CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Methodological Approach

Chapter Three delineates methodological procedures utilized in this study. It includes a description of the research design, a review of the research questions, target population and participant selection procedures, the follow-up telephone interviews and interview protocol used, and data collection and analysis.

This study reviewed literature on characteristics of effective counselors. This review included articles and research on graduate admissions, novice vs. expert characteristics, supervisee and graduate student development, and assessed the current admission practices as well as requirements of the 129 master’s level CACREP-accredited counseling programs across the country, as identified by information from the CACREP (1999) Directory of Accredited Programs. The assessment included a selected sampling of 20 (further explained on p. 55) of the 129 CACREP programs and the faculty implementing admission procedures, as well as a content analysis from information gathered via Internet, mail and follow-up telephone interviews.

Three research questions framed the study as described below:

1. What does the research indicate are the characteristics of effective counselors?
2. What are current admission requirements for master’s level CACREP counseling programs in the United States?
3. A) To what extent do admission requirements and procedures of CACREP counseling programs reflect and assess characteristics of effective counselors? What is missing?
B) What would a framework of a standard set of admission requirements consist of if they were balanced between cognitive-behavioral characteristics (CBC) and personal-emotional characteristics (PEC) of effective counselors?

Information collected was used to develop a framework for a standard set of admission requirements, balanced between cognitive-behavioral and personal-emotional effective counselor characteristics, for assessing prospective master's level students for CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Operational steps of this research study are summarized below. The researcher:

1. Conducted a literature review of effective counselor characteristics (see Table 3, p. 67 and Appendix A, p. 121), college admissions, novice vs. expert characteristics, counseling supervisee and graduate development and characteristics (used to answer research Questions 1, 2, and 3B);

2. Collected admission requirements and procedures from the CACREP Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual (2001) and the 129 master’s level CACREP counseling programs, using descriptions of programs included in their web pages and mailed admission packets, to perform a content analysis. The content analysis was to determine what programs do and don't do during admissions of prospective counseling students (utilized for answering research questions 2 & 3);

3. Conducted follow-up telephone interviews using a Follow-Up Interview Protocol (Appendix B, p. 128) with the program chair, CACREP liaison, or admissions coordinator from a sample of 20 of the 129 CACREP programs.

A. Ten interviews were conducted with those representatives from counseling programs primarily screening for academically focused admission requirements
(AFAR) (i.e., graduate school and program applications, GPA, GRE/MAT, transcripts, and may or may not require recommendation letters of prospective counseling students).

B. Ten interviews were conducted with those representatives from counseling programs that had AFARs plus utilized personally focused admission requirements (PFAR) (i.e., interviews, portfolios, psychological/personality assessment instruments, and/or miscellaneous admission requirements and procedures not otherwise specified for assessing prospective master's-level counseling students), specifically those focusing on personal-emotional characteristics of effective counselors;

4. Identified gaps (i.e., missing personal-emotional effective counselor characteristics) in the existing admission requirements of programs by synthesizing information collected throughout this study from CACREP programs and the literature review. This process involved merging the existing admission requirements categorized by this researcher according to cognitive-behavioral characteristics and personal-emotional characteristics in Tables 1 & 2 (pp. 75-76) with that of the summarized literature on characteristics of effective counselors categorized in the same manner in Table 4 (p. 64). (Note: This method was used to answer research question 3. Research question 1 also used synthesis, but only of the information collected from the literature review);

5. Developed a framework for a standard set of admission requirements, balanced between cognitive-behavioral characteristics and personal-emotional characteristics,
to more thoroughly assess prospective students for admission to counseling programs. Development of these requirements was completed by filling in the admission gaps identified during the synthesis of collected information in answering Research Question Three (operational method #4) (conducted for the sole purpose of answering research question 3B).

The operational steps of this study, outlined above, are described in detail below.

**Literature Review and CACREP Standards**

A review of the literature published between 1936 and the first few months of 2004, described in Chapter Two of this study, characterized effective counselor characteristics. The review also included articles on what is most important in assessing prospective master-level counseling students, novice vs. expert characteristics, counseling supervisee and graduate student development, CACREP admission standards and requirements, and college admission requirements in general.

**Content Analysis of CACREP Programs**

This researcher conducted a content analysis of the existing admission requirements and procedures of the 129 master’s level CACREP counseling programs listed in the CACREP Directory of Accredited Programs 1999 accessed via the internet at [http://www.counseling.org/cacrep/directory.html](http://www.counseling.org/cacrep/directory.html). From the directory, programs' web pages were investigated along with program admission application packets requested by mail using the information from the web pages. If specific admission requirements were not mentioned on the web page or in the admission packet, an informal telephone inquiry was made asking for that information (i.e., Does your program conduct personal interviews? Do you require GRE scores?). Once information was collected, this investigator charted the requirements for further
analysis using these headings: 1) graduate application, 2) program application, 3) GPA, 4) GRE/MAT, 5) transcripts, 6) recommendation letters, 7) interviews (group/individual), 8) autobiography/personal statement, 9) psychological/assessment instrument, 10) work experience, 11) pre-requisite course(s), and 12) miscellaneous (not otherwise specified). Headings 6-12, being the focus of this study, were placed in a separate chart for more detailed analysis where the information under each was detailed.

The population for this study was 129 Master’s level CACREP Counseling Programs. Follow-up telephone interviews were then conducted with a sample of 20 programs and their representatives, selection described in more detail under ‘Selection Criteria’ below. Faculty member representatives, either the program chair, CACREP liaison, or admissions coordinator of the counseling program, were contacted via telephone by this investigator and asked about their procedures for admitting prospective master's counseling students, specifically those procedures including portfolios, psychological/assessment instruments, and/or other alternative means of assessing prospective students' PECs.

There was no risk to human subjects in this research project. Disclosure of the information collected about programs posed no risks as it was publicly accessible by Internet and/or by requesting an admission packet from the prospective program and would not alter or damage the programs' reputations. Follow-up phone interviews were only to collect more details on what was already public knowledge. Names and addresses of the colleges or universities were included, but names of individual faculty participants were kept anonymous. All information was recorded via paper and pencil and/or e-mail correspondence and kept confidential. Consent was verbal either by phone or e-mail once this researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the interview. A list of counseling programs contacted is included in Table 5 (p.54).
### Table 5

**Follow-up Telephone Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personally Focused Admission Requirements (PFAR)</th>
<th>Academically Focused Admission Requirements (AFAR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sonoma State University (CA)</td>
<td>1. Florida State University (FL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. University of Colorado at Denver (CO)</td>
<td>2. University of Florida (FL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. University of Northern Colorado (CO)</td>
<td>3. Georgia State University (GA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Northeastern Illinois University (IL)</td>
<td>4. Eastern Illinois University (IL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Northeast Louisiana University (LA)</td>
<td>5. Lindsey Wilson College (KY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Southeast Missouri State University (MO)</td>
<td>6. Murray State University (KY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. University of Nebraska at Omaha (NE)</td>
<td>7. University of Southern Maine (ME)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SUNY at Brockport (NY)</td>
<td>8. University of Maryland at College Park (MD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Shippensburg University (PA)</td>
<td>9. Delta State University (MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. University of Wisconsin Superior (WI)</td>
<td>10. University of Wyoming (WY)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection Criteria and Procedures for Follow-up Interviews

To clarify additional and alternative forms of admission requirements and gather further information about admissions requirements and procedures, a decision was made to select a sample of twenty (described in more detail under AFAR and PFAR Programs below) from the population of 129 CACREP-accredited programs. After dividing the 129 programs based on specific requirements as explained below, a sample of twenty was selected and divided into two classifications: ten with Academically Focused Admission Requirements (AFAR) and ten with Personally Focused Admission Requirements (PFAR) and programs were selected as described below. Next a representative from each of these programs was contacted via telephone. The individual contacted was typically the person responsible for the overall administration and functioning of the program and/or was knowledgeable about CACREP standards and the admission requirements of their program.

AFAR Programs.

First, the selection of 10 programs to be included under the AFAR was conducted by extracting those programs that had admission requirements with more academically focused admission requirements. For this study, this meant programs' admission requirements included only AFAR (graduate school and program admission's application, GPA, GRE/MAT scores, transcripts and may or may not require recommendation letters). Fifteen of the 129 CACREP programs met these criteria. For generalizability purposes, only public universities were used in this research, therefore private university programs were then eliminated leaving 13 public university programs with AFAR. From the remaining 13 programs, 10 (to be included under the AFAR classification) were chosen using the SPSS random sampling procedure. SPSS random
sampling was set to choose 10 programs from these 13. The 10 chosen were programs used for follow-up telephone interviews listed under the AFAR classification (see Table 5, p. 54).

**PFAR Programs.**

Secondly, selection of ten programs to be included in the PFAR category was conducted by extracting those programs that had admission requirements with more of a PEC focus. This meant programs' admission requirements included not only AFARs, but also two or more of the following: a face-to-face individual/group interview, portfolio, autobiographical/personal statement, psychological assessment, counseling work experience, pre-requisite(s) such as counseling courses and/or counseling, and/or miscellaneous requirements not otherwise specified. Twenty-one of 129 CACREP counseling programs met these criteria. Of the 21 extracted, a sample of 10 was needed. Again for generalizability, private university programs were eliminated leaving a total of 19 programs fitting the PFAR category. Preference was given first to those programs that included a psychological assessment as this was one of the main criteria in the PFAR category, mainly because so few programs utilized them. This researcher believes psychological assessments to be an important part of the admission requirements of prospective counseling students. Of the 19, 6 programs were automatically included due to requiring a psychological assessment as part of their admissions' requirements. The 13 remaining were then reduced to 7 by eliminating those that did not include interviews in addition to one or more of the following: a portfolio, autobiographical/personal statement, counseling work experience, pre-requisite(s), and/or miscellaneous requirements not otherwise specified. This elimination was used to distinguish the PFAR category from the AFAR category. From the remaining 7 programs, 4 (remaining number needed to make 10 under the PFAR classification) were chosen using the SPSS random sampling procedure. SPSS random sampling was set to
choose 4 programs from the 7 remaining. The 4 chosen were then added to the 6 previously chosen to complete the final list of 10 (see Table 5, p. 54) needed under the PFAR category for follow-up telephone interviews.

After setting specific parameters and narrowing the sample to 20 programs, 16 states across the country [CA, CO (2), FL (2), GA, IL (2), KY (2), LA, MD, ME, MO, MS, NE, NY, PA, WI, WY] were represented. With the elimination of the two non-respondents (MS and CA), the final sample represented 14 states across the country.

All participants in the follow-up telephone interviews of this project were informed about the nature of the study and the informed consent form (Appendix C, p. 132). Consent was verbal either by phone or e-mail once this researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the interview. The respondents' responsibilities were to verbally express an understanding of the instructions and agree to participate in the study. Completion of the telephone interview took approximately 10-20 minutes. This varied due to the response time of the respondents as they described their program's admission requirements and further discussed their ideas, theories, and opinions. Respondents were contacted on one occasion only and had the choice of not participating. No incentives for participation were provided.

Questions asked by the participating faculty members were answered at the conclusion of the follow-up telephone interview. Additionally, appreciation for the faculty member's time was extended.

**Instrumentation**

Follow-up Telephone Interview Protocol

Counselor educators from the sample of twenty CACREP-accredited programs were interviewed using an interview protocol designed by this researcher specifically for this study. It
was designed to determine current attitudes and knowledge about admissions of prospective counseling students and effective counselor characteristics, and collected information that pertained to:

A. Respondent's and their Program's Demographic Information

B. Admission Requirements and Procedures
   1. indicators of effective counselor qualities
   2. useful instruments for assessing prospective counseling students' personal qualities
   3. future hopes and desires associated with admission requirements and procedures

C. Effective Counselor Characteristics

D. Additional Variables and Comments from Respondents

A. **Respondent and Corresponding Program Information:** To acquire information about the respondents, their professional background and the program they represented, they were asked:

1. their professional title/position,

2. how long in their current position,

3. how long with this program,

4. how long as a counselor educator,

5. if they were actively involved with the admissions of their prospective master's counseling students,

6. how many faculty in the counseling program,

7. how many master's students in the counseling program.
B. Admission Requirements and Procedures: To determine what programs were doing to assess prospective master's counseling students, respondents were asked to discuss:

1. what characteristics of effective counselors were important and if they screened for those during their admissions procedures,
2. if they felt their admission requirements and procedures were adequate for assessing prospective students, specifically personal-emotional characteristics,
3. how long their program had been using their current admission requirements and procedures,
4. if the current requirements were fairly new and more focused on personal-emotional characteristics of prospective students, and if so if they felt their students were better and more prepared overall, personally and professionally,
5. if they had experienced more or less problems with their students since adopting admission requirements more focused on personal-emotional characteristics,
6. how specific admission requirements or procedures worked for them and if they were good indicators of effective counselor characteristics,
7. what other instruments or requirements had their program used and how did they work,
8. what other instruments or requirements were they considering,
9. future hopes and desires for their program's admissions of prospective master's counseling students.

C. Effective Counselor Characteristics: To ascertain the current attitudes and beliefs concerning admissions of prospective master's counseling students in CACREP-counseling programs, all participants were asked to comment on and discuss:
1. characteristics of effective counselors as assimilated by this researcher (see Table 6, p. 65),

2. if they thought the characteristics presented were important to be an effective counselor and needed in prospective counseling students,

3. if their program assessed these characteristics, and if so

4. how did they feel their admission requirements assessed/evaluated the characteristics presented,

5. what other characteristics did they believe were important and needed for counselors and prospective counseling students to be effective?

D. Additional Variables and Comments from Participants: To assess for additional trends and ideas that may be present in counseling preparation programs for admitting prospective counseling students to their programs, respondents were asked:

1. if they believed it was possible to have one instrument/form of assessment to assess personal-emotional characteristics of prospective counseling students or effective counselor characteristics, and if so would they like to see such an instrument developed,

2. would they be willing to use such an instrument in their admissions procedures,

3. what they believed their counseling programs needed in order to do a better job of admitting prospective master's counseling students.

Follow-up Interview Protocol Format

Interviews

Interviews with program representatives were an important part of the research process as they provided valuable clarifying information about master's counseling programs' admission
requirements and procedures. The format used in this procedure involved the interviewer speaking by phone to one faculty representative from each of the twenty CACREP programs in the sample with a request that they respond to all questions. The researcher then guided the interview by asking specific questions and asking for more elaboration.

These questions included "Do you believe most counseling programs adequately assess the characteristics deemed necessary to be an effective counselor, particularly PECs?" "Why/Why not?" "What would you add to or eliminate from this process?" "What instruments or methods do you believe are adequate for assessing the effective counselor characteristics presented?"

Data Analysis

Data collected from this study were analyzed qualitatively & quantitatively. Results from the follow-up interviews were tallied for each of the 20 respondents and their programs included in the follow-up sample with responses grouped into two classifications (see Appendix D, p. 134). These included:

- Academically Focus Admission Requirements (AFAR)
- Personally Focused Admission Requirements (PFAR)

The information obtained from these two groups were placed in chart form and examined for confirmation and/or contradictions of the literature, and differences between them regarding their views of effective counselor characteristics and effectiveness and satisfaction of their admission requirements. Additionally, the data obtained were summarized to answer the three research questions outlined in Chapter 1.