fact that those types of elements are not easily taught or learned. Thus, the better able the admissions committee is to identify individuals who possess those variables, the greater the likelihood of admitting students with the greatest potential for effectiveness. To put it simply, if certain variables, such as the GRE Verbal scores and ratings on the Personal Statement, are weighted differentially in accordance with the values of the program, then it is more likely that applicants to the program who have the greatest potential to be

effective counselors, as evidenced by the data in this study, will be identified for acceptance to the program.

The results of this study do not differ to a great degree from results obtained by previous researchers examining the predictive validity of admissions and programmatic variables for counselor effectiveness. The reality is, truly valid and reliable predictors of counselor effectiveness have yet to be identified. Furthermore, over the course of the last thirty or more years, the research has not yielded any appreciable discoveries related to the predictive validity of admissions variables for counselor effectiveness.

It is clear though that one reason for that lack of progress is the field's persistence in attempting to validate predictors that have repeatedly been proven invalid. It seems equally clear that new approaches may yield novel results, moving the field of mental health closer to identifying more valid and reliable predictor variables for counselor effectiveness. As counselor effectiveness is critical to the therapeutic process, the identification of these predictors is vital to the profession as a whole, not just to training programs. It is with this principle in mind that the following recommendations for practice and further research are provided.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

It is rather surprising to note that despite the fact that a substantial amount of research has demonstrated that current admissions criteria do not adequately predict who will make an effective mental health practitioner, those criteria continue to be used to make admissions decisions. As Pfouts and Henley (1977) seem to imply, continued use of admissions variables with such limited predictive validity is essentially "admissions roulette" (p. 56). There is a clear need to examine new methods and possibly new criteria

for making admissions decisions. Currently though, that is the vein of empirical research that is sorely lacking. Virtually all research examined for this study simply evaluated the methodology and admissions criteria that have been in place and utilized by most programs for decades.

In general, there are two primary criteria by which training programs gage the effectiveness of their trainees. Those criteria relate to performance in coursework and performance in settings such as practica in which counseling skills and abilities must be applied in a practical sense. According to Kerl et al. (2002), students who are later identified as deficient in some area typically perform well in coursework but face significant challenges interpersonally and in the practical application of their counseling skills. That assumption suggests then that the predictor variables whose validity is largely related to GPA and performance on examinations may not warrant as much attention as predictor variables that provide insight into a trainee's practical skills and abilities. Subsequently, the suggestions offered here will focus primarily on personal statements and the interview process.

In a study by Powers and Fowles (1996), which was described previously, the use of personal statements versus a structured essay as an indicator of writing ability was compared. Results showed that the structured essay was more strongly correlated with other measures of writing ability than was the personal statement. These findings are particularly salient when one is reminded of the fact that the Mechanics and Writing Style subscale of the Personal Statement Rubric was one of the most predictive variables for effectiveness in this study in terms of practical application of skills. Since Mechanics and Writing Style, which is essentially defined by one's writing ability, seems to be more

predictive of practical application of skills, then using a structured essay in lieu of or in conjunction with the personal statement, because it measures writing ability more directly, may provide a more powerful indicator of future effectiveness as a counselor.

Possibly, the essay could be structured in such a way as to also provide information about an individual's maturity, ability to manage conflict effectively, or some other important skill that has implications for counselor effectiveness. One example of such an exercise might be to have students write a brief essay (approximately 400-500 words in length) related to a question such as one of the following:

- 1) Describe a time when you received constructive feedback from someone. How did you handle it, and what did you do with the information?
- 2) Describe a relationship that was difficult for you. How did you manage it, and what did you learn from it?
- 3) Describe specific qualities you possess that will enable you to be an effective counselor. Within your essay, specifically address how you know you have those qualities.
- 4) Describe a challenging event or circumstance in your life. How did you handle it, and what did you learn from it?
- 5) Describe three ways you are a good match for this program (or field) and three ways you may not be a good match for this program (or field).
- 6) Assume you have been a counselor for several years. Describe what you would do if one of your clients told you that you were awful at counseling.

Each of the aforementioned prompts for the structured essay has the potential to provide valuable information related to the abilities necessary to effectively implement

practical counseling skills and negotiate a variety of interpersonal relationships. For example, question one has clear implications for openness or the ability to receive feedback in an amenable manner and subsequently use it to improve oneself. Within the context of supervision, that ability or quality is extremely valuable. Question two has implications for openness and interpersonal skills. Question three speaks to an individual's level of self-awareness, and question four may provide some insight into a person's ability to engage in self-reflection. Underlying the fifth prompt is self-awareness and openness, while the sixth prompt, much like the first, provides information about willingness to accept feedback.

Alternatively, the structured essay could be centered upon a more innocuous topic, and the prompts described previously could be used during the face-to-face interview. In that case, it may prove beneficial to have each applicant answer each question during the course of the day's interviews. To accomplish this goal, each interviewer would ask each applicant one of those questions, and by the day's end, each applicant would have provided a response to all of the questions. Essentially, the questions themselves are designed to reveal certain elements of a person's character that are typically masked during the course of interviews but that often become glaringly apparent, for better or worse, as the individual becomes less guarded and one gets to know the person better.

The process is one of asking multiple questions that have implicit similarities. The value of that process is that it has the potential to permeate defense mechanisms, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining a more honest and telling response from an individual. To some extent, it is the same principle by which interrogations are

conducted. If a person is not being entirely forthright, the true nature of his or her character is much more likely to be revealed as he or she is asked to respond to multiple questions that are designed to obtain the same or similar information.

While making use of these types of questions in an interview seems to have significant benefits, there is the possibility that combining the power of the apparent predictive validity of writing ability with a writing prompt that is designed to reveal elements of a person's character that are typically highly guarded in an interview may have the greatest potential for predicting who will be effective counselors. Thus, using the prompts within a structured written exercise rather than in an interview may have additional benefits.

In the interest of obtaining information relevant to future practical counseling skills and abilities, another idea on which research has yet to be conducted is that of role play. Admittedly, most applicants to master's level counseling programs have not had any formal training in helping skills. However, asking applicants to role play situations in which they are counselors has several potential benefits. First, it would provide information relevant to an applicant's willingness to do something that is asked of her or him but with which she or he may not be entirely comfortable. The process of training counselors often demands that they attempt new things and follow through with recommendations that they may not as yet be fully comfortable implementing. Thus, a role play exercise might provide valuable information relevant to that area.

Another potential benefit of utilizing a role play activity during the interview process relates to the identification of severe deficits that typically only become apparent when individuals finally begin their practicum experiences. At times, once an applicant

has been admitted to a counseling training program, it becomes evident that she or he is truly not equipped with certain innate abilities or qualities that are essential for achieving even a minimal level of clinical competence. It seems quite plausible that a role play activity might at least identify applicants for whom those innate qualities and abilities are severely lacking. At best, the activity might distinguish future counselors who are truly artful in what they do from those who are simply competent.

Clearly, anytime modifications are made to the way in which one selects trainees for a counseling program, a risk is being taken that could impact students, clients, and faculty alike for several years to come. In light of the significance of that risk, there is an alternative way to pilot the suggestions offered here.

Many universities, much like The University of Georgia, offer “helping skills” courses. The individuals who take these courses are often students who are pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees that mirror many aspects of the counseling field. It is highly likely that the types of individuals who take helping skills courses have many of the same qualities, goals, and aspirations as individuals who eventually apply to master’s level counseling programs. In fact, many of the applicants to The University of Georgia’s Community Counseling program described their own experiences in helping skills courses they took as undergraduates. Thus, within the confines of helping skills courses, the novel interview and writing assessment activities described here could be piloted, at no risk to the training program, with a population of students that mirrors that of future applicants to counseling training programs.

In addition to the written exercises and interview and role play activities offered thus far, it may also be prudent to refine the instruments used in this study so that they are

more cohesive. For example, although the construction of the Personal Statement Rubric was based on the requirements of the personal statement itself, it could be revised in such a way as to be more reflective of the PCPE. Additionally, because the current requirements for the personal statement tend to result in compositions that have great variability, it might be beneficial to revise the requirements so they are somewhat more specific, thereby limiting the variability of the final product. Ultimately, modifications such as the ones described should result in the development of a set of instruments that have greater predictive validity and reliability.

Summary

The field of mental health continues to battle for credibility among members of the general public as well as among its own professionals. A substantial amount of research supports the contention that who we train as counselors may well be as important as how we train them. What remains to be tested and validated by empirical methods are new and unique ways of predicting which applicants to counseling training program are most likely to be effective counselors in the future. Offered here are several new ways of evaluating applicants as well as suggestions for how these methods may be piloted with minimal risk to the training program.

It seems incredible that given the importance of selecting applicants who will eventually become highly effective counselors, the research surrounding the debate has perseverated on variables that have been shown many times before to have low or inconsistent predictive validity. Hopefully, the suggestions offered here will spark new perspectives on the issue, resulting in the training of more effective counselors with the ultimate goal of assisting those individuals who seek help in their deepest times of need.

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APPENDIX A
PERSONAL STATEMENT RUBRIC

Personal Statement Rubric

Rating Scale						
1 – Strongly Disagree	3—Neither			5 – Strongly Agree		
2—Disagree	4 – Agree			N – No Opportunity to Observe		
Mechanics and Writing Style						
1. The statement contains few grammatical or syntactical errors.	1	2	3	4	5	N
2. The statement contains few punctuation errors.	1	2	3	4	5	N
3. The statement is well integrated and reflects logical thought pertaining to the information necessary for inclusion.	1	2	3	4	5	N
4. The statement covers all required elements in adequate depth.	1	2	3	4	5	N
5. The statement is impactful and moves the reader on an emotional level.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Goals						
6. The statement clearly identifies the individual’s purpose for applying to graduate school.	1	2	3	4	5	N
7. The statement clearly identifies realistic personal and professional goals.	1	2	3	4	5	N
8. The statement touches upon the most important characteristics the individual seeks in a graduate program as well as specific reasons for applying to this particular graduate program.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Self-Awareness						
9. The statement reflects awareness of how academic experiences have contributed to the development of the individual’s goals.	1	2	3	4	5	N
10. The statement reflects awareness of how life experiences beyond academic study have contributed to the development of the individual’s goals.	1	2	3	4	5	N
11. The statement reflects an accurate assessment of how the individual’s personal qualities uniquely qualify him or her for the desired field of study.	1	2	3	4	5	N
12. The statement suggests the individual has an awareness of the distinctiveness of this particular field (i.e. counseling versus social work).	1	2	3	4	5	N
Maturity						
13. Within the statement, the individual exercises an appropriate level of self-disclosure.	1	2	3	4	5	N
14. The individual refrains from “name dropping” or else makes tactful mention of connections within the field.	1	2	3	4	5	N
15. The statement reflects an appropriate level of self-assurance and confidence.	1	2	3	4	5	N
16. The statement reflects a certain level of sophistication on the part of the writer as evidenced by the writer’s thoughtful perspectives on life and personal and professional development.	1	2	3	4	5	N

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study related to counselor effectiveness. The study, Identifying Effective Counselors: Implications for Training Programs and the Field of Mental Health, is being conducted by Catherine M. Callender, M.Ed., M.S. (706-542-8508), a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology, under the direction of Dr. Georgia Calhoun (Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, The University of Georgia, 402 Aderhold Hall, 706-542-1812). I recognize that I do not have to take part in this study; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me, returned to me, removed from research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the study is to determine which admissions and programmatic variables in the Community Counseling program at The University of Georgia are the best predictors of who will be effective counselors.
- 2) The benefits I may expect to gain from the study are new insights into what makes an effective counselor.
- 3) My part in this study will take approximately three hours. I understand that I will be asked to do the following things in relation to participating in this study:
 - a) Listen to an explanation of the informed consent, and sign it if I agree to participate.
 - b) Complete an evaluation instrument for every counselor whose clinical competencies I am familiar with.
- 4) No discomforts or risks are expected. However, if difficulties arise, I can discuss them with the researcher, Catherine Callender.
- 5) I understand that the data collection process in this research study will be confidential. None of the information collected will be identified with the participant who submitted it. To ensure security of the data, they will be stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only the principal researcher has access. All results will be reported in aggregate form.
- 6) The researcher, Catherine Callender, will answer any questions about the research now or at a later time. Catherine can be reached by telephone at: 706-542-8508.
- 7) I understand all of the procedures described above. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to participate in this study. Additionally, I acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher Phone Number: 706-542-8508 Email Address: cmcrun4fun@yahoo.com	Signature of Researcher	Date
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Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
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Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation

Rating Scale				
1-Does not meet criteria for program level	3-Meets criteria consistently at this program level			
2-Meets criteria minimally or inconsistently for program level	N-No opportunity to observe			
Counseling Skills and Abilities				
1. The student demonstrates the ability to establish relationships in such a manner that a therapeutic working alliance can be created.	1	2	3	N
2. The student demonstrates therapeutic communication skills including:	1	2	3	N
a. Creating appropriate structure—setting the boundaries of the helping frame and maintaining boundaries throughout the work such as setting parameters for meeting time and place, maintaining the time limits, etc.	1	2	3	N
b. Understanding content—understanding the primary elements of the client’s story.	1	2	3	N
c. Understanding context—understanding the uniqueness of the story elements and their underlying meanings.	1	2	3	N
d. Responding to feelings—identifying client affect and addressing those feelings in a therapeutic manner.	1	2	3	N
e. Congruence—genuineness; external behavior consistent with internal affect.	1	2	3	N
f. Establishing and communicating empathy—taking the perspective of the client without over identifying and communicating this experience to the client.	1	2	3	N
g. Nonverbal communication—demonstrates effective use of head, eyes, hands, feet, posture, voice, attire, etc.	1	2	3	N
h. Immediacy—staying in the here and now.	1	2	3	N
i. Timing—responding with a clear understanding of the therapist’s therapeutic intention.	1	2	3	N
j. Intentionality—responding with a clear understanding of the therapist’s therapeutic intention.	1	2	3	N
k. Self-disclosure—skillful and carefully considered for a specific therapeutic purpose.	1	2	3	N
3. The student demonstrates awareness of power differences in the therapeutic relationship and manages these differences therapeutically.	1	2	3	N
4. The student collaborates with the client to establish clear therapeutic goals.	1	2	3	N
5. The student facilitates movement toward client goals.	1	2	3	N
6. The student demonstrates the capacity to match appropriate interventions to the presenting clinical profile in a theoretically consistent manner.	1	2	3	N
7. The student creates a safe clinical environment.	1	2	3	N
8. The student demonstrates analysis and resolution of ethical dilemmas.	1	2	3	N
Professional Responsibility				
1. The student conducts self in an ethical manner so as to promote confidence in the counseling profession.	1	2	3	N
2. The student relates to peers, professors, and others in a manner consistent with stated professional standards.	1	2	3	N
3. The student demonstrates sensitivity to real and ascribed differences in power between themselves and others, and does not exploit or mislead other people during or after professional relationships.	1	2	3	N
4. The student demonstrates application of legal requirements relevant to counseling training and practice.	1	2	3	N

Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation Continued

Rating Scale				
1-Does not meet criteria for program level		3-Meets criteria consistently at this program level		
2-Meets criteria minimally or inconsistently for program level		N-No opportunity to observe		
Competence				
1. The student recognizes the boundaries of her/his particular competencies and the limitations of her/his expertise.	1	2	3	N
2. The student takes responsibility for compensating for her/his deficiencies.	1	2	3	N
3. The student takes responsibility for assuring client welfare when encountering the boundaries of her/his expertise.	1	2	3	N
4. The student demonstrates basic cognitive, affective, sensory, and motor capacities to respond therapeutically to clients.	1	2	3	N
5. The student provides only those services and applies only those techniques for which she/he is qualified by education, training, and experience.	1	2	3	N
Maturity				
1. The student demonstrates appropriate self-control (such as anger control, impulse control) in interpersonal relationships with faculty, peers, and clients.	1	2	3	N
2. The student demonstrates honesty, fairness, and respect for others.	1	2	3	N
3. The student demonstrates an awareness of his/her own belief systems, values, needs and limitations and the effect of these on his/her work.	1	2	3	N
4. The student demonstrates the ability to receive, integrate and utilize feedback from peers, teachers, and supervisors.	1	2	3	N
5. The student exhibits appropriate levels of self-assurance, confidence, and trust in own ability.	1	2	3	N
6. The student follows professionally recognized conflict resolution processes, seeking to informally address the issue first with individual(s) with whom the conflict exists.	1	2	3	N
Integrity				
1. The student refrains from making statements which are false, misleading, or deceptive.	1	2	3	N
2. The student avoids improper and potentially harmful dual relationships.	1	2	3	N
3. The student respects the fundamental rights, dignity, and worth of all people.	1	2	3	N
4. The student respects the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and choices regarding self-determination and autonomy.	1	2	3	N
5. The student respects cultural, individual, and role differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.	1	2	3	N

Adapted from: Kerl, S. B., Garcia, J. L., McCullough, C. S., & Maxwell, M. E. (2002). Systematic evaluation of professional performance: Legally supported procedure and process. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 41*, 815-820.