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Cover Page Footnote

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A Model of Retention and Remediation for Online Counselor Education

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Abstract

Online counseling programs experience unique retention and gatekeeping challenges. Increased isolation and personal adversities are common factors associated with attrition for online students, and broad-access admission policies of online counseling programs often lead to increased gatekeeping concerns postadmission. Counseling programs develop policies and procedures related to retention, remediation, and dismissal, but extant models of remediation do not also address student retention or the unique challenges of online counselor education. We present a model, The Retention and Remediation Model for Online Counselor Education, that demonstrates a comprehensive policy for retention, remediation, and dismissal in online counseling programs through a three-prong approach that includes recognizing student achievements (compliment referrals), connecting at-risk students to resources (connect referrals), and remediating students' academic, clinical, and dispositional concerns (concern referrals). A case example is presented that demonstrates the implementation of connect and concern referrals, and implications related to triangulation, cultural sensitivity, and cyberincivility are discussed.

Significance to the Public

This article addresses the scholarship need for robust retention and remediation policy in online counselor education. The presented model supports online counseling student retention through achievement recognition and connecting at-risk students to institutional resources. Online student remediation is addressed through a structured approach based on best practices. A case is presented to demonstrate the model.

Keywords: remediation, gatekeeping, retention, online counselor education, counselors-in-training

Online counseling programs are steadily growing (Snow et al., 2018) with increased access opportunities for students and unique challenges related to student retention and remediation for counselor educators. At the time of this writing, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; n.d.) has accredited 91 online addiction, clinical mental health, marriage, couple, and family, and school counseling master's programs. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this growth by prompting traditional counseling programs to adopt online or hybrid instruction methods (Harrison, 2021). Online education transcends geographical barriers and

enables international students and students isolated in rural areas to access accredited counselor education (Chen et al., 2020). It also allows students to pursue degrees without significant interruptions to their job or family responsibilities (Haddock et al., 2020; Sheperis, Coker, et al., 2020; Sorensen & Donovan, 2017).

Despite these advantages, online counseling programs have substantial retention and remediation challenges. According to Haddock et al. (2020), the attrition rate for online counseling programs is higher than that of traditional residential programs and factors that impact retention in online

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counseling programs often overlap with potential gatekeeping concerns. Increased isolation in online counseling programs is linked to attrition and diminished opportunities for accurate competency assessment (e.g., Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020; Gilbert et al., 2019). Also, many online counseling programs have adopted broad-access admission policies, which could result in increased remediation needs (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020; Haddock et al., 2020) and greater variance in students' commitment, a potent factor in graduate student retention (Roberts, 2012). The personal adversities of online counselors in training (CITs) can impact retention and students' ability to reach minimum competency standards (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020). Given these overlapping needs, online counseling programs must develop a robust strategy that concurrently addresses student retention and remediation.

CACREP (2023a) requires programs to establish policies and procedures for retention, remediation, and dismissal (Standard 1.O.); however, extant models of CIT remediation (e.g., Hylton et al., 2017; Letourneau, 2016) lack procedures for improving retention and overlook the challenges of online programs. Applying approaches designed for face-to-face CITs without adapting them to an online format “is not adequate to promote engagement and could instead contribute to both cognitive and emotional detachment” (Haddock et al., 2020, p. 94). Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Student Departure is a research-based model of higher education student retention; however, extant scholarship has not explored the model's application to counseling programs and only one known article has adapted the model for online students (Fraenza & Rye, 2021). Considering CACREP's (2023a) mandate to develop policies addressing both remediation and retention, the overlapping catalysts for gatekeeping and attrition risk, and the imperative to adapt research-based models to the peculiarities of online counselor education, a model for remediation and retention in online counselor education is essential.

To meet this need, we present a comprehensive model for retention, remediation, and dismissal in

online counseling programs. This three-prong approach includes recognizing student achievements, connecting students to resources, and remediating students' competency concerns. The first two prongs draw from Tinto's (1993) model and existing retention research with counseling students and online higher education students, whereas the third prong is informed by CIT remediation research adapted to the online environment. This model targets online (master's) counseling programs, and we present a case study illustrating its application. For this article, an *online counseling program* refers to a master's-level program that delivers some or all of its counseling training “via a distance education format” (Sheperis, Ordway, et al., 2020, p. 109).

Student Retention in Counselor Education Programs

Student retention enables counseling programs to ensure limited resources are utilized efficiently and to provide evidence of program sustainability and viability (Cochran et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2018). Admissions, orientation, and program recruitment are time-intensive with substantial resources allocated to these processes (Jensen et al., 2018), and administrators of counseling programs must compete for limited institutional resources to fund these activities (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). To maintain accreditation, online counseling programs must demonstrate that institutions are financially committed to “ensure continuity, quality, and effectiveness in the program's digital delivery learning environments” (CACREP, 2023b, Standard 1.C.). Counseling programs that successfully retain students demonstrate program viability and are more likely to maintain accreditation and institutional financial support, which is crucial to providing quality counselor education that develops high caliber CITs (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020) and maintains the integrity of the profession.

Theoretical Framework of Retention

Tinto (1993) developed the Longitudinal Model of Student Departure as a conceptual framework of attrition in higher education. The model posits that students' engagement in academic and social experiences in the learning environment influences their integration into the academic community, which impacts their level of institutional commitment and, consequently, departure decisions (Roberts, 2012). Although the model was developed for traditional undergraduate students, Hoydhaugen et al. (2023) validated the model with graduate nursing students and Fraenza and Rye (2021) adapted the model for online doctoral students. Tinto's (1993) model has not yet been implemented with online counseling programs and there is a paucity of research exploring factors predicting online CIT retention. Despite these gaps, much can be gleaned from retention research with online students in higher education and traditional residential counseling students. The integration of this research with the Longitudinal Model of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) can inform a new model of retention in online counselor education.

Engagement

According to Tinto's (1993) model, diminished institutional integration predicts student departure and is evidenced by a lack of engagement in the academic and social environments. Engagement refers to the quality of students' efforts in academic activities and involvement in the educational setting (Krause & Coates, 2008; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2020). Students enrolled in online counseling programs have significantly less program engagement than students in traditional residential programs (Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2020). Because online students are dispersed geographically, programs must be intentional about creating opportunities for social and academic engagement. For example, faculty advisors' multifaceted outreach to students in the form of asynchronous (e.g., email, instant messaging) and synchronous (e.g., videoconferencing) communication increases higher education online student engagement and retention, especially when the advisement is

personalized to focus on students' values and goals (Gravel, 2012). In addition, programs can enhance the inclusivity of the learning environment by connecting racially and ethnically diverse students with diverse faculty, professional networks, and professional associations (Proctor & Owens, 2019). These ongoing intentional interactions promote students' engagement, which contributes to student retention.

Connecting Identified Students to Resources

Because engagement predicts institutional integration and, consequently, retention, online students can be identified for further intervention by their diminished engagement. This disengagement may be evidenced by withdrawal behaviors such as unresponsiveness to peer or instructor communication, reduced synchronous class attendance or participation, or infrequent interaction with the Learning Management System (LMS). Online counseling programs can institute policies for identifying students with low engagement and potential departure risk and then connect these students to appropriate supports that may facilitate their success.

Online CITs' engagement and integration may be stymied due to disconnection from institutional resources. Online higher education students determined that issues such as unreliable technology, financial aid incorrectly applied, a lack of advisement, registration challenges, and unresponsiveness from university personnel were catalysts for their self-initiated withdrawal (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). Failing to receive assistance can amplify feelings of isolation for online counseling students and increase the likelihood of student attrition (e.g., Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020; Phirangee & Malec, 2017). Connecting identified online counseling students to appropriate resources (e.g., registrar, financial aid, advisors, library resources, etc.) should be combined with intentional outreach from faculty, which is "intricately tied to the successful utilization of these services" (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020, p. 71).

Students often choose online counseling programs to better maintain multiple family, work, and personal obligations (Haddock et al., 2020); however, personal stress can disrupt engagement (Muir et al., 2019) and serve as a malintegrative experience that contributes to attrition (Roberts, 2012). Doctoral counselor education and supervision (CES) students noted that personal difficulties combined with academic culture factors led to their departure (Burkholder, 2012). To counter the impact of personal adversity on engagement, integration, and retention, online counseling programs can connect identified students with personal counseling resources. Counseling and school psychology students experienced fewer problems, lower mental health distress, and increased program engagement after attending program-initiated personal counseling (e.g., Bilodeau & Meissner, 2018; Prosek et al., 2013). Personal stress and adversity can also lead to competency concerns if clinical or dispositional skills are affected (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020). Intervening with online CITs' personal concerns that are posing a risk for attrition may be an early intervention that prevents future remediation.

Recognition of Student Achievements

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Student Departure emphasizes the importance of positive institutional experiences for fortifying students' intentions and commitments, and ultimately, persistence in their degree (as cited in Roberts, 2012). Part of cultivating an engaging learning community involves recognition of student successes. Students feel motivated to continue when their achievements are affirmed (O'Shea et al., 2015). In a sample of online higher education students, Beck and Milligan (2014) found that positive interactions with the educational social environment predicted institutional commitment. Positive interactions include recognizing students that are exceeding competency standards. Bliven and Jungbauer (2021) found that higher education students who received formal recognition for academic excellence demonstrated greater persistence, academic success, and retention than

those who did not receive the recognition. Examples of achievement recognition can include a personalized letter, a formal award, or a certificate of achievement (Bliven & Jungbauer, 2021). Maintaining a positive and caring learning environment is integral to students' continued engagement and retention.



Gatekeeping and Remediation

For counseling programs, dismissal due to gatekeeping concerns and unsuccessful remediation may be an accepted part of attrition. D'Aniello and Hertlien (2017) describe gatekeeping as counselor educators' role at admissions, during training, and at graduation to regulate "entry into the profession" of counseling (p. 220). Effective gatekeeping ensures that graduates have demonstrated adequate competency to provide ethical and proficient counseling. Programs identify minimum competency standards, develop methods of assessment, and implement remediation and dismissal processes should a student fail to meet identified benchmarks (D'Aniello & Hertlein, 2017).

Competency Standards

Counseling students are assessed according to identified standards of knowledge, clinical skills, and professional dispositions (CACREP, 2023a4, Standard 2.C.). Minimum knowledge standards required of CITs are delineated in the third section of the 2024 CACREP Standards, which includes the counseling curriculum's eight core content areas (CACREP, 2023a). Clinical competency standards include skills related to case conceptualization, application of theory, strategies that facilitate client change, crisis intervention, (CACREP, 2023a, 3.E.), and cultural competency indicators (CACREP, 2023a, 3.E.11., 3.B.). Programs also identify specific standards of *professional dispositions* or "the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors" exhibited in professional interactions (CACREP, 2023a, p. 5). When these standards of assessment are

communicated at preadmission, admission, and throughout the program, students are better set up for success (Branson et al., 2015).

Online Competency Assessment

With the diminished interaction, online counseling programs have greater challenges in recognizing students who are not meeting identified standards, especially clinical and dispositional standards (Gilbert et al., 2019; Haddock et al., 2020), and counselor educators must adapt assessment procedures for the online environment. To assess clinical skills at a distance, students can analyze clinical approaches depicted in interactive online video modules, and synchronous online counselor educators can utilize breakout rooms to engage students in clinical role-plays (Chen et al., 2020). Opportunities to accurately assess clinical skills increase with in-person residencies (Sheperis, Coker, et al., 2020).

Assessing professional dispositions is also unique at a distance. Some CITs have greater comfort communicating disrespectfully in an email or discussion board post than if they were in person (Chen et al., 2020; Gilbert et al., 2019; Haddock et al., 2020). These are examples of *cyberincivility*, which is “disrespectful, insensitive, or disruptive internet behavior” (De Gagne et al., 2018, p. 2). When directed toward an instructor, cyberincivility is an indicator that a *relationship rupture*, or a fracture in the instructor–student connection, has occurred. Instructors can facilitate a relationship rupture repair by empathically acknowledging the activating incident while reclarifying the boundaries of the relationship as instructional and professional (Bernard & Luke, 2013). The assessment of professional dispositions must be generalized to written and digital interactions and dispositional deficits may result in remedial intervention.

Remediation Procedures

When students are assessed as failing to meet minimum competency standards, formal remediation procedures are implemented. Some students may be unable to achieve counseling

competency standards even with remedial assistance, which would warrant dismissal from the program. Students must be afforded due process by timely and transparent notification of concerns, remediation participation requirements, and any decisions for program dismissal (e.g., Burkholder et al., 2014; D’Aniello & Hertlein, 2017; Foster & McAdams, 2011).

Models for student remediation currently exist, including Letourneau’s (2016) model, which utilizes a feminist and social-constructivist lens that effectively supports counseling student competency while maintaining cultural sensitivity and awareness of multiple systems that impact students. Hylton et al. (2017) developed a remediation model for addressing competency deficits among clinical social work students that included a research-based approach for defining program standards, clarifying the student concern, identifying the level of concern, potentially halting clinical experiences, implementing an action plan, and continued monitoring. Despite the strengths, current models omit retention policies and overlook the nuances of online counselor education. A model that includes achievement recognition and connection to institutional resources to mitigate student attrition as well as robust remediation procedures is needed to holistically address retention and gatekeeping in online counseling programs.

The Retention and Remediation Model for Online Counselor Education

The Retention and Remediation Model for Online Counselor Education is a three-prong approach for student recognition, resource connection, and remediation. In collaboration with program administrators, the retention and remediation interventions are developed and implemented by a group of counselor educators who serve on a committee called the Care Committee. Members of the committee include counselor educators who have experience and expertise in retention, remediation, and gatekeeping with CITs. The committee is responsible for facilitating referral

processes as described in the next sections; however, all faculty share broad ownership of remediation and retention by identifying student needs, making referrals, and collaborating with the committee. Faculty advisors are notified when advisees are referred to the Care Committee, which facilitates enhanced connections between students and advisors to strengthen retention (Gravel, 2012), and remedial assignments may also entail additional meetings with faculty advisors. Figure 1 guides faculty in assessing when each type of referral is warranted.

Compliment Referral

Faculty complete compliment referrals to recognize outstanding student effort anytime they encounter a student who exceeds expectations (see Figure 1). The goal of the compliment referral is to reinforce students' persistence (Bliven & Jungbauer, 2021) and increase students' positive interactions with the institution, which supports students' institutional commitment (e.g., Beck & Milligan, 2014; Roberts, 2012). The Care Committee responds to compliment referrals by issuing formal letters informing the student of the recognition, and referred students are included in graduation award nominations.

Connect Referral

The second prong of the model includes identifying students with diminished engagement who may be at risk for departure and connecting them with appropriate resources. Faculty initiate connect referrals for students exhibiting withdrawal behaviors (e.g., unresponsiveness, late assignment submission, poor class attendance, etc.) or are experiencing a hardship that is impacting their engagement in the program. Although issues that prompt a connect referral have the potential to affect students' ability to meet identified standards, connect referrals are not intended for students who need remediation. Connect referrals serve as an early intervention that may prevent both attrition and future remediation.

In accordance with the connect referral process, faculty first attempt to meet with the student to offer support and further assess needs, and if problems persist, then a connect referral is completed for the student (see Figure 1). The Care Committee responds to connect referrals by issuing a formal letter with university and community resources to include counseling referrals, library resources, information technology assistance, advisor information, and registrar and financial aid contact information. All faculty would be able to speak in-depth about university and department resources (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020) and the written letter is a review of information already provided by the faculty in the preliminary meeting.

Concern Referral

The concern referral process is initiated for a student with an academic, clinical, or dispositional deficit that falls below identified standards (see Figure 1). Students' knowledge, clinical skills, and professional dispositions are expected to be in process (Burkholder et al., 2014) and all interventions are aimed at supporting students' development through an individualized, culturally sensitive, and holistic approach. To promote transparency and due process (Foster & McAdams, 2011), standards of assessment are identified in the student handbook with descriptions of assessment methods, remediation procedures, dismissal practices, and appeal processes. Students can appeal committee decisions by expressing their disagreement to an identified program administrator (e.g., chair, dean) within the allotted timeframe (see Table 1).

The Care Committee responds to concern referrals according to the procedures displayed in Table 1. After collecting additional data, the committee assesses the student concern as Level I (developmental struggles requiring targeted supervisory support and intervention), Level II (recurrent or more severe concerns), or Level III (pervasive concerns indicating a problem of fit with the counseling profession). Level I concerns may include poor time management, unintentional plagiarism, or a minor dispositional concern. Level

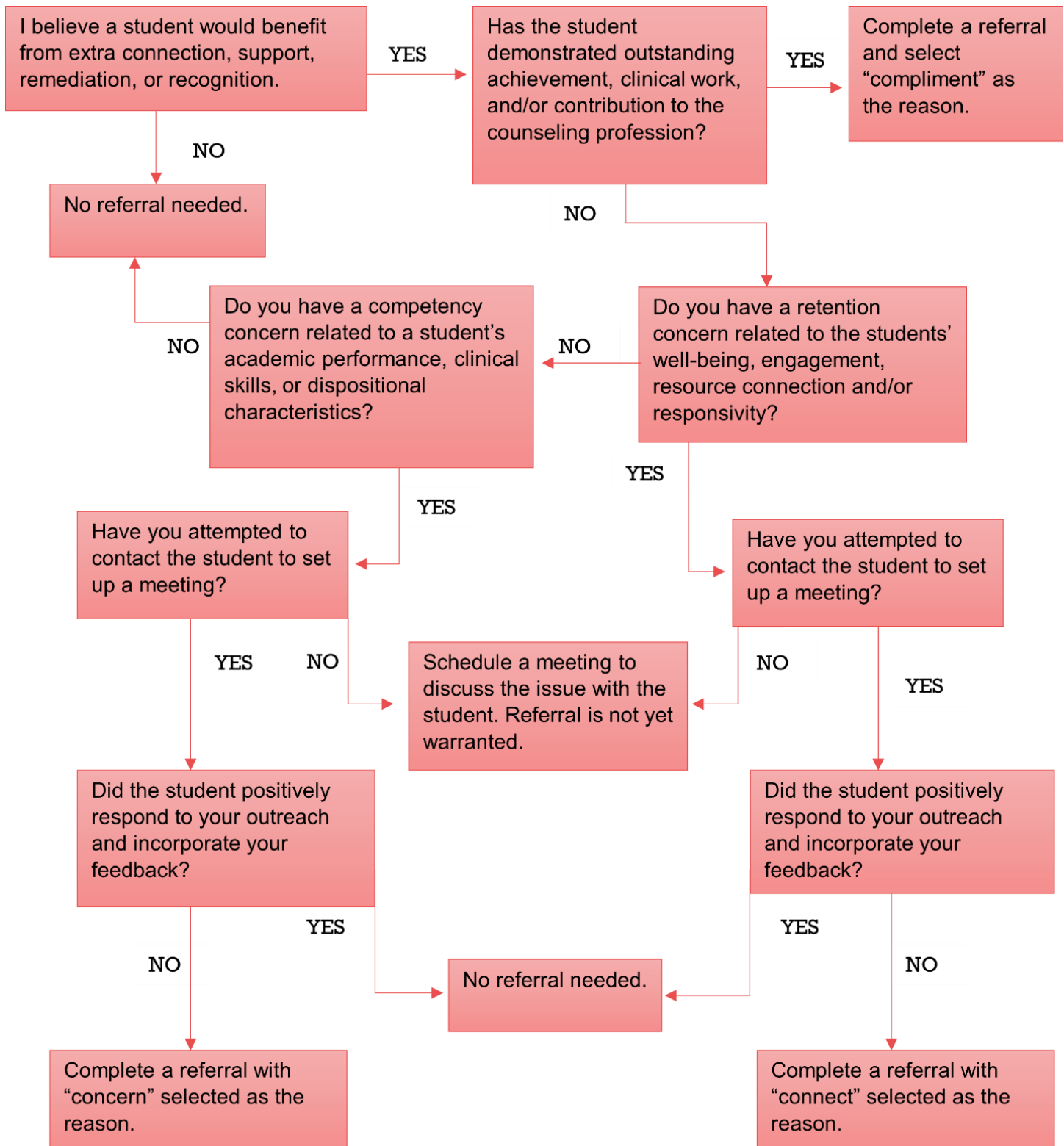
Figure 1*Referral Decision Tree*

Table 1*Care Committee Responses to Concern Referral*

Goal or Outcome	Procedures	Next Steps
Step 1: Collect Data and Assess the Concern		
1. Assess concern 2. Support student development	1. Gather information from the referral source 2. Through video conference, meet with the student 3. Engage in a supportive discussion with the student	1. Determine concern level 2. Develop an individualized remediation plan
Step 2: Initial Remediation Plan		
1. Ensure student understands: a. The competency concerns b. What changes are needed to end remediation c. The remedial activities and due dates 2. Answer any student concerns	1. Through video conference, review remediation plan with the student 2. When warranted, incorporate student feedback into the plan	1. Student has 1 week to sign and return plan to committee or appeal the plan (see appeal information below) 2. Set up remediation plan review meeting for 90 days (Level I), 60 days (Level II), or 30 days (Level III) <i>A student can appeal the remediation plan within 1 week of the plan review. If the student wins the appeal, they can return to normal engagement. If they do not win the appeal, they have 3 days to sign and return the plan.</i>
Step 3: Remediation Plan Review		
1. Assess current level of concern 2. Determine how the plan will be revised or if remediation will conclude	1. Gather information from relevant sources 2. Revise the remediation plan with new assignments and due dates or to indicate student has successfully completed the plan	1. If student requires further remediation, Steps 2 and 3 will continue as needed 2. If remediation conclusion is warranted, Step 4 will commence <i>Appeal process for revised remediation plans is the same as in Step 2.</i>
Step 4: Remediation Conclusion		
Successful Remediation		
Determine student has successfully completed the plan and meets minimum competency standards	Meet with student through video conference to review completed plan and end remediation	Student will return to normal program engagement
Unsuccessful Remediation		
Determine students' concerns continue and indicate a problem of fit with the counseling profession	Meet with student through video conference to inform student of dismissal	Student will be dismissed from the program <i>Students will have 10 days to appeal the decision. If the student wins the appeal, Steps 2 and 3 will be repeated. If the student loses the appeal, they will be dismissed from the program.</i>

II concerns require increased accountability and possible postponement of clinical activities, whereas Level III concerns require intensive intervention and postponement of clinical activities. Egregious Level III concerns, such as legal or ethical violations, may automatically result in dismissal. The Care Committee considers the student's receptivity to feedback, developmental level, and program advancement when selecting a level of concern. For example, diffuse personal disclosure concerns in a first-year student may warrant a Level I remediation plan, whereas the same issue with an internship student, especially during client sessions, could be assessed at a Level II or III due to potential harm to clients and misalignment with developmental expectations. The next section presents the implementation of the concern referral procedures with a student case example.

Case Example: Concern Referral

The Care Committee received a concern referral for Analise Mendoza, a 35-year-old Latinx cisgender female student. Analise's internship instructor initiated the referral based on the site supervisor's report that while coleading a Spanish-speaking group therapy session for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), Analise persistently urged a member to leave her abusive partner and tearfully disclosed her personal experience with IPV. According to the referral, the client became defensive and left prematurely, and the other group members were reticent to share after the disruption. The site supervisor determined Analise's actions may have harmed clients and discontinued Analise's work with IPV victims. After Analise learned this, she wrote an email to her site supervisor with disparaging remarks of the site supervisor's competency, judgment, and personal character. The referral also indicated that Analise had a pattern of late arrival to the internship site and missing or delinquent client documentation. In accordance with the decision tree depicted in Figure 1, the internship instructor had an initial videoconferencing-facilitated meeting with Analise about the nature of the concern and informed her

that she had been referred to the Care Committee for further remediation.

The Care Committee noted that Analise received a connect referral a year prior for late assignments, increased absences, and distracting conduct during synchronous online class sessions (e.g., multi-tasking, being off camera, etc.). These withdrawal behaviors were possible indicators of attrition risk (Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2020) and the instructor met with the student (see Figure 1). At this meeting, Analise disclosed the recent death of her father and reported difficulty managing graduate work, caring for her mother, and responsibilities as a single parent. Difficulty balancing multiple responsibilities and personal adversity are common catalysts for attrition among online counseling students (Burkholder, 2012; Haddock et al., 2020), and family support and interpersonal connection in the academic environment are often important factors for Latinx student retention in graduate studies (Locke, 2021). As a result, the instructor initiated a connect referral and Analise was sent a letter with university and community resources.

Step One

In accordance with Step One of the concern referral procedures (see Table 1), the Care Committee would triangulate data to substantiate the referral by collecting further information from the site supervisor and internship instructor. This may include the specifics of the student's late arrival (e.g., dates, severity of tardiness, etc.) and late documentation (e.g., severity and frequency, types of documents, etc.), a statement from the cotherapist that witnessed the incident, and a copy of Analise's email to the site supervisor. The committee would then meet with the student through video conference to learn the student's perspective and to present the nature of the concern referral.

Step Two

Next, the Care Committee would create a personalized remediation plan (see Table 1) and assess the referral as a Level II concern due to the recurring nature of the documentation and time

management problems, and the emergence of a clinical concern (e.g., unmanaged countertransference) that posed a risk of client harm. The remediation plan would specify the academic, clinical (e.g., group counseling skills, record-keeping, countertransference management), and dispositional (e.g., interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, feedback receptivity) concerns, as well as the improvements needed for a return to normal program engagement (see Table 1). Remedial assignments may involve practical tasks (e.g., crafting a self-care and time management plan, creating a schedule to address late documentation) and activities to promote knowledge and insight (e.g., written assignments, personal counseling, additional supervision; e.g., Henderson & Dufrene, 2012, Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Steps Three and Four

In accordance with Level II concerns, the plan would be revised in 60 days after the committee reviewed all remedial assignments, gathered additional data from relevant individuals (e.g., internship instructor, supervisor, advisor), and assessed Analise's progress (see Table 1). At the time of the plan review meeting, Analise may have improved to a Level I and would continue in remediation for 30 more days. With continued improvement, Analise may be assessed to be ready to return to normal engagement in the counseling program. Conversely, Analise's performance may have continued (stayed at Level II) or escalated to Level III with further concerns, which would prompt a withdrawal from clinical interactions and increased remedial interventions. If the Level III concerns failed to improve with further intervention, Analise would be dismissed from the program (See Table 1).

Discussion

In the previous case example, we explored Analise's experience as a nontraditional online counseling student navigating the intricate balance

of family, work, and graduate studies — a narrative reflective of the challenges faced by many online counseling students (Sheperis, Coker, et al., 2020). Analise initially interacted with the Care Committee during a connect referral as her personal challenges and disengagement indicated a possible attrition risk. The response of resource support and increased faculty outreach may have bolstered Analise's confidence to persist and eventually continue to internship, at which time a competency concern arose. The concern referral process depicted previously follows research-based policies and procedures that administer due process for the student (Burkholder et al., 2014; D'Aniello & Hertlein, 2017; Foster & McAdams, 2011). Throughout the implementation of this remediation model, online counselor educators should also minimize triangulation, practice cultural competency, and consider relationship rupture repairs after cyberincivility.

In an online counseling program, the student, committee members, instructor, advisor, site supervisor, and administrative leadership have varying work hours, frequency of interaction, and time zones. As a result, all involved parties in the depicted case would not be able to regularly attend synchronous meetings and, Analise may have multiple individual conversations. This creates the potential for triangulation and differing accounts of events. Faculty may record important gatekeeping video or phone conversations with students; however, Sheperis, Ordway, et al. (2020) warn that under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) a recording of a student becomes part of their private educational record. Faculty are advised to gain consent from a student before engaging in recording (Sheperis, Ordway, et al., 2020). Alternatively, counselor educators and supervisors can document communication and remedial actions, and summarize conversations in follow-up emails with all relevant individuals copied to minimize the risk of triangulation (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020).

Online counseling programs attract a diverse student body (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020) and remediation processes should be implemented with

cultural awareness and competency. The Care Committee must consider if the problematic behavior identified is related to cultural expression that deviates from the dominant culture rather than a competency deficit requiring remediation (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). With experiences of historical marginalization, diverse students may view remediation processes with suspicion. Because Analise had supportive interactions during the connect referral process, she may be more open to the concern referral process (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020). Faculty should also consider if students of color have access to support within the department that includes faculty or students of color (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). A Latinx faculty member or doctoral supervisor could provide additional support for Analise as part of the remediation plan.

Online counselor educators can model therapeutic rapport and counseling skills by teaching conflict resolution skills (Bernard & Luke, 2013) and by supporting students like Analise in recognizing the impact of their digital communication and repairing relationship ruptures. Analise's remediation may involve assistance in navigating the relationship rupture with her site supervisor. Analise could also be supported in identifying ways she could have communicated more effectively, which may lead to a relationship rupture repair with her site supervisor. By encouraging clear communication, considering cultural nuances, and modeling therapeutic skills, the Care Committee can further enhance the efficacy of the model's remediation process and foster growth and resilience in the online counselor education landscape.

Limitations and Future Research

The proposed model is believed to be a robust, research-driven, comprehensive approach. However, further research is needed to confirm its effectiveness. Future researchers could analyze attrition data of online counseling programs before and after this model's implementation to empirically determine the impact of this approach

on student retention. Engagement data such as class participation, LMS interaction, and assignment completion could be captured by instructors or LMS analytics. This data could be analyzed to determine if the various engagement measures significantly increased after involvement in the connect referral process. Implications of these quantitative studies include validation of the model's efficacy in retaining online counseling students and clarification of the strengths and weaknesses of the model. Qualitative researchers could explore students' lived experiences engaging in each type of referral process, and results of this inquiry could be utilized to further refine each prong of the Retention and Remediation Model for Online Counselor Education.

Similar to CITs, barriers to retention for doctoral CES students include personal adversity and diminished engagement (Burkholder, 2012); however, further research is needed to clarify salient determinants of online doctoral CES student retention. Counselor educators and researchers can adapt the model for this population by considering additional relevant catalysts for compliment referrals (e.g., student publications or conference presentations, outstanding leadership or advocacy, etc.) and connect referrals (e.g., missing writing deadlines, diminished communication with dissertation chairs, etc.). Doctoral students with deficits in identified CES competencies as informed by the 2024 CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2023a) would warrant a concern referral. Brown (2012) identified behaviors that exemplify professional responsibility, maturity, and integrity among CES doctoral students. These could be utilized as standards for dispositional assessment, and deficits may necessitate a concern referral and remediation.

Conclusion

The three-prong Retention and Remediation Model for Online Counselor Education offers a tailored, comprehensive approach to retention and gatekeeping in online counseling programs that promotes the active participation and collaboration

of all faculty. The positivity of compliment referrals and the support of connect referrals promotes institutional integration and enhances students' success. When online counseling programs create a caring environment with mechanisms for student recognition and resource connection, students become more receptive to remedial feedback (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020). Implementing retention and remediation policies that foster community enables online counseling programs to cultivate and retain competent CITs that sustain programs and benefit the counseling profession.

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