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Practicum and Internship Coordinators' Experiences Amid COVID-19 Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract

Although recent literature addresses online pedagogy and online counselor education, few articles address the challenges faced by counselor educators during emergency remote teaching, an unplanned and unanticipated switch from in-person education to online education. To address this gap, we conducted a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of practicum and internship coordinators (N = 8) during the emergency remote teaching phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Five themes emerged: (a) uncertainty, (b) adaptation to leadership, (c) changes to student experience, (d) personal support, and (e) readiness. Implications for counselor educators and supervisors are addressed.

Significance to the Public

This study advances the idea that counselor preparation programs should increase their preparedness for remote teaching during emergencies or wide-scale disasters. Additionally, it suggests that all counselor educators need to be prepared to assume leadership roles rather than only those who are in formalized leadership positions.

Keywords: practicum & internship, COVID-19, clinical field experience, leadership

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Since then, over 572 million cases and 6 million deaths worldwide have been confirmed. As government officials began implementing safety measures such as social distancing and limitations on public gatherings, many universities ceased all in-person operations (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). In effect, the COVID-19 pandemic created a sudden need for institutions of higher education to quickly pivot toward online education (Dhawan, 2020). Consequently, counselor educators had to make decisions about how counseling students would complete their clinical field experiences and obtain their required practicum and internship hours. Limitations on public spaces within universities and mental health

facilities prompted a drastic shift in the delivery of supervision and the availability of practicum and internship sites for students, subsequently limiting the availability of counselors to clients (Bell et al., 2020; Goghari et al., 2020).

Hodges et al. (2020) named this transition Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and described it as a temporary change from face-to-face teaching to online teaching during crisis events. Unlike traditional online teaching, ERT occurs without extensive planning and preparation. As such, experiences within ERT are not perfectly comparable to otherwise normal online educational experiences. While some universities were able to quickly transition programs to online models during this ERT phase, many counselor education and supervision (CES) programs, which are traditionally

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face-to-face, were not prepared. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2018, only 36 of 405 institutions accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) offered counseling programs that delivered 50% or more of their instruction remotely (Snow et al., 2018). Thus, many counseling program faculty members were exploring remote teaching for the first time in March 2020.

Practicum and Internship in CES Programs

Within CES programs, students participate in experiential practica and internships as a necessary component of their counselor preparation. CACREP requires all accredited programs to designate one faculty member to be the practicum and internship coordinator. This individual is responsible for coordinating student field experiences as well as responding to inquiries about practicum and internship (CACREP, 2016). Pitts (1992) first codified the duties and responsibilities that are typically associated with this role. Practicum and internship coordinators ensure that a proper organization exists for students, faculty, and placement sites to exchange information. These coordinators may help establish relationships with placement sites, connect students with placement opportunities, and communicate with placement supervisors about student progress. In addition to site management duties, coordinators are typically also responsible for ensuring that students receive adequate supervision and evaluating the performance of the practicum and internship program itself. Given that practicum and internship coordinators do not typically hold formalized leadership positions within departments (i.e., department chair), they must also communicate regularly with department chairs about the goals, progress, and needs of the practicum and internship program (Pitts, 1992). Although the practicum and internship coordinator is vital to any CACREP-accredited program, few articles explore the role of the coordinator within a program, leadership aspects

of this role, or the ways in which this role could be impacted.

Leadership in Counselor Education and Supervision

Effective leadership, particularly from leaders who are highly adaptable and communicative, is essential to the successful operation of organizations during crises (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). As such, strong leadership is a necessary component to counselor education and supervision programs as well as the broader field of counseling (Gibson, 2016). The significance of leadership in counseling has been highlighted by its inclusion in both the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics as well as the CACREP accreditation standards (CACREP, 2016). In addition, Chi Sigma Iota (CSI), the international honor society for professional counseling, has made counseling leadership development an essential component of its organizational mission (CSI, n.d.).

Extant literature on counselor leadership has identified the unique nature and presentation of leadership within the counseling profession (McKibben, 2016; McKibben et al., 2017b; Peters & Vereen, 2020). Successful counseling leaders engage in a variety of behaviors including, but not limited to, modeling, mentoring, and advocating (McKibben et al., 2017b). Counselor educators are particularly responsible for appropriate modeling as they not only influence counselors-in-training, but also, in effect, their clients (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Although counselor educators regularly engage in leadership roles (Harrichand et al., 2021; McKibben, 2016; McKibben et al., 2017b), there is a need for additional leadership training as well as leadership training that is more directed and useful (Peters & Vereen, 2020). Further, some counselors may need support to increase awareness of how their existing skills can be utilized for leadership roles (Prasath et al., 2021). Thus, some counselor educators may be inadequately prepared to assume leader roles when necessary, such as times of crisis.

Although the literature is expanding, there are few articles that address how counselor educators led programs through the ERT phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gay and Swank (2021) investigated how school counselor educators navigated practicum and internship experiences during COVID-19. They identified five themes through their phenomenological approach: supporting school counselors-in-training, decision making, rethinking clinical experiences, preparedness, and gatekeeping. Although this study shed light on the experiences of counselor educators who taught school counselors during COVID-19, no article has explored the role of practicum and internship coordinators, who are responsible for organizing and maintaining field experiences on a systemic level (Pitts, 1992), during this period. To address this gap, we explored the lived experiences of practicum and internship coordinators during emergency remote operations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, we specifically focused on the coordinators' experiences during the initial semester of the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., Spring 2020). Our research question was: What are the lived experiences of counseling practicum and internship coordinators during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Method

We chose a transcendental phenomenological methodology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), to explore and convey the overall essence of the unique lived experiences of practicum and internship coordinators' experiences during the ERT phase of COVID-19. Moustakas was significantly influenced by the work of the philosopher Husserl (1970), who developed a philosophic system based on subjective openness. Moustakas (1994) used this system to outline a process for conducting research that facilitates knowledge's derivation. The goal of transcendental phenomenology is to describe lived experiences while acknowledging and then setting aside researcher biases (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, we

chose this approach to capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

Procedure

Upon receiving approval from our university Human Subjects Review Committee, we began participant recruitment through a purposive sampling procedure. Given that we sought to interview practicum and internship supervisors from diverse counseling graduate programs throughout the United States, we chose to solicit participants on CESNET-L (Jencius, 2019), the listserv for counselor educators and supervisors. Participants were the current practicum and internship coordinator within their program, a role as defined by Pitts (1992). To ensure that each participant had experiences in their role both prior to and during ERT, participants also had at least one academic year of experience as a coordinator prior to the interview. We screened for these inclusion criteria through conversations with each potential participant. We selected participants on a first response, first selected basis. One volunteer was excluded when it became apparent that the participant was a site supervisor rather than a practicum and internship coordinator.

After individuals indicated interest and were screened for inclusion criteria, they were directed to an informed consent document. Upon agreeing to the informed consent document, they were directed to a demographics questionnaire, and we scheduled an interview with a member of the research team. We conducted and recorded interviews using teleconferencing software, and we deleted the recordings after we transcribed the interviews. The first two authors transcribed and coded the interviews separately. After the initial coding, the first two authors reviewed the transcripts, discussed coding, and agreed upon each coded interview. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, and no details about their universities were included in the results. We interviewed participants until we determined that no new information related to the phenomenon was being discussed by participants that had not already been reviewed by previous participants, as

recommended by Moustakas (1994). We conducted interviews in May 2020, and participants discussed the experiences they had during the Spring 2020 semester.

Participants

Our participants were eight practicum and internship coordinators in counseling graduate programs in the United States. Seven participants were women, and one participant was a man. We assigned the pseudonym of Derrick to the one male participant and the pseudonyms of Dani, Heather, Jodey, Lisa, Patty, Sadie, and Teresa to the seven female participants. We selected these pseudonyms by using a random name generator. Six participants identified their race as White, and two identified themselves as "other." Only one participant identified as being of Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin. Participants' number of years as practicum and internship coordinator ranged from 1 year to 11 years, with a mean of 5.25 years. Three participants were in the South, two participants were in the Northeast, two participants were in the Midwest, and one participant was in the West. Six participants worked at public universities, one participant worked at a private, nonprofit, religious university, and one participant worked at a for-profit university. Five participants worked in universities focused primarily on teaching, two participants worked at universities with high research activity (R2), and one participant worked at a university with very high research activity (R1). Seven participants worked in CACREP-accredited programs, and two worked in programs that were not CACREP-accredited.

Researchers

Our research team consisted of three counselor educators, two White males, and one White female, affiliated with the same CACREP-accredited doctoral counselor education program. All three members have mentored, advised, and supervised counseling students in some capacity throughout their careers. Additionally, one team member served as an assistant practicum and internship coordinator

during the initial outbreak of COVID-19. Our combined counseling specialty areas include school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, ethics in counseling, and counseling supervision.

Therefore, we discussed how our familiarity with the research topic and observations about the overall research project might inform assumptions. Potential biases included beliefs about gatekeeping and the practicum and internship student experiences, the influences of accrediting bodies on professors' and students' experiences, and thoughts about the coordinators' management of clinical experiences, thereby influencing the quality of the practicum and internship experiences. Due to the discussed assumptions, we made efforts to manage them. Throughout the research project, we communicated regularly and revisited how to minimize biases and assumptions concerning the research project.

Data Collection

The study participants completed semi-structured interviews focused on practicum and internship coordinators' experiences during the beginning phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview was approximately one hour in length. We began participant interviews by asking the general question: What was your experience as a practicum and internship coordinator during the COVID-19 pandemic? We asked the following additional questions if the information had not already been addressed by participants: (a) How did your responsibilities as a practicum and internship coordinator change due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (b) How were your practicum and internship students able to continue and complete their field experiences? (c) Do you think your practicum and internship students' overall quality of experiences was negatively affected by transitioning to providing online counseling services? Why or why not? (d) How was your university affected by state-ordered closures of physical campuses? and (e) What were your greatest concerns for the practicum and internship program at your university?

Trustworthiness

We utilized the following criteria to address trustworthiness in this qualitative research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). We established credibility through triangulation and member checking. For our triangulation process, the first two authors analyzed the interview transcripts and formulated emerging themes. Then, the first two authors reviewed and agreed upon the initial themes. The third author, functioning as a peer debriefer, reviewed the themes and provided feedback to further clarify and confirm the themes. For member checking purposes, we provided a summary and rationale of our findings to each participant and invited them to read and comment on our proposed findings. We asked members whether they believed that these themes captured the essence of the phenomenon and whether they agreed or disagreed with each theme. No participants responded to this request. We achieved transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon as well as a clear explanation of the researcher method. We achieved dependability through consultation with colleagues with experience in phenomenological research (Levitt et al., 2017). We established confirmability through the use of reflexive journaling, a process which helped us to remain aware of any preceding biases (Creswell, 2018). At each stage of data collection, we utilized discussions to resolve any confusion or disagreements to build a shared theme conception.

Data Analysis

We followed the core processes for conducting transcendental phenomenology research as described by Moustakas (1994). By employing epoche, we set aside everyday understandings and freshly revisited the phenomenon. We utilized the transcendental-phenomenological reduction process in which we used the input from our participants to describe their experiences freshly and openly. We were able to derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon. We then used imaginative variation, a process in which we took textual descriptions of our phenomenon to

grasp the structural essences of the experience we studied (Moustakas, 1994). In analyzing the data that we collected from participants, we followed Moustakas' guidelines (1994). After reading the participant interviews' verbatim transcripts several times, we constructed meaning units utilizing horizontalization, giving equal value to all participants' statements. We then clustered what our participants said into themes, using both individual and composite textural descriptions. For example, when participants utilized similar vernacular to discuss their initial reactions to campus closures, such as "confusion" or "chaos," we viewed the essence of the meaning of each description to group these terms into a theme of "uncertainty." Finally, we arrived at a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences.



Findings

Five themes emerged from the participant interviews. The themes were (a) uncertainty, (b) adaptation to leadership, (c) changes to student experience, (d) personal support, and (e) readiness.

Uncertainty

In the beginning, many of the participants experienced a period of ambiguity as cities went on lockdown and universities began transitioning to ERT. It was unclear how the virus would change their jobs, expectations, students' experiences, and personal lives. One participant described this early stage as "pandemonium." This experience left participants with many questions and few answers. "Students had questions and their guess was as good as ours," said Sadie. To regain some control, participants began searching for information and guidance to inform their early decisions. Some participants started by consulting with colleagues. Heather stated, "I was getting a lot of information from CESNET, the counselor education, and supervision listserv, and I was also part of the state professional organizations. I was getting emails from various counselor educators and programs, and we were talking amongst each other as well for

state-specific stuff." Others, such as Teresa, sought legal advice about new problems that surfaced in the changing climate. She says, "We had to look into laws in regard to practicing supervision and seeing clients in regard to our state. A student was seeing a client that lived across the state line and was unable to continue seeing the person."

Although some participants gathered enough information to make initial decisions, nearly all participants expressed frustration with CACREP's initial lack of guidance and slow reaction. Heather stated:

I think working in a bit of a vacuum was a challenging thing at times, and not having that vocal support from our institutions that are really quick to require much of us, and then in return are not very providing of guidance. I think it's specifically around CACREP's leadership — I thought really fell short.

Derrick expressed similar frustration when he stated:

From our accrediting agencies and licensure bodies, they were also quite slow in making any kind of accommodations for our students. I still have a great deal of — and I've expressed it where I can — disappointment in the leadership in our profession, especially in terms of CACREP as slow reaction time and really restricted measures in terms of supporting our students getting what they needed done.

In addition to a lack of guidance from CACREP, participants also noticed a lack of communication from their states' licensing boards. Teresa stated, "It was frustrating because we had rules, but then we didn't. The board was sometimes not communicating with us as much as we wanted." Participants also noted that guidance from their universities was noticeably absent. "There wasn't any guidance initially from the university in terms of what we were expected to do or able to do for our students," said Derrick. Similarly, Jodey stated, "Everyone has had lots of questions but sometimes not a lot of answers from department heads or state boards."

Adaptation to Leadership

The second theme examined the leadership roles that the participants took as they made decisions and experienced changes to their responsibilities. Although the participants were not in formal leadership positions, such as department chair or dean of a college, many found themselves in quasi-leader roles as the circumstances demanded action. Rapidly changing conditions and a lack of guidance in the pandemic's early stages compelled participants to make quick, independent decisions. While confusion and contemplation marked the pandemic's initial phase, action defined this period. Participants framed their decisions more as reflexes than carefully laid-out plans. Lisa explained:

Literally, in about 12 minutes I had 100 and something emails from students, very chaotic and panicked because their sites were closing so we really had to do some scrambling. We had to immediately meet with administration and with staff.

Although the participants responded as quickly as possible, it seemed the circumstances were evolving just as rapidly. Patty stated, "We'll make this announcement to students, and two hours later, CACREP gives us different information." Derrick summarized, "It can be hard steering a big ship like [my university]. Most of it was just a reaction. I'm just making a decision and hoping later that I have a job to come back to."

One decision that weighed heavily on participants was determining which rules and regulations to follow closely and which ones to bend. Participants like Teresa viewed the regulations as unwavering because of the potential ramifications. She stated:

You have to follow those CACREP standards, and CACREP did not give us much wiggle room. For our interns, you're going to get 600 hours no matter what. I'm not going to send you out into the field and then you email me and go, "They're not letting me get licensed because I got 550 hours and not 600."

Other participants, knowing the potential for consequences, decided not to follow regulations as closely to help graduating students. Heather explained:

We said there's our little loophole because we need to graduate students to get licensed. We're going to follow the state's guidelines. For CACREP, we will just provide an explanation of why our students for this academic year did not do 700 hours.

On top of these additional decisions, participants also experienced significant increases to their regular workload. Participants spent extra time coordinating with their students' internship sites, communicating with faculty and students, and connecting others with resources. Patty stated, "I get up early in the morning, and sometimes I'm still tapping away at midnight. My job increased triple, probably quadruple." In a similar sentiment, Sadie stated simply, "I don't think I've worked that hard in a really long time." Even though workloads increased, coordinators recognized the necessity of their efforts and expressed a need to help their students. Patty elaborated, "We are trying to do as much as we can even though things are shut down. So yes, my workload increased, but I also wanted to take on new projects to help the students."

Changes to Student Experience

In this theme, participants described the changes to students' practicum and internship experiences, particularly academic-related changes. One of the most drastic changes that the participants' students faced was the shift from in-person counseling to telecounseling. Not only did the participants facilitate this abnormal transition, they were also responsible for adequately training students to provide new virtual counseling services. Some participants relied on the resources from large organizations, such as Professional Education Systems Institute (PESI) or ACA, for their telehealth training. Others scrambled to put together their own trainings. Lisa described this process:

We quickly put together a 2-day, 3-hour training on telemental health.... We trained with two

sessions with 400 students in each and site supervisors. We're training our site supervisors, too, because they were also thrown into this crisis. So again, we trained everybody up as quickly as we could. It was a Band Aid.

Supervision of students also changed significantly during this time. Because students and supervisors were not allowed to meet in-person during the pandemic, participants installed creative solutions to meet their students' supervision needs. Patty described:

All of our practicum sessions are videotaped; faculty review all sessions and provide feedback. And so, what we did was we got the highest grade of Zoom we could get. We have a double password protection on videos we save for review and supervision. And we, as faculty, for the first two to three sessions with a new client, we provided live supervision through Zoom.

Dani approached practicum and internship supervision in a completely different manner than Patty. She explained, "We had a rule in place where their supervisor had to be on the session, just with their face muted. So, it was like a live supervision." Sadie's practicum and internship supervision process was unique as well. She explained:

A student would share their screen and they show the video, and then the instructor would watch them and delete it. For students who weren't able to get their recording, some of our instructors would be their client and they'd have to live counsel them and they would get feedback from the class.

Other participants did not experience changes to supervision. Jodey said, "Our program is specifically online, and it's asynchronous, so we meet every week. Personally, I feel like our group supervision didn't really look any different." Participants with previous remote teaching experience had similar encounters with supervision.

Another hurdle that the participants' students faced was the acquisition of counseling hours. As practicum and internship sites closed, reduced services, or transitioned to telecounseling services,

participants were left to help students find other ways to meet their required practice hours. Like Patty and Derrick, some participants advised students to focus on indirect hours rather than direct counseling hours. Many participants, however, were able to help students complete their direct counseling hours. Sadie, Heather, and Jodey reported that all of their students could finish the required hours for the semester. Teresa stated that this issue was her single most significant concern of the semester. She encapsulated this time best when she said, "Everything was hours, hours, hours. I don't like to put so much on the hours, but we were scrambling."

Although participants tried to maintain somewhat normal expectations for their programs, they inevitably made alternative plans for some students. Some of those plans included giving extensions to complete clinical hours, giving students an Incomplete for their grade, and even prolonging students' programs of study. To mitigate the need for extensions, some participants chose to assign projects to fulfill some of the need for clinical hours. Derrick explained:

Some of the students were required to complete and create trainings for either their peers or client populations. It was really geared towards who the students had been working with. A psychoeducation presentation that really applies to and can benefit clients. The expectation was that they would feed that back into their sites as a resource for the site.

Heather took a similar approach to Derrick. She said:

We just said make infographics for clients about dealing with COVID-19 anxiety or research about disaster relief therapy or psychology, or psychological first aid.... We used creative ideas to say, here, there are things that you can do so you're engaged, still in your clinical growth.

Personal Support

The fourth theme illustrated the personal toll that the pandemic took on students and faculty. The

steps that the participants took to support student wellness were described by participants. Several participants noticed how they were checking on their students' mental health more often, shifting more into a counselor role. Participants noted their use of counseling skills, such as asking process questions and reframing, increased significantly during this time. "We had a lot of very anxious students, mentally distressed students. [We were] to the point where we felt we were doing a little counseling for our counselors," said Lisa. Sadie stated, "We used this crisis as kind of like a learning opportunity. Like in the real world, when they graduate, no one's going to be pulling them from anywhere. So, let's see how this rolls out." Participants also recognized the isolation that students faced in a quarantined world and provided more opportunities for them to connect to real people. Dani expressed the importance of demonstrating composure to students throughout this time, saying "There was no need to be in panic mode, especially for our students. They needed to see that we were calm and composed."

While the participants were devoting time and energy to caring for the students, many noticed the personal toll that the responsibilities of their jobs took. Common words used among nearly every participant were "exhausting" and "overwhelmed." Derrick said, "Pretty much as soon as I got one thing under my belt, I started freaking out about the next thing coming up. We got that elephant back in its cage. Now, there's a whole stampede that's coming." Patty, looking forward to the end of the semester, simply said, "Hopefully, I will be able to catch my breath."

Readiness

The final theme explored the participants' thoughts around the readiness of CES programs to react appropriately to large-scale crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In regards to their preparedness to pivot toward ERT, the participants who had remote teaching components in their programs before COVID-19 felt equipped to handle the transitions that occurred. Those participants who did not incorporate technology into their CES

programs expressed significant frustrations related to the switch to ERT. In a similar vein, many participants discussed the importance of resiliency as an element of program readiness. Most participants noted how their students were able to adjust even during drastic changes to their programs. Heather said, "We go into crisis mode, and there was no stop in our movement. [My students] just kept rolling, and they just kept doing it because we had implemented strategies for what they could do." In the only dissenting view, Lisa noted disappointment in the resiliency of her students, saying "If you want to be a school counselor, then you must be able to roll with these situations. And that really grew our awareness to student resiliency and how low our student resiliency was, surprisingly."

Participants also reflected on the ways that COVID-19 affected the overall quality of the practicum and internship experience. Some participants believed that they could maintain the same level of quality even through the various adjustments they made in response to the pandemic. Dani illustrated this idea when she said, "I think with crisis, there's opportunity. I think our students got it. So, do I think [practicum and internship] was effective? Absolutely." Others saw an evident decline in quality and reported that students did not have the same clinical experience as previous students. Lisa elaborated:

[The students] felt cheated. They had been looking forward to working with clients, and now what I'm doing is observing on Zoom or a telemental health platform. They couldn't wait to do play therapy and to integrate these things, and now [we have] practicum students who don't even have 100 hours.

Most participants saw increased value in the unique clinical opportunities (e.g., telecounseling, online supervision) that graduate students experienced during the pandemic. Sadie stated:

I think some students felt like they kind of got shortchanged a little bit. When we were able to talk it out and reframe it, I'm like, well you could

look at it like you got skills and training that you would not normally have thought you would.



Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged practicum and internship coordinators in counselor education programs across the country (Gay & Swank, 2021). In this study, we found that coordinators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic followed a common trajectory. In the beginning, coordinators felt lost as they awaited guidance from their universities, accrediting organizations, and local licensure boards. When they realized that the guidance was either vague or untimely, they began to make more independent decisions about their programs. As decisions were made, they noticed how their students' experiences were drastically changed. As students struggled to cope, coordinators took steps to ensure personal wellness for their students. Although the coordinators were physically and emotionally exhausted, many saw value in their experience when reflecting upon their first semester in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our study echoed many of the themes found by Gay and Swank (2021). Both studies found that participants commonly expressed ways in which they supported students. Additionally, both studies identified themes related to program preparedness for large-scale closures as well as changes to clinical experiences. The two studies differed, however, in some meaningful ways. First, the participants in our study identified a theme related to uncertainty and confusion, and a significant focus of their experiences centered around their efforts to cope with the uncertainty of the events. Second, our study identified a theme related to participants' identity as leaders. Although our participants were initially reluctant to lead their programs and waited for guidance from others, they eventually embraced leadership as they made necessary, independent decisions. Additionally, the participants in Gay and Swank (2021) identified gatekeeping as an important component during COVID-19. We did

not find gatekeeping as a major theme among these participants' experiences.

This study also endorsed findings from the extant counseling leadership literature. McKibben et al. (2017a) documented a comprehensive array of leadership behaviors and qualities including modeling, advocacy, professional identity, wellness, high standards, and creativity. Throughout their roles during the ERT phase of COVID-19, our participants exemplified several of these characteristics as they embraced leadership roles. As participants in the current study quickly adapted to these new leadership roles, many of them felt exhausted and overwhelmed, typical symptoms of burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005). This finding supports Harrichand et al. (2021), who found that counselor educators with lower levels of leadership experience had higher levels of personal and student-related burnout. Further, the initial hesitancy of our participants to accept their leadership role as part of their identity suggests the need for improved counseling leadership training, a finding that is well-documented in counselor leadership literature (Chang et al., 2012; McKibben et al., 2017b; Peters & Vereen, 2020).

Participants in this study recognized how the pandemic affected students' mental health and their personal mental health. This finding is similar to recent studies that connect mental health issues with the COVID-19 pandemic (Dong & Bouey, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). These participants also illustrated the challenges students faced as clinical sites closed and students struggled to acquire their required clinical hours. This finding was also similar to some of the recent COVID-19-related research (Bell et al., 2020; Goghari et al., 2020; Thompson, 2020).

Implications

The findings from this study provide several implications for counselor educators, especially those who serve as practicum and internship coordinators. First, we found that many coordinators waited for information from leadership organizations such as CACREP before deciding to

act. Because of the potential impact that early decisions could have on graduate licensure and program accreditation, it is vital that accrediting bodies and state licensure boards provide necessary guidance to counselor education programs in the early stages of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the experiences of these participants as described in our first theme, it is possible that these leadership organizations may not be able to provide guidance quickly. Therefore, coordinators should expect to take leadership roles and make swift decisions independently when future crises arise.

Alternatively, it is possible that these coordinators were not adequately prepared for their leadership roles. Insufficient training could explain their initial disinclination toward leadership. Therefore, counselor education and supervision programs must design training programs that develop leadership knowledge and skills. Further, counselor educators who are inadequately prepared for leadership should consider additional continuing education to grow these skills.

Additionally, counselor educators should consider their preparedness for ERT. Coordinators who worked at universities with remote teaching components installed before the pandemic switched to ERT with ease. The coordinators who worked in more traditional settings that favored in-person learning struggled in the pandemic's early stages. Although it is unreasonable to expect programs to fully exchange their in-person modalities for remote teaching formats, it is important for counselor educators to consider having some remote teaching structure in place before a crisis such as a campus lockdown or a natural disaster. Coordinators should advocate for the incorporation of remote teaching within their programs. By creating an ERT plan, counselor educators can relieve some of the pressure that practicum and internship coordinators might face in a crisis that closes campus for an extended period of time.

Similarly, this study shows the emerging importance of telecounseling training and preparedness. The participants in this study described the efforts they made to locate

appropriate training for telecounseling when their universities closed and internship sites began to discontinue in-person counseling services. Counselor educators may consider adding telehealth training as a component of their programs. By training students in telecounseling before practicum and internship, counselor educators will be more prepared for an ERT-related switch to online counseling services during a crisis. Furthermore, this training would give students an additional marketable skill when they enter the workforce.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study are noted. Our sample lacked both gender and racial diversity. Future studies should target a more diverse sample of coordinators. We also recruited participants from the CESNET listserv, and coordinators who are not on the listserv may have responded to our prompts differently. Future studies should also consider limiting their participants only to include coordinators of CACREP-accredited programs. Our study participants who were not at CACREP-accredited programs did not follow the same standards as the other participants and therefore had different experiences. This study utilized a one-time interview with each participant. Future studies could strengthen findings by conducting multiple interviews over time. Further, some characteristics about each participant, such as the number of students they manage or the presence of an on-campus training clinic, were not collected from our participants. Future studies should consider collecting this data to further differentiate the experiences of coordinators. In addition, the interviews for this study were completed shortly after the conclusion of the Spring 2020 semester, when participants were concluding their first semester during the pandemic. Future studies may consider studying coordinators after their experiences spanned several semesters in the pandemic or even in the post-pandemic world.

Conclusion

As the experiences of these participants demonstrate, several challenges arise when practicum and internship experiences suddenly switch to an ERT format. Decisions must be made about student experiences while coordinators grapple with newly found leadership roles. Although we cannot be certain if another pandemic will occur in our lifetimes, it is vital that programs are adequately prepared to manage the possibility of future crises through the use of ERT. Thus, there is a need for counselor educators to examine their program needs to appropriately prepare for future ERT transitions.



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