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## Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions: A Content Validity Analysis

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# Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions: A Content Validity Analysis

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## Abstract

Counselor educators evaluate the professional counseling dispositions of trainees throughout their development within training programs. There have been few consistent articulations of professional dispositions as many programs and measures define them differently. In this study, we developed the Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions (APCD) and performed a content validity study of the measure. Our findings provide evidence for the content validity of the APCD. We discuss these findings, their implications, and future research using the measure.

## Significance to the Public

This study advances counselor educators' understanding of different types of professional counseling dispositions to consider in student learning outcomes. Additionally, it provides a new measure for which counseling training programs can utilize formative and summative evaluation of counseling students' professional dispositions.

**Keywords:** professional dispositions, content validity, counseling, assessment

A vital element of training counselors is the transparent and data-driven assessment of trainee skills, knowledge, and dispositions (Barrio Minton et al., 2016; Bernard & Goodyear, 2018). Using formative and summative assessments at critical times during students' progression through the program permits self-reflection and constructive learning opportunities to foster their professional growth (Barrio Minton et al., 2016). When students demonstrate nonresponse to feedback or fail to demonstrate professional competence, counselor education faculty, as gatekeepers to the profession, may prevent students from completing their program based on formal assessment procedures (Barrio Minton et al., 2016; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Related Programs [CACREP], 2023). Yet, despite their importance for counselor development,

professional dispositions are hard to define and evaluate (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). Thus, implementing a consistent and reliable program and student evaluation system is critical to ensure students receive opportunities to develop into competent counselors.

CACREP (2023) requires programs to demonstrate assessment processes that provide program-wide and student-specific evaluations through the systematic use of data to appraise students' knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions. Professional dispositions are defined by CACREP as "the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, and behaviors that influence the counselor's professional growth and interactions with clients, faculty, supervisors, and peers, including working in a diverse, multicultural, and

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global society with marginalized populations” (p. 35). While this definition provides a general view on professional dispositions, it lacks specificity about the qualities that make up the concept. Dispositions can be inherent to an individual’s personality, learned over time, or developed through training, intervention, and experience (Freeman et al., 2019; Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Swank & Houseknecht, 2019; Thompson, 2009). Evaluating counseling students’ dispositions includes the identification of crucial dispositions, measuring these dispositions, and reviewing the data to understand student performance (Barrio Minton et al., 2016; CACREP, 2023). As compared to knowledge and skill, professional dispositions include more ambiguous language and inconsistent usage across programs, as evidenced in part by the lack of consensus on which dispositions should be assessed (Foster & McAdams, 2009; Sabella et al., 2019). Scholars have defined dispositions in various ways despite work to clarify definitions (e.g., Christensen et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2020; Spurgeon et al., 2012). Despite lacking a unifying definition, identifying and measuring dispositions is vital for counseling programs.

In addition to being required by accrediting bodies, developing appropriate professional dispositions is also an ethical issue. The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) noted that counselors should exhibit the requisite dispositions to perform culturally competent work with a diverse clientele. Further, the ACA Code of Ethics noted that counselor education faculty are responsible for assessing students’ limitations, providing remedial assistance that matches students’ needs, and potentially recommending dismissal from programs when students cannot demonstrate competence. Consequently, the effective assessment of counseling trainees’ professional dispositions is not only an accreditation requirement but an ethical concern, thus demonstrating the need for quality measures to capture information on students’ performance of established professional dispositions.

Scholars have taken a variety of approaches to identify crucial counselor professional dispositions. Spurgeon et al. (2012) detailed a process whereby the faculty at one institution created professional dispositions for which the program evaluated students. Spurgeon et al. (2012) used several approaches to create their dispositional inventory, including examination of other programs, reflecting faculty values, input from key partners, and use of student evaluation. The culmination of Spurgeon et al.’s (2012) study identified the dispositions of commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness. In a later study, Christensen et al. (2018) conducted a content analysis with 224 counselor education programs by examining their student retention processes, evaluations, and rubrics for key dispositional topics. The Christensen et al. (2018) study resulted in the authors developing seven dispositional areas that included openness to growth, awareness of self and others, integrity, emotional stability, flexibility, compassion, and personal style based on their data coding. Christensen et al.’s (2018) study established that dispositional areas vary based on the perspective of the individuals judging program practices.

Various assessments within the counseling field include aspects of professional dispositions as part of the larger evaluated construct. One example is the Counselor Competency Scale-Revised (CCS-R, Lambie et al., 2018). In the CCS-R, supervisors or course instructors observe and rate students or supervisees in counseling skills and therapeutic conditions and counseling dispositions and behaviors. The CCS-R has several research studies that provide evidence for its reliability and validity, including psychometric studies (i.e., Lambie et al., 2018; Swank et al., 2012) and qualitative inquiries of the supervisee and supervisor experience (i.e., Lambie & Ascher, 2016). When creating the items for the CCS-R, Swank et al. (2012) relied on the expertise of the counselor education faculty at the University of Central Florida in combination with an in-depth review of relevant literature.

A potential limitation of the counseling dispositions measured on the CCS-R is that the authors did not use sophisticated content validity

strategies (i.e., content validity study; Ayre & Scally, 2014; Polit et al., 2007) that involved quantifiable external input to ensure the scales effectively represent the concept. While Swank et al. (2012) used “extensive discussions among experts” (p. 191) along with a review of the literature to develop the initial CCS, it was not subjected to a formal content validity study that would permit external reviewers to provide ratings of the importance for each item on the scale. Given the ambiguity of professional dispositions, using a rigorous content validity study may be useful and add to the literature. A possible added consideration is that the CCS-R is available through membership with Tevera, a third-party fieldwork management and assessment system. Thus, developing a measure of dispositions that is accessible and uses a content validity study may benefit the counselor education community.

The Professional Dispositions Scale–Counseling Student Version (PDS-CVS) by Miller et al. (2020) is another measure of counseling dispositions. The formation of the PDS-CVS followed a development process similar to that of the CCS-R, in which the authors reviewed the literature and identified specific counseling dispositions. The authors’ review resulted in nine categories for the PDS-CVS, including self-control, suitability for the profession, personal wellness, responsiveness, professionalism, personal and professional boundaries, ethical/legal considerations, cognitive factors, and interpersonal factors. Miller et al. (2020) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on a 59-item scale using 283 counseling students. The analysis confirmed the influence these nine categories had on two latent factors of personal and professional dispositions along with a global scale of dispositions. Though the authors provided evidence for the structural validity of the scale, Miller et al. (2020) did not describe a process by which they determined the content validity of the scale through expert review. Thus, they did not ensure that the PDS-CVS contained a comprehensive representation of all the professional dispositions connected to the counseling field.

Garner et al. (2016) created the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (PDCA) as a rubric tool for counselor educators to help evaluate student dispositions during admission and throughout the program. Using a scale development process described by Saifit and Wood (1995), the authors enacted critical processes in creating the PDCA, including creating a blueprint, creating items, examining content validity, testing the items, analyzing the results, and revising the tool. The PDCA items measure the domains of conscientiousness, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, professionalism, self-regulation, character, critical thinking, appreciation of learning, and spirituality. To establish evidence for content validity, the researchers provided a detailed literature review and developed a test blueprint evaluated by an expert panel of seven counselor educators. Yet, the measure included professional dispositions that may also be regarded as innate, universal traits (i.e., spirituality) while omitting some widely regarded as essential to effective counseling work.

Garner et al. (2020) later revised the PDCA for specific use during admission interviews and created a training video to improve interrater reliability, resulting in the PDCA-Revised (Freeman & Garner, 2017). The details of the revisions process are limited, but Garner et al. (2020) noted that they utilized an additional expert panel process and legal counsel to make revisions to the PDCA. The PDCA-R evaluates the areas of conscientiousness, coping and self-care, openness, cooperativeness, moral reasoning, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, emotional stability, and ethical behavior. Garner et al. (2020) noted that the PDCA should be used for gatekeeping, which led them to create the PDCA–Revised Admission (PDCA-RA) to help screen for dispositional issues during the admissions process. The PDCA-RA (Garner et al., 2020) evaluates the same areas as the PDCA-R minus the construct of ethical behaviors and includes adjustments to the item stems, making it suitable for admission processes. While the PDCA and its variants provide a lens through which counselor educators can evaluate professional dispositions, the content

validity of the measure is unsubstantiated. The authors of the PDCA even noted that the “utility may be limited, as the selected dispositions may not align with the values of all counselor education programs” (Garner et al., 2020, p. 346). Given the often-ambiguous nature of professional counseling dispositions and the importance of accurately evaluating them as a gatekeeping process, efforts to gain diverse and collaborative perspectives on the content of a dispositions measure are imperative.

## Development of the Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions

The Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions (APCD) started as a feedback process established by the counseling program at William & Mary, whereby faculty evaluated and rated students across a series of professional standards. The Professional Performance Review process (McAdams et al., 2007), first modeled by Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995), regularly evaluated students across 10 professional performance standards. If a student showed insufficient performance in one or more standards, a professional growth plan to address the deficiency would be communicated to the student through a notification of professional performance. For a more detailed description of this process, readers could review the works of McAdams and Foster (2007), McAdams et al. (2007), and Foster and McAdams (2009).

We followed DeVellis' (2017) guidelines for scale development in our approach to creating the APCD. First, we began the process by (a) determining what to measure, (b) generating a pool of items, and (c) determining the format for the scale. To start, we conducted a general review of the literature to define and explore the construct of professional dispositions regarding counselor education. We avoided construct proliferation (Shaffer et al., 2016) by ensuring that existing measures of counseling dispositions are not the same as the APCD using a comprehensive review of the literature and the creation of a nomological

network of concepts and scales that measure counseling dispositions. Second, we created our initial item pool using the professional performance review process as a starting point. At first, we used the 10 professional standards (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; McAdams et al., 2007) from the professional performance review process, which made the initial 10 items on the scale. Our second step in generating an item pool included a deeper exploration of the literature on professional dispositions and existing scales that measure dispositions (Barrio Minton et al., 2016; Christensen et al., 2018; Garner et al., 2020; Spurgeon et al., 2012). The items we considered reflected the broad terms used to measure dispositions in the literature. The creation of an item pool included forming a table of specifications, which illustrated how the existing literature is represented in the measure and built initial evidence for the scale's content validity.

As a result of the literature review, we added two items to the pool that could evaluate professional dispositions but were not already included. At this point, we shared the items with the faculty in our counselor education program (14 core faculty with doctoral degrees in counselor education) for feedback and input, which resulted in adding two additional items and some changes to the language used in the scale. Finally, we shared the scale with five counselor educators external to our program familiar with scale development and counseling dispositions. We deemed these panelists as experts based on their meeting three of the following five criteria: (a) published or presented on professional dispositions, (b) taught a doctoral course on counseling supervision or professional issues at a CACREP program, (c) published on scale development research methods, (d) worked in counselor education as a faculty member for 8 or more years, and (e) served as a program coordinator or department chair for 2 or more years. The initial external panel recommended one additional item and provided feedback on the scale. After the item generation process, the APCD encompassed 15 counseling dispositions.

For the third step, we finalized the format of the APCD. Each dispositional trait is measured by a single item that includes an identifier and description of the disposition. The rating scale uses three progressive levels: unacceptable, acceptable, and optimal. Each rating category includes detailed examples that demonstrate the rationale for the rating. Our decision for the three-level scale was to ensure that a person completing the scale could meaningfully and clearly discriminate between ratings, whereas a higher-level scale may lead to a less definitive response due to ambiguity between the response options. The initial scale reviews described earlier also included feedback about the scale rating format. For example, reviewers noted that the three-level scale made the rating of dispositions clear. Once we finalized the scale format, we examined the APCD by subjecting it to a content validity study. The following questions guided the study:

1. How does an expert and clinical panel rate the *relevance* of the items on the APCD?
2. How does an expert and clinical panel rate the *clarity* of the items on the APCD?
3. How does an expert and clinical panel rate the *importance* of the items on the APCD?

## Method

### Participants

In this study, we utilized two panels of participants to gather ratings of the APCD. Our selection of a large and professionally diverse panel is grounded in Lawshe's (1975) recommendation to include people who know the job to make judgments about performance on the APCD. The first panel included 21 content experts in counselor education and supervision. The second panel included 21 field placement clinical supervisors, school counseling district coordinators, or clinically active alumni from the authors' counseling program. Table 1 displays the demographics of the participants.

### Procedures

Before starting the study, we acquired approval from our university's institutional review board. Next, we employed a nonprobability, purposive sampling approach based on specific criteria to determine each person's suitability for the study. Specifically, we identified a list of prospective counselor educators who held the necessary credentials to be considered for the first panel in the study. The inclusion criteria included faculty who (a) coordinate a counseling program, thus displaying experience managing gatekeeping processes; (b) serve as CACREP liaison, thus exhibiting a familiarity with aspects of accreditation; and (c) have published research on professional dispositions broadly or on unique aspects of professional dispositions. In addition, participants were recruited to represent different disciplines (i.e., school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, and couples and family counseling). Once we created this list, the first author emailed prospective participants individually with an invitation to complete a review of the measure using a Qualtrics survey. Up to two reminder emails (three in total) were sent to anyone who did not respond to the initial inquiry. Participants received a copy of the scale and a link to read the scale description. Each participant was offered a \$10 gift card to Amazon.com as an incentive for participating. A total of 25 counselor educators were invited to participate, with 21 (84% response rate) completing the review.

For the second panel of participants, we again used a nonprobability, purposive sampling approach to review and select field placement clinical supervisors, school district school counseling administrators, and clinically active alums from the counselor education program of the authors. We selected these community partners because they utilize the measure to evaluate students in our program or represent prospective hiring agents of our students. Clinically active alumni were selected because they were familiar with the evaluation and feedback processes and had a view of its importance from the practitioner side, offering a unique perspective for feedback on the measure. In

addition, this pool of participants represents practicing counselors from across key discipline areas, such as school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, and couples and family counseling, to develop evidence for the content validity of the measure from a group of people

working in the profession (Lawshe, 1975). Like the group of content experts, we recruited participation via a series of emails, a Qualtrics survey, and an offer of a \$10 Amazon.com gift card for being in the research study. A total of 50 individuals from the second-panel group were invited to participate, with 21 (42% response rate) completing the review.

**Table 1**

*Panelist Demographic Data*

|                                  | Panel 1      |           | Panel 2      |           | Total        |           |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
|                                  | <i>M</i>     | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>     | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>     | <i>SD</i> |
| Age                              | 46.24        | 9.58      | 38.14        | 9.88      | 42.19        | 10.45     |
| Experience in Current Role       | 14.24        | 3.39      | 7.81         | 6.58      | 11.02        | 8.13      |
| Gender                           | <i>n</i> (%) |           | <i>n</i> (%) |           | <i>n</i> (%) |           |
| Female                           | 14 (66.7%)   |           | 16 (71.4%)   |           | 29 (69.0%)   |           |
| Male                             | 7 (33.3%)    |           | 6 (28.6%)    |           | 13 (31.0%)   |           |
| Ethnicity                        |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish     | 2 (9.5%)     |           | 2 (9.5%)     |           | 4 (9.5%)     |           |
| Not Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish | 19 (90.5%)   |           | 19 (90.5%)   |           | 38 (90.5%)   |           |
| Race                             |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Asian                            | 1 (4.8%)     |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 1 (2.4%)     |           |
| Black or African American        | 3 (14.3%)    |           | 3 (14.3%)    |           | 6 (14.3%)    |           |
| White                            | 16 (76.2%)   |           | 18 (85.7%)   |           | 34 (81.0%)   |           |
| Declined to Answer               | 1 (4.8%)     |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 1 (2.4%)     |           |
| Faculty Role                     |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Assistant                        | 4 (19%)      |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 4 (9.5%)     |           |
| Associate                        | 6 (28.6%)    |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 6 (14.3%)    |           |
| Professor                        | 10 (47.6%)   |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 10 (24.4%)   |           |
| Other                            | 1 (4.8%)     |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 1 (2.4%)     |           |
| Not Applicable                   | 0 (0%)       |           | 21 (100%)    |           | 21 (50.0%)   |           |
| Primary Current Work Role        |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Counselor Educator               | 21 (100%)    |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 21 (50.0%)   |           |
| Practicing Counselor             | 0 (0%)       |           | 13 (61.9%)   |           | 13 (31.7%)   |           |
| Director/Supervisor/Employer     | 0 (0%)       |           | 5 (23.8%)    |           | 5 (12.2%)    |           |
| Some Other Role                  | 0 (0%)       |           | 3 (14.3%)    |           | 3 (7.3%)     |           |
| Current Site Supervisor          |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Yes                              | 0 (0%)       |           | 11 (52.4)    |           | 11 (26.2)    |           |
| No                               | 21 (100%)    |           | 10 (47.6%)   |           | 31 (73.8%)   |           |
| Sample Groups                    |              |           |              |           |              |           |
| Counselor Educator               | 21 (100%)    |           | 0 (0%)       |           | 21 (50%)     |           |
| Site Supervisor                  | 0 (0%)       |           | 10 (47.6%)   |           | 10 (24.4%)   |           |
| District Administrator           | 0 (0%)       |           | 2 (9.5%)     |           | 2 (4.9%)     |           |
| Alumni                           | 0 (0%)       |           | 9 (42.9%)    |           | 9 (22.0%)    |           |

*Note.* Panel 1 ( $n = 21$ ) = Content experts. Panel 2 ( $n = 21$ ) = Site supervisors, alumni, and employers.

## Data Sources and Collection

Data for this study included expert panelists' ratings for each item on the APCD. Participants were emailed a copy of the APCD and a link to the Qualtrics survey to capture the data. When completing the ratings, the participants reviewed instructions that provided a link to a copy of the APCD and a scale description. The description of the APCD provided to participants (a) defined the scale's purpose, focus, and target population; (b) defined professional counseling dispositions; (c) identified potential uses of the scale; and (d) noted the scoring procedures.

Participants were asked to review the APCD and the description of the scale. Then, they entered their ratings of the individual scale items for relevance, clarity, and importance. For relevance and clarity, we used a 4-point rating scale based on guidance provided by Polit and Beck (2006) and Yusoff (2019). We used a 3-point rating scale following Gilbert and Prion's (2016) guidance for Lawshe's (1975) content validity ratio (CVR), which evaluated the importance of each item. After data collection, participants' survey responses were analyzed in Excel.

## Data Analytic Approach

In order to evaluate the evidence for the content validity of the APCD, we followed two different procedures for calculating content validity. Our procedures included (a) the approach Polit and Beck (2006) described for the content validity index and (b) the Lawshe's CVR (Ayre & Scally, 2014; Gilbert & Prion, 2016; Wilson et al., 2012). The following sections describe these data analytic approaches in more detail.

We calculated the content validity index for each item on the APCD (I-CVI) and the overall scale (S-CVI) to answer research questions one and two. For research question one, respondents rated their scores for relevance using the following scale: 4 = highly relevant, 3 = quite relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, and 1 = not relevant. For research question two, respondents rated their scores for clarity using the following scale: 4 = very clear, 3 = clear but

needs minor revisions, 2 = item needs some revisions, and 1 = not clear. The I-CVI is calculated as the number of panelists who rated the item as 3 or 4 (endorsed as relevant) divided by the total number of panelists (Polit & Beck, 2006). For example, if there are 10 panelists and 8 endorse the item (score of 3 or 4), the I-CVI calculation would be  $8 \div 10 = .80$ . An advised cutoff for the I-CVI is .78 (Polit & Beck, 2006). We also computed the S-CVI, or universal agreement, which represents the proportion of items on a measure rated as a 3 or 4 by all panelists. To calculate the S-CVI, we totaled the number of panelists' item-level endorsements and divided them by the total possible number of item endorsements. We used a critical value for the S-CVI of .80 (Polit & Beck, 2006). The I-CVI and S-CVI were applied to the data captured for relevance and clarity.

The CVI does not consider inflated values due to the possibility of chance agreement (Polit & Beck, 2006; Wynd et al., 2003). Thus, we applied the Kappa coefficient to ensure an accurate understanding of the CVI by removing the possibility of chance agreement. To compute the Kappa, we had first to compute the probability of chance agreement using the following equation:  $P_c = [N! / A! (N - A)!] \times 0.5^N$  where  $N$  is the number of expert panelists and  $A$  is the number of expert panelists who endorsed the item as relevant (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019). Once the  $P_c$  was calculated, we used the following formula to calculate the Kappa as  $K = (I-CVI - P_c) / (1 - P_c)$ . We used the cutoff value of .74 for the Kappa coefficient (Polit & Beck, 2006). We utilized the Kappa coefficient for both relevance and clarity.

To examine research question three, we applied Lawshe's CVR to the data acquired through our study (Ayre & Scally, 2014; Gilbert & Prion, 2016). Ratings from the survey were categorized in one of three ways: (a) essential, (b) useful but not essential, and (c) not necessary. In cases where participants rated the items as essential, their response was coded as a 1 and the other categories were coded as a 0. Then, we applied the following equation:  $CVR = (N_e - N/2) / (N/2)$ . In this equation,  $N_e$  is the number of panelists who endorsed the item as "essential,"

and  $N$  is the total number of panelists. We determined the cutoff criteria for the CVR using a critical value table offered by Ayre and Scally (2014). For a panel with 21 people, the minimum number of endorsements ( $N_e$ ) needed to support the inclusion of an item is 15 or a  $CVR_{critical}$  value of .429. Any items with fewer than 14 endorsements or a value less than .429 should be considered as not meeting the threshold for being essential based on the CVR.

## Results

Research question one examined the relevancy ratings of the dispositions measured by the APCD using the I-CVI and S-CVI. Panel 1 was comprised of the content experts, and panel 2 was comprised of the clinical placement supervisors, school district school counseling administrators, and clinically active alums. For panel 1, the I-CVI for the items on the APCD for the relevancy ratings ranged from .86 to 1.00 with an S-CVI of .97. The Kappa scores also ranged from .86 to 1.00. For panel 2, the I-CVI for the items on the APCD for the relevancy ratings ranged from .90 to 1.00 with an S-CVI of .98. The Kappa scores also ranged from .90 to 1.00. The results indicated that all items met standards for relevancy. Table 2 presents additional information about the results of this study.

The second research question explored the panelists' ratings of each item on the APCD regarding clarity. For panel 1, the I-CVI for the items on the APCD for the clarity ratings ranged from .81 to 1.00 with an S-CVI of .94. The Kappa scores also ranged from .81 to 1.00. For panel 2, the I-CVI for the items on the APCD for the clarity ratings ranged from .95 to 1.00 with an S-CVI of .98. The Kappa scores also ranged from .95 to 1.00. The results indicated that all items met standards for clarity. Table 3 presents detailed information about these results.

The third research question focused on the importance of the scale items. To examine this research question, we used Lawshe's CVR. In panel 1, the CVR ranged from -.05 to 1.00, with four

items not meeting the cutoff criteria for the analysis. For panel 2, the CVR ranged from -.05 to .9, with five items not meeting the cutoff criteria for the analysis. Across the two panels, three items on the APCD resulted in insufficient CVR values (initiative and motivation, wellness and self-care, and humility). Table 4 displays item data on the results of this research question.

## Discussion

We set out to advance existing research on professional dispositions within the field of counselor education. Counselor training programs need methods to evaluate trainees' professional dispositions, and there have been various perspectives on the makeup of these dispositions. The creation of the APCD is based on existing literature and input from a panel of experts concerning significant professional dispositions needed by counselor trainees. We then applied these dispositions to a content validity study whereby 42 participants individually rated each item to identify whether they were relevant, clear, or important. Using two approaches, we analyzed participant input to evaluate if the items met the thresholds for inclusion.

The analyses for the first two research questions did not identify any concerns regarding the items' relevance and clarity. All scores indicated that these items were both relevant and clear. These findings provide empirical support that the items on the scale are relevant professional dispositions to be evaluated by counselor education programs. The findings also prove that the items and dispositions represented are clear and understandable. Most of these items originated from the work of Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995) and McAdams et al. (2007), and our findings provide further evidence that supports their use as a measure of professional dispositions. The five new items created during this project were also shown to be relevant and clear, again, showing evidence for the content validity of these items.

**Table 2***Relevancy Ratings for Dispositions on the Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions*

| <b>Dispositions</b>                                         | <b>Panel 1</b> |                      |       |       | <b>Panel 2</b> |                      |       |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------------|-------|-------|
|                                                             | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | I-CVI | Kappa | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | I-CVI | Kappa |
| Openness to new ideas                                       | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Flexibility and adaptability                                | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Cooperativeness with others                                 | 21             | 18                   | .86   | .86   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Willingness to accept and use feedback                      | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Awareness of own impact on others                           | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Ability to deal with conflict                               | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Ability to accept personal responsibility                   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Effective and appropriate expression of feelings            | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Attention to ethical and legal considerations               | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Initiative and motivation                                   | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   |
| Orientation to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Professional wellness and self-care                         | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Humility                                                    | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Professionalism                                             | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Willingness to seek help                                    | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |

*Note.* *N* = Number of Panelists. *N<sub>e</sub>* = the number of panelists in agreement (3 or 4 on the scale). I-CVI = Item-level Content Validity Index (should be higher than .78). Kappa = Measure of Content Validity Index while removing chance error (> .74 is excellent). Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI universal) = .97 (panel 1) and .98 (panel 2) (should be higher than .80).

**Table 3***Clarity Ratings for Dispositions on the Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions*

| <b>Dispositions</b>                                         | <b>Panel 1</b> |                      |       |       | <b>Panel 2</b> |                      |       |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------------|-------|-------|
|                                                             | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | I-CVI | Kappa | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | I-CVI | Kappa |
| Openness to new ideas                                       | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Flexibility and adaptability                                | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Cooperativeness with others                                 | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Willingness to accept and use feedback                      | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Awareness of own impact on others                           | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Ability to deal with conflict                               | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Ability to accept personal responsibility                   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | .00   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Effective and appropriate expression of feelings            | 21             | 17                   | .81   | .81   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Attention to ethical and legal considerations               | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Initiative and motivation                                   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Orientation to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Professional wellness and self-care                         | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Humility                                                    | 21             | 19                   | .90   | .90   | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   |
| Professionalism                                             | 21             | 20                   | .95   | .95   | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Willingness to seek help                                    | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  | 21             | 21                   | 1.00  | 1.00  |

*Note.* *N* = Number of Panelists. *N<sub>e</sub>* = the number of panelists in agreement (3 or 4 on the scale). I-CVI = Item-level Content Validity Index (should be higher than .78). Kappa = Measure of Content Validity Index while removing chance error (> .74 is excellent). Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI universal) = .94 (panel 1) and .98 (panel 2)(should be higher than .80).

**Table 4***Content Validity Ratio Scores for Dispositions on the Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions*

| <b>Dispositions</b>                                         | <b>Panel 1</b> |                      |      |         | <b>Panel 2</b> |                      |      |         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|------|---------|----------------|----------------------|------|---------|
|                                                             | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | CVR  | Min Met | <i>N</i>       | <i>N<sub>e</sub></i> | CVR  | Min Met |
| Openness to new ideas                                       | 21             | 18                   | .71  | Y       | 21             | 14                   | .33  | N       |
| Flexibility and adaptability                                | 21             | 15                   | .43  | Y       | 21             | 15                   | .43  | Y       |
| Cooperativeness with others                                 | 21             | 13                   | .24  | N       | 21             | 16                   | .52  | Y       |
| Willingness to accept and use feedback                      | 21             | 21                   | 1.00 | Y       | 21             | 19                   | .81  | Y       |
| Awareness of own impact on others                           | 21             | 21                   | 1.00 | Y       | 21             | 20                   | .90  | Y       |
| Ability to deal with conflict                               | 21             | 17                   | .62  | Y       | 21             | 16                   | .52  | Y       |
| Ability to accept personal responsibility                   | 21             | 19                   | .81  | Y       | 21             | 20                   | .90  | Y       |
| Effective and appropriate expression of feelings            | 21             | 17                   | .62  | Y       | 21             | 15                   | .43  | Y       |
| Attention to ethical and legal considerations               | 21             | 21                   | 1.00 | Y       | 21             | 20                   | .90  | Y       |
| Initiative and motivation                                   | 21             | 10                   | -.05 | N       | 21             | 11                   | .05  | N       |
| Orientation to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy | 21             | 20                   | .90  | Y       | 21             | 14                   | .33  | N       |
| Professional wellness and self-care                         | 21             | 13                   | .24  | N       | 21             | 12                   | .14  | N       |
| Humility                                                    | 21             | 13                   | .24  | N       | 21             | 10                   | -.05 | N       |
| Professionalism                                             | 21             | 18                   | .71  | Y       | 21             | 18                   | .71  | Y       |
| Willingness to seek help                                    | 21             | 20                   | .90  | Y       | 21             | 17                   | .62  | Y       |

*Note.* *N* = the number of panelists. *N<sub>e</sub>* = the number of panelists in agreement (Rated item as essential). CVR = Content Validity Ratio (Critical Value = .429). Min Met = *N<sub>critical</sub>* (Minimum number of experts required to Agree on an item essential [15 based on the sample of 21]) based on Ayre and Scally (2014).

The third research question applied the Lawshe CVR, which focused on item importance. The approach for the CVR is more conservative than the approach utilized for the CVI as it necessitates agreement on the highest scale rating (out of three rating options), whereas the CVI utilizes the two highest ratings (out of four rating options) as positive endorsements. As a result, it returned more critical results highlighting items that could be problematic. The responses fall within four categories, including (a) items that met cutoff values for both panels of participants (nine items), (b) items that did not meet cutoff values for panel 1 only (content experts; one item), (c) items that did not meet cutoff values for panel 2 only (practitioners; two items), and (d) items that did not meet cutoff values for both panels (three items). Further, the CVR has more literature within the counseling field that encourages its use (e.g., Ayre & Scally, 2014; Wilson et al., 2012). In our findings, the Lawshe CVR identified three items that did not meet the cutoff criteria for both panels.

The item *cooperativeness with others* did not meet the cutoff values for the content experts but did for the field-based practitioners. The results indicate that clinical placement supervisors, school district school counseling administrators, and clinically active alums viewed this item as more important than the content experts. We were surprised by this finding, considering the essence of this disposition is identified in a number of theoretical and empirical articles on the topic (i.e., Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; McAdams et al., 2007; Spurgeon et al., 2012). This finding could possibly be a result of the prevalence of an emphasis on collaboration and case coordination in school and community settings (Johnson & Freeman, 2014), which accentuates the need for this disposition among counselors. One consideration as to why content experts did not rate this item more favorably is the description and rating criteria for it; they might have felt it did not sufficiently encapsulate the concept of cooperativeness with others. The findings regarding this item gave us pause to consider the item's representation of professional dispositions. We elected to keep the items because (a) it performed poorly only in

Lawshe's CVR and not the other analyses, (b) existing literature highlights the importance of this concept (Christensen et al., 2018; Garner et al., 2020), and (c) the need for counselor education programs to evaluate it among their students.

The items *openness to new ideas* and *orientation to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy* met the cutoff for the content experts but not for the field-based practitioners. The finding indicates that while the content experts viewed these items as highly important to the construct of professional dispositions, the clinical placement supervisors, school district school counseling administrators, and alums did not rate them as high. The item *openness to new ideas* speaks to the importance of professional growth, flexibility, and the need to develop as a practitioner, which are ideas endorsed in the literature (McAdams et al., 2007; Swank et al., 2012). Orientation to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy is another essential aspect of counselor training (Davis et al., 2018; Ratts et al., 2016) and should be regularly evaluated (Barrio Minton et al., 2016). Interestingly, our findings regarding the low score for *orientation to multiculturalism and social justice* among practitioners echo Lambie et al. (2018) who considered removing (but retained) the item for multicultural competencies on the CCS-R due to low performance in an exploratory factor analysis. The scores from our study might suggest that these items are more suited to be evaluated separately from a measure of counseling dispositions. For example, a competence or dispositional assessment focused solely on counseling students' multiculturalism and social justice advocacy might be more suitable than a single item on the APCD. We elected to retain these items based on our consideration of the research on the importance of these dispositional traits (Ratts et al., 2016).

The three items that did not meet the cutoff for importance per both panels were (a) initiative and motivation, (b) professional wellness and self-care, and (d) humility. As a result, we have support to exclude these items from the measure because the panelists' scores did not endorse each item at an acceptable level for the CVR. *Initiative and*

*motivation* is an item that evaluates a person's engagement in the learning process and development of their skills with the hope that a student actively participates and completes all assignments. One possible reason for scoring low is that students' motivation toward learning is already evaluated through grades and classroom feedback, possibly rendering the dispositional item redundant. However, initiative and motivation transcend academic assignment and speak to a person's overall effort to develop and grow as a clinician and other scholars highlight its importance (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019).

*Professional wellness and self-care* represent counseling students' intentional efforts to ensure they manage the stress and challenges they face to prevent burnout. We postulate that this item may not be relevant for an examination of dispositions but rather a broader area requiring separate evaluation and monitoring. The concepts measured in this item may be captured elsewhere on the scale, such as within the concept of professionalism. Authors have discussed the importance of training and promoting counseling student well-being (Blount & Mullen, 2015), supporting the importance of this attribute as a professional characteristic. However, we speculate that participants might have been concerned about evaluating health-related aspects of students' academic experience, which might be seen as an attribute that should be outside the scope of a training program and the professional dispositions of counselors. Future research on counseling programs' roles in promoting well-being and evaluating trainees in this area may help illuminate the strengths and concerns of this topic.

The item *humility* represents a counseling trainee's approach to new learning, focusing on displaying modest thoughts regarding the knowledge and skills they bring to the new learning environment. Feedback from experts who recommended this item suggested the need for students to approach new learning from a place of humility. Humility is not a novel concept in education. For example, researchers have examined intellectual humility as a predictor of openness to

opposing views (Porter & Schimann, 2018) and the pursuit of mastery (Porter et al., 2020). Also, cultural humility is viewed as a desirable characteristic of counselors who demonstrate an open and curious viewpoint toward their clients' experiences (Lee & Haskins, 2021). Nevertheless, the participants of this study rated the item as lacking importance, as noted by the low CVR. The overlap between *humility* and the items *openness to new ideas* and *orientation to multiculturalism and social justice* created too much commonality among related concepts. Also, humility might be too broad of a concept described within the scale or might not be a valuable dispositional trait. Similar to the other items, it is useful to remember that humility performed well on two of the three analyses and only struggled in the Lawshe's CVR.

## Implications

The findings have several implications. First, the APCD is a potential scale for counselor educators to evaluate trainees' professional counseling dispositions. Evaluating counseling dispositions is a critical element of counselor education programs; thus, using a scale with the appropriate level of content validity is essential to ensuring trainees are evaluated on dispositions that represent desirable behaviors within the profession. Gatekeeping is an ethical responsibility of supervisors and training programs (Bernard & Goodyear, 2018); the APCD can capture data on professional dispositions for feedback and student tracking. Compared to other measures of professional dispositions, we included a significant vetting of the measured concepts based on a series of panelist evaluations of the APCD items. Counselor educators could use the entire 15-item scale, which is supported by the findings in research questions 1 and 2, or they could use the items that Lawshe's CVR identified as sufficient based on their program's preference.

One consideration for the use of the APCD is the three-scale rating options (unacceptable, acceptable, and optimal), which limits raters' ability to respond to three options and may lead to situations where raters avoid certain levels. Raters may not want to give students an *unacceptable* rating out of concern

for how they interpret it or the implications for their progress in their program. This concern may adversely impact the measure's reliability and the variance of scores, along with its use as a mechanism for feedback. Still, the three-level score system provides clear differentiation for the meaning between scores, helping raters and those being rated make sense of the results. Counselor educators using the scale should consider the rating levels to ensure they use it efficiently and effectively and communicate its meaning to students.

At the core of our study, we investigated the professional counseling dispositions that are important in counselor preparation. The dispositions and their descriptions are an element of the APCD. However, the dispositions could be a resource for counselor educators even if they do not want to utilize the scale. Counselor educators could examine the 15 dispositions described here and use the categories to guide instruction. For example, an instructor in an ethical and professional issues class could engage in a reflective group discussion on a disposition each week to help students conceptualize these professional behaviors. Similarly, at a program orientation, students can take the APCD and then discuss their dispositions as they learn about the program they are beginning. Like Garner et al. (2020), the APCD or the items in it could be used during admissions processes to consider the dispositions of potential students. Once students are admitted to the program, the APCD could be utilized to inform and encourage student development. Within the classroom, instructors might use the APCD to outline expectations for engagement, education, and interaction (West et al., 2021). Within supervision, the APCD could be used as a formative assessment tool, from which a student may work to improve or enhance their professional disposition ratings through intentional work with their supervisor. The APCD may also be used within student experiential growth groups to guide personal growth goals with students' self-selecting dispositions they would like to develop in group sessions.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

One limitation of the study is that it merely examines the scale's content validity, not other psychometric elements, such as reliability, factor structure, and predictive validity. Another limitation of the presented study is that the purposive sample may not represent the viewpoints of everyone who works with and understands professional dispositions in counseling. Although we made efforts to engage a professionally diverse and wide-ranging audience in our panels, our panel 2 (practitioners) remained inevitably geographically local to our institution. The sample also included a high rate of White and female panelists, which means the findings reflect the perspective of these participants and should be contextualized within this limited viewpoint.

We have identified several future research directions to advance our understanding of the APCD. First, researchers could create a study design that would permit exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis of the scale, reliability analysis, and the application of item response theory to scores on the APCD. We anticipate a single-factor model based on the specifications table and professional dispositions construct but we would need to test this empirically. Future research might include adapting the scale from a 3-point scale to a 5-point scale to increase rater scale options and variable scores, perhaps creating multiple versions of the APCD for different uses. For example, a scale with five categories might allow users to capture a broader array of qualifiers for dispositional behaviors. An important future direction is to replicate and extend this study with a more diverse sample and a sample from varying geographical regions. Qualitative and quantitative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of the APCD as a self-reflective tool may also be beneficial.



## Conclusion

We performed a content validity study on the APCD, a measure of professional counseling

dispositions. The findings from our study highlight that the items were both relevant and clear based on ratings from a panel of content experts and a panel of practitioners. Lawshe's CVR revealed that some items were not seen as important by the panelists, which provides information to help contextualize the dispositions measured on the scale. We believe the APCD provides a quality pathway for evaluating professional dispositions, but more research is needed to provide additional evidence for the measure's reliability and validity.

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