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Counseling Today

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We are Virginia Tech

How counselors responded to the grief and trauma on campus after the startling events of April 16

BY ANGELA KENNEDY

As a nation, we have watched and grieved with Virginia Tech. We have been moved by the images of candlelight vigils, tears, flowers and balloons. We have worn the school colors and proudly declared, "We are all Hokies today!" And we have learned about the university's motto, "ut prosim," which is Latin for "that I may serve" — the essence of what the university community refers to as "Hokie spirit."

Following that infamous Monday morning of April 16,

when student gunman Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people and wounded numerous others before committing suicide, Virginia Tech counselor educators Gerard Lawson and Nancy Bodenhorn, both American Counseling Association members, responded quickly, serving the university community wherever they saw a need. They served the students with comforting hugs. They served by being present with the victims' families during the heart-wrenching notifications. They served their colleagues, offering

them shoulders on which to cry.

Lawson and Bodenhorn were also key players in what has come to be known as the Mental Health Advisory Group, a collaborative panel that also includes representatives from the university's Cook Counseling Center, the university psychology department, the New River Valley Community Services Board and the American Red Cross. The group met the day after the shooting to develop a strategy to provide mental

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Courtesy of Virginia Tech photo library

Candles were raised high to remember the victims of the campus shootings and to show support for the university community.

20/20 delegates start reaching consensus

Oversight Committee asking for feedback from counseling community as delegates continue discussions

BY JONATHAN ROLLINS

The Oversight Committee for 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling has announced that the initiative's delegates have

reached consensus on their first 22 items. The delegates will continue to review items they have yet to reach agreement on or discuss in depth, but in the interim, the Oversight Committee is pre-

pared to receive feedback on the current consensus items from the counseling community at large (see "Consensus items," p. 27).

Each of the consensus items falls under one of seven major areas that delegates representing 29 different counseling associations and entities have agreed must be addressed to ensure the future health of the counseling profession:

- Strengthening identity
- Presenting ourselves as one profession
- Improving public perception/recognition and advocating for professional issues

- Creating licensure portability
- Expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling
- Focusing on students and prospective students
- Promoting client welfare and advocacy

In reviewing the items on which the delegates have reached consensus thus far, Sam Gladding, an American Counseling Association past president who is serving as the facilitator for the 20/20 initiative, said a number of core commonalities have emerged. "I think commonalities center

around 1) identifying the profession as a single entity with specialties, 2) presenting the profession to the public in a positive and unified way, 3) generating research in the field of counseling apart from other helping professions, 4) establishing common core standards for the education of counselors, 5) working with undergraduate and graduate students to educate them on the value of counseling and the profession of counseling and 6) advocating for the profession of counseling and those in need of counseling services on multi-

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ple levels — local, state and national.” Gladding says the 20/20 delegates will continue to refine the consensus items as well as work toward agreement in other areas. “We are in our second year of hard work addressing problems that have beset (the counseling profession) for a long time,” he says. “We have 29 counseling entities at the table involved in this initiative, and there is not a political agenda or ego agenda in this group. We do not and may not agree on everything, but there is honesty and frank discourse going on. We will continue to work as long as needed. Counseling has had a divisive past. It is time to leave that behind so that we may serve others better and advocate for the profession as other helping professions do.”

Work groups

Work groups are focusing on each of the seven major “problem” areas. Each work group has written a report on its respective area and included recommended action steps to address the problem. All the 20/20 delegates began

reviewing these action steps at the ACA Convention in Detroit, where they started reaching consensus on items within each area.

After discussions have concluded, the 20/20 delegates will provide a document detailing each of the items on which they have reached consensus. Each delegate will then take that document back to their sponsoring organizations and ask them to sign off on it as a way of showing their support for a common vision for the counseling profession.

Currently, there is no deadline for the 20/20 delegates to reach consensus or present a final document. “Although we don’t want this to drag on too long, we’d rather do it right than to set specific timelines,” said ACA Chief Professional Officer David Kaplan, a member of the 20/20 Oversight Committee.

Counseling Today asked each of the individuals chairing one of the seven work groups to provide brief comments on both their focus area and the 20/20 initiative as a whole. (Note: Joy Whit-

man, who is chairing the work group on focusing on students and prospective students, was not available for comment before *Counseling Today’s* deadline. Whitman is the delegate for the Association for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Issues in Counseling.)

Lynn Linde, chair, work group on strengthening identity; delegate for ACA Southern Region

“Identity — who we are as a profession and what we do — underscores all aspects of our profession. It directs what we do as professional counselors and how we represent ourselves. Identity drives counselor certification, program accreditation, marketing, public relations and public policy issues, and outreach to stakeholders and other similar professions. It is also one of the factors that drives what services and resources the association offers members and potential members. Without a strong sense of our identity, what separates us from other professions? Identity is what makes us distinct, different and unique.

“All of the statements on which (the delegates reached consensus in this focus area) relate to the concept that professional counselors share core commonalities. There is a body of knowledge and skill shared by all professional counselors which is, or should be, reflected in our training programs and the accreditation of those programs. This united philosophy should be reinforced for students, who should be encouraged to be members of the professional associations. I believe agreement on these issues is an important step toward strengthening our identity in that they focus on those things that make us the same.

“The diversity around the room (among the 20/20 delegates) is a

strength but also makes it that much more difficult to come to agreement on issues. I was reminded what a huge task this really is. ... But I was also struck by the professionalism of the delegates and their commitment to working on this task. To paraphrase what Sam Gladding said at the end of the meeting (in Detroit), other groups have tackled this same issue, gotten to this point where it seemed too hard and walked away. We are committed to moving ahead. ... Once we come to agreement on these issues, we will be able to strategically move into the future and to go where we need to be as a united profession.”

Thomas Clawson, chair, work group on presenting ourselves as one profession; delegate for the National Board for Certified Counselors

“Professions seen by the public and legislators as unified receive stronger support. Counseling has so many groups with separate voices that we need to coalesce with an agenda of consensus. ... As in every work group, consensus items (were those that) seemed the least threatening. I believe this is where we must start: with issues that are important and that have universal appeal. We have so much that we inherently agree about that we need to focus in this arena first.

“I am hopeful that the process will continue so that we do not reach an artificial point of creating a report. I stated in the Detroit meeting that extending this process that has been making progress is a logical next step. The group of delegates is thoughtfully adding important perspectives to a needed dialogue. ... I am a veteran of four previous leadership gatherings to plan future strategies to enhance our profession. Such initiatives are part of dynam-

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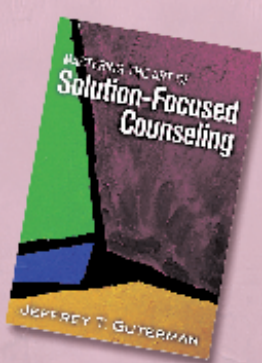
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American Counseling Association members can now wear their pride on their sleeves — or more accurately, on their lapels! ACA is honoring its 10-, 25-, 50-year and lifetime members by presenting them with beautiful, newly designed commemorative ACA membership pins, accompanied by a note from ACA President Marie A. Wakefield.

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ACA has also designed a general membership pin, which debuted at the ACA Convention in Detroit. The pins are now available for order online in the bookstore section of ACA’s website (www.counseling.org) for \$5.

Both the anniversary pins and the general membership pins are gold-tone metal with a clasp back and prominently feature the new ACA logo.

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Consensus items

The delegates working on the 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative reached consensus on the following items at the American Counseling Association Convention in Detroit. The delegates will continue to refine the consensus items as well as work on other items they have yet to reach agreement on or discuss. The counseling community at large is encouraged to provide feedback on the current consensus items by going to the ACA website at www.counseling.org/2020feedback.

Strengthening identity

- The counseling profession should develop a paradigm that identifies the core commonalities in the profession.
- Identify through research the body of core knowledge and skills shared by all counselors. A work group will be identified and charged with finding the research that identifies the core knowledge and skills shared by all counselors. This investigation shall include an analysis of counselor education programs and relevant publications and a survey of counseling professionals. **Rationale:** The philosophy of a unified identity lends itself to a body of core knowledge and skills. Once these are identified, or reaffirmed, then the common body of knowledge and skills can form the discourse to unite the profession.
- Counselor education programs shall reflect a philosophy that unifies professional counselors who share a body of core knowledge and skills. Our unified identity is that we are one profession but, as a result of the areas in which we practice, we may have specialty training.
- Reinforce for students that the counseling profession is a single profession composed of counselors with specialized areas of training. **Rationale:** As in other mental health professions, students developing their identities as counseling professionals need to begin identifying with a unified profession before graduation in order to maintain this philosophy as practicing professionals.
- The accreditation of counseling programs must reflect one identity.

Presenting ourselves as one profession

- Investigate the best structure for the future of counseling.
- Develop a process to create a working group for the purpose of

creating a common counselor identification that would allow for additional designations of special interests and specialty practices. Consider combining current specialties or designations to four areas of concerns. **Rationale:** Professional associations of counseling should consider their size and vitality with the intention to combine some groups. Specialties might be designated according to setting (e.g., school), practice (e.g., substance abuse), societal group (e.g., geriatric) or modality of practitioners (e.g., group).

- Unify the profession while respecting our specialties.

Improving public perception/recognition and advocating for professional issues

- Present a clear definition of counseling to the public. **Rationale:** We must first start with ourselves. An essential first step is to get counselors on the same page as to the definitions of a professional counselor and the counseling profession. In addition to establishing agreement within the profession, we must work toward reflecting this in our licensing standards. Current structure of professional organizations promotes fragmentation rather than unity. Once agreement is achieved, we can then through strategic large-scale marketing and the availability of the proper tools promote the profession to the public. The current level of marketing has not seemed effective in making counselor and counseling “household” words. We must increase our visibility.
- Unify for a stronger, more defined voice at the state and federal levels.
- Merge one definition of counselor across the different states. **Rationale:** Uniform definitions will aid in presenting a more uniform profession to the public, managed care companies and to legislators. Additionally, uniform curricular and licensing standards will enhance counselor portability and enhance recognition/participation of counselors within third-party reimbursement and state/federally funded programs.
- Unify to work with managed health care to benefit all counselors. **Rationale:** As key gatekeepers in access to qualified professionals, we must work more closely with the insurance indus-

try. They must understand who we are, what we do and the outcomes associated with counseling interventions. We must illustrate the similarities and differences between the counseling profession and other mental health professionals.

Creating licensure portability

- Establish common counselor preparation standards. **Rationale:** Preparation standards move the profession forward. CACREP and CORE can contribute toward acceptance of counselors as legislated providers in federally funded programs and the unification of training standards through a bold position of a single training model. This model would be similar to those already used by our sister professions of psychology (APA), social work (NASW) and marriage and family (AAMFT).

Expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling

- Encourage interest in research by practitioners and students.
- Emphasize research on counseling methods currently used and expand use and emphasis upon both qualitative and quantitative research. **Rationale:** Much of the research in counseling has been direct outcome research. Through direct outcome research, counselors would be in a better position to posit “best practices” in the field. At this time, many of the “best practices” are dictated to counselors by mental health professions other than counseling.

Focusing on students and prospective students

- Work with undergrads and undergrad programs.
- Highlight the value and promote mentor/practicum/internship relationships.
- Endorse/require student involvement in professional counseling associations.

Promoting client welfare and advocacy

- Offer ongoing education and training for counselors on client and student advocacy using, for example, the ACA Advocacy Competencies. **Rationale:** Attending to client welfare and advocacy is one primary focus of a helping profession, therefore training

in how to promote and advocate for our clients becomes an essential skill for counselors. Our profession should continually focus on providing professional development in the “how” for advocacy. For example, the Advocacy Competencies could be a foundation for this training (Lewis, House, Arnold & Toporek, 2005).

- Identify one advocacy project that would be completed annually within a selected community as a way to strengthen our counseling identity, present ourselves as one profession and improve public perception. **Rationale:** This yearly project would move us from talking about advocacy to demonstrating how counselors can produce positive effects on social issues.
- Promote optimum health and wellness for those served as the ultimate goals of all counseling interventions.
- Encourage evidenced-based, ethical practice as the foundation for counselors in training and professional counselors’ interventions across settings and populations served. **Rationale (also applies to previous item):** These bullet points are in line with *The Counseling Profession as Advocates for Optimum Health and Wellness*, which was adopted by the Governing Council of the American Association for Counseling and Development, now the American Counseling Association, July 13, 1989. At that time, all divisions of ACA were directly affiliated and endorsed this position. Wellness models based in counseling have been the foundation for significant research that helps to form evidence-based practice in counseling (e.g., Myers & Sweeney, 2005). Promoting wellness in all its dimensions — within families, schools, business, industry, government and the community at large — therefore draws upon the unique history and philosophical roots of counseling as a profession. As other disciplines, business, government and others now recognize the merits of wellness and prevention as national policy and good business, professional counselors are needed to help with its implementation in all settings for the benefit of all people. ■

ic, growing professions. We are setting yet another path for future goals and cementing past successes to develop a strong, forward-moving profession.”

Caroline Wilde, chair, work group on improving public perception/recognition and advocating for professional issues; delegate for the Ameri-

can Rehabilitation Counseling Association

“In order for counseling to thrive, we must help the general public and legislators understand what counseling is, who we are, what we do, what our academic preparation is, etc. We have to advocate for ourselves, as no one else is going to. Visibility and perception are key to

social acceptance of counseling as a household word and funding support.

“I think, in general, consensus was reached (on four items from this work group) because these items reflect the core values that unite us as counselors and promote our profession. These items are aspirational in nature and reflect the mission of the

20/20 effort in general. It is possible that once articulated in more concrete terms, consensus could be harder to reach.

“I am honored to be a part of such an important task. It is essential to the health of our profession. I witnessed a great amount of commitment to the profession and respect for diversity of ideas even when it was

clear that not everyone agreed. ... I think that we need to focus the time ahead on tackling those areas in which there was disagreement or lack of consensus. This is historically where things have come to a standstill. This will require a ‘seeking to understand’ mentality and then exploration of ways to bridge differences, a decision to accept unresolved differences or possibly even a parting of ways. ... Having said that, I was impressed by the commitment to the 20/20 mission. I believe all the members demonstrated great passion for the counseling profession, respect for one another’s perspectives and that they are committed to asking and answering the hard questions.”

J. Barry Mascari, chair, work group on creating licensure portability; delegate for American Association of State Counseling Boards; member of 20/20 Oversight Committee

“Portability is important for two reasons. First, it makes new graduates seamless in terms of the job market, and, second, it is a reflection of the end product of professional preparation. Unfortunately, everything that is unresolved in counselor preparation standards seems to be reflected in licensing standards.

“I am not exactly sure why this item (“Establish common counselor preparation standards”) received consensus. I can only speculate that there is recognition among the delegates that we need to come to more clarity on training if we are to be seen as a separate profession from psychology and social work. I also suspect that since these (20/20 delegates) are people with strong counselor identity ... they recognize the value in the CACREP standards envisioned a long time ago. We have studied the history of our profession and are aware of the struggles to achieve licensure. Counseling has such a rich history, and looking at how far it has come, the delegates might see anything else as taking a step backward.

“There is strength in numbers as a profession, and I still believe that despite our specialties and different work settings, it is in our collective best interests to be seen as one profession — period. Others may feel differently, so we have work to do. ... I know there have been several initiatives like this before, none of which continued through to conclusion and implementation. For various reasons, they ended without achieving the broad objectives. The



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20/20 delegates seem to have a different feel as a group, almost a sense that what we are doing transcends our own interests. Many times we have remarked that the stars have lined up at this time in some unusual constellation. It may be our time to address the previously unaddressable.

"This group represents some of the best, most visionary thinkers in our field. If we cannot collectively figure out how to jump some of the hurdles that are preventing the counseling profession from reaching its potential and expanding the public's recognition of our value, no one can. ... I love the counseling profession and certainly would like to see us do something bold and visionary — something that will secure a healthy future for the new counselors who follow us."

Bret Hendricks, chair, work group on expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling; delegate for the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors

"We believe that research is vital to the counseling profession because research defines the profession. Counseling is a relatively new profession and is evolving constantly. Outcome research is necessary for counseling to continue its evolution. Professional counselors do not need to look to persons in other mental health specialties to define 'best practices' for counselors. Counselors need to define best practices for the counseling profession. Research by counselors must be encouraged so that the counseling profession may continue to grow and flourish.

"We were able to reach consensus easily because we all agree that effective research is necessary for the counseling profession to maintain and gain even more credibility. As a profession, counseling is based upon the premises of human development and strength development. The counseling profession is based on a positive growth model instead of a deficit model. As a committee, we agree that counseling research needs to fulfill a two-pronged mission. First, we need to educate the public about what counseling has to offer society as a whole. Second, we need to consistently deliver the message to professional counselors and the public that counseling interventions are effective. We must present a unified professional stance to the public while respecting diversity within the profession.

"The 20/20 project encourages proactive strategic planning for the counseling profession. We must look forward to encourage growth of the profession and define goals for the future. As a dynamic profession, we need to collectively combine our visions of what counseling is and what it can be so that future generations may benefit from the foundations that we are establishing today."

Rebecca Schumacher, chair, work group on promoting client welfare and advocacy; delegate for the Association for Specialists in Group Work

"Client welfare and advocacy is a primary focus of our helping profession. ... One particular point (of consensus) that is significant: 'Encourage evidenced-based, ethical practice as the foundation for counselors in training and profes-

sional counselors' interventions across settings and populations served.' The significance of this item is 'evidence-based practice.' With accountability and outcomes critical in these times, this item is of particular significance.

"The importance of 20/20 is that our profession, which has multiple specifiable interests, is dialoguing with one another and sharing perspectives of the

profession. This can only increase our awareness and sensitivity to the diversity within our profession." ■

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