
CCPA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs in Canada: An Historical Perspective L'accréditation par l'ACCP des programmes de formation des conseillers au Canada : une perspective historique

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association has promoted the development of guidelines and standards for the education and training of counsellors in Canada. This article outlines the evolution of this process from early discussions and initiatives into formal procedures and standards for accreditation of counsellor education programs at the master's level and the creation of the Council on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs (CACEP). The activities of CACEP are described, the significance of CACEP accreditation is explained, and suggestions for the further development of CACEP accreditation of counsellor education programs in Canada are provided.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis les années 1970, l'Association canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie a fait la promotion de l'élaboration de lignes directrices et de normes applicables à la formation des conseillers et conseillères au Canada. Cet article souligne l'évolution de cette démarche depuis les premières discussions et initiatives jusqu'aux procédures et aux normes officielles en matière d'accréditation des programmes de formation des conseillers au niveau de la maîtrise et la création du Conseil pour l'accréditation des programmes de formation des conseillers (CAPFC). On y décrit les activités du CAPFC et la signification de l'accréditation, tout en formulant des suggestions pour de futurs développements de l'accréditation par le CAPFC en ce qui concerne les programmes de formation des conseillers au Canada.

Throughout its history, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA)¹ has demonstrated its recognition of the important role it could and should play in the development of counselling as a profession in Canada. Over the years, it has pursued this goal through activities such as the development of professional standards and monitoring processes in areas such as ethics, certification, and continuing education. Another area in which it has been actively involved is the setting of standards and procedures for the accreditation of counsellor education programs in Canada.

As noted on the website of Universities Canada (UC), accreditation in Canada, as it pertains to postsecondary education, is a quality assurance process intended to maintain and continuously improve academic program standards.

In addition to institutional quality assurance processes of the institution, some academic programs in professional fields are subject to accreditation by professional bodies at the provincial, Canadian, or international levels....

Professional bodies review programs to ensure that the content of university programs, teaching resources, and research outputs are of consistently high quality to meet competency expectations and to support future professionals in their area of expertise. (Universities Canada, 2015, paras. 1 & 2)

An important aspect of accreditation is that it involves intensive self-study and an external peer review process. Within the counselling profession, as with many other professions, accreditation is a form of self-regulation and is normally carried out on a voluntary basis. Little has been published on CCPA's leadership in this area. As we recently marked the 50th anniversary of CCPA, our goal is to chronicle the history of CCPA accreditation from its early beginnings in the 1970s to the present day.

EARLY EFFORTS TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS FOR CANADIAN COUNSELLOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS (1970–1997)

As early as 1975, in response to the significant number of differences in the content and length of graduate-level counsellor education programs across the country, the then Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (CGCA) passed a resolution to “establish a set of guidelines for counsellor education,” reflecting its recognition of the importance of education and training in promoting “quality” in counselling and its own role in promoting such quality. As noted by Jevne (1981), the “accelerating need for competent counsellors imposes on the profession a responsibility for effective counsellor education” (p. 57). Passage of the 1975 resolution to “establish a set of guidelines for counsellor education” reflected an attempt by CGCA to establish standards and to regulate the profession internally (Jevne, 1981; Peavy, Robertson, & Westwood, 1982).

CGCA attempted to act on this historic resolution by funding a study within the Canadian context (Jevne, 1979, 1981) to determine the competencies of an effective counsellor and to suggest guidelines for counsellor education that would best promote their development. A questionnaire was developed based on a literature review of counsellor competencies and issues in counsellor education. In order to determine those competencies and issues for which there was a high degree of consensus, a modified Delphi technique was used to gather data from 304 counsellor educators, counsellor supervisors, practicing counsellors, and students enrolled in counsellor education programs across Canada. Analysis of the data indicated a high degree of consensus relative to the various competency areas and specific competencies considered necessary for counsellor effectiveness. Ranked

in decreasing order of importance for the total sample, these competency areas were self-awareness, personal characteristics, counselling skills and techniques, theoretical background, professional/ethical conduct, consulting and coordinating, and measurement techniques. There was also a high degree of consensus regarding most issues pertaining to counsellor education programs in areas such as counsellor education policies, candidate selection criteria, counsellor educator selection, modes of training (e.g., supervised practicum, core curriculum, personal growth experiences, and micro-training), and directions for the future.

CGCA Counsellor Education Ad Hoc Committee (1979 - 1982)

Direct action on the development of guidelines for counsellor education programs began when Professor Myrne Nevison of the University of British Columbia (UBC) organized a meeting of Canadian counsellor educators at the CGCA conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1979. An ad hoc committee, comprising Dr. Vance Peavy from the University of Victoria, Dr. Sharon Robertson from the University of Calgary (U of C), and Dr. Marvin Westwood from UBC, was given a mandate to develop a preliminary set of guidelines for counsellor education by December 1980. The final document was based on input from counsellor educators across Canada and the CGCA Counsellor Education Committee. The CGCA General Assembly approved it at the CGCA conference in Calgary in June 1981. The approved guidelines, published in the *Canadian Counsellor*,² addressed standards in the following areas: Program Objectives, Curriculum (general characteristics, core concepts and competencies, elective concepts and competencies, practica including total and direct client contact hours), Students (selection, advising), Qualifications of Counsellor Educators, and Number of Faculty and Staff (Peavy et al., 1982). No guidelines were set regarding program credits. Although the guidelines did not address the issue of professional standards for counsellors directly in that they did not legislate program content or standards for accreditation, they did serve as "a standard toward which all counsellor education programs in Canada might aspire" so that "all programs provide students with those components of counsellor training which are held to be essential by most Canadian counsellor educators" (Peavy et al., 1982, p. 137). For many years, this document served as a common reference point for both existing and emerging university-based master's level counsellor education programs in Canada.

CGCA Ad Hoc Committee on Accreditation (1984–1988)

Picking up on the fact that the 1981 CGCA Guidelines for Counsellor Education Programs did not address the issue of program accreditation and that there seemed to be enough interest to warrant study, in 1984 the Board of Directors of CGCA passed a resolution to ask a group "to explore the possibility of making CGCA an accreditation body for counsellor education programs (similar to AACD [the American Association for Counselling and Development] in the US)" (R. Conklin, personal communication, February 24, 1984). A CGCA ad hoc committee on accreditation, made up of Dr. Sharon Robertson (Chair), Dr. Vance Peavy,

and Dr. Marvin Westwood, was established with a mandate to further examine the "accreditation" issue.

In order to obtain more information about the attitudes of counsellor educators toward the idea of accreditation before beginning a process of setting out accreditation standards and procedures, the ad hoc committee sent out a survey in April 1984 to all universities in Canada with counsellor education programs. Both English and French versions of the survey were developed. Seventeen counsellor educators from all provinces in Canada except Manitoba, Newfoundland, and PEI responded to the survey. All but two were in favour of accreditation for counsellor education programs in Canada. Qualified support came from some counsellor educators from Ontario where, in keeping with requirements of the Ministry of Education, Specialist Certificates in Guidance were offered to train elementary and secondary school teachers to become guidance counsellors. Fourteen counsellor educators indicated they would support their institution's application for accreditation if it were established. No one said they would not support such an application. Counsellor educators, while concerned about possible disadvantages such as the stifling of creativity, initiative, and innovation, saw accreditation as a means of enhancing credibility.

Apart from the work and financial disadvantages that might ensue for CGCA, the counsellor educators overwhelmingly seemed to believe that the move toward accreditation would be positive for CGCA as an association. They would support their own institution's application for accreditation under certain conditions. They were in favour of voluntary participation with the opportunity for self-study and time to initiate needed changes. They wanted the steps toward accreditation to be constructive rather than punitive. They wanted to be given the opportunity to react to any proposals and to voice their support or lack of it. Finally, almost all of the counsellor educators wanted to participate in developing the accreditation process. Twelve counsellor educators reported that they would be willing to participate in the process if a decision were made to move toward accreditation, primarily by (a) assisting in developing criteria and standards and reacting to those created by others, and (b) being a member of an accreditation team.

A preliminary report was presented at a meeting of Counsellor Educators at the CGCA conference in Winnipeg in May 1984. At that time, additional feedback was received from counsellor educators who had not completed the survey. In all, the views of between 25 and 30 counsellor educators were obtained. The group discussed the results of the survey and was very much in favour of proceeding to set out accreditation standards and procedures for counsellor education programs. A preliminary report was also made to the CGCA Board of Directors at that conference, and the ad hoc committee was given approval to proceed.

A more detailed report on the work of the committee was submitted to CGCA in March 1985 (CGCA, Ad Hoc Committee on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs, 1985). This report included the results of the survey and meeting with Counsellor Educators in Winnipeg in 1984 as well as information obtained about the accreditation process set up by the AACD, based on documentation

provided by Dr. Joe Wittmer, Executive Director of the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and Dr. Louise Forsythe, a Past-President of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) and a CACREP site visitor. In the report, the ad hoc committee outlined three areas on which the future work of the committee should focus:

1. examination of the structural and legal aspects of accreditation,
2. re-examination of the CGCA Guidelines for Counsellor Education Programs in Canada, and
3. development of tentative accreditation procedures and rating forms appropriate for the Canadian context.

Following this, Dr. Lloyd West from the University of Calgary joined Drs. Robertson, Peavy, and Westwood on the committee. The *CGCA/SCOC Accreditation Procedures Manual for Counsellor Education Programs in Canada* (Robertson & West, 1987) and recommendations for moving forward with accreditation were developed and presented to the CGCA Board of Directors at its May 1987 meeting in Toronto. The document contained four sections: (a) an introduction to CGCA accreditation, (b) accreditation procedures, (c) instructions for preparing an accreditation application including an application form, and (d) a rating form containing accreditation standards. The accreditation procedures section contained detailed information in areas such as making an application, application review, conduct of a site visit, the site visit report, and accreditation decisions. Some standards, particularly those pertaining to practica, were drawn from the 1981 CGCA Guidelines for Counsellor Education Programs in Canada. Others were updated from the 1981 guidelines and refined based on the CACREP materials. Accreditation standards were outlined for five areas: Mission, Philosophy, Objectives, and Priorities; Program of Studies (general characteristics, core concepts and competencies, elective concepts and competencies, practica); Students (screening, selection, and admission; selection criteria; and performance review); Faculty (qualifications and number and workload of faculty); and Instructional Support. No standard was set for a required number of program credits. The Board received the Accreditation Procedures Manual and recommendations (including a proposal for a pilot study of the accreditation process) for information. The Accreditation Committee developed a plan for the pilot study and presented it to the CGCA Board at its January 1988 meeting.

Although CGCA was fairly stable and had been growing steadily over the years, in May 1987 it entered a period of financial difficulties during which the continued existence of the organization was seriously threatened. This financial challenge affected the ability of the Board to then act on the proposal put forward in January 1988. The Board was supportive but decided to delay the implementation of its recommendations. From 1987 until the mid to late 1990s, the primary focus for CGCA was on reorganization of its administrative operations, maintaining longstanding existing activities (e.g., *COGNICA*, the journal, conferences), and as circumstances would allow, fostering activities that would attract new members

and generate additional revenue (e.g., continuing education, certification). The focus and energies of many key counsellor educators became directed toward this broader organizational purpose. Accreditation was put on a back burner as the organization attempted to rebuild its foundation, and further progress on accreditation became stalled.

Other Accreditation Initiatives

There was some action on accreditation at the local level during the 1984–1988 period. Recognizing the value of program accreditation and without a formal mechanism for having master's-level programs accredited by CGCA, in 1985 Dr. William Borgen, Head of the Department of Counselling Psychology at UBC, initiated a process that resulted in the 1987 accreditation of the UBC MA and MED programs in counselling psychology by CACREP, the accreditation body based in the United States. These were the first accredited counsellor education programs in Canada.

In 1989, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) included counselling psychology in its accreditation standards, and during the 1990s, several counsellor educators gained knowledge and experience in the administration of program accreditation as members and chairs of the CPA Accreditation Panel. Although no counselling psychology program became CPA accredited until 1999, the experience with this process helped to inform the CGCA accreditation procedures in subsequent years.

So, despite the problems facing CGCA as an organization, Canadian counsellor educators continued to be interested in accreditation, and information sharing about it was ongoing. For example, a number of the counsellor educators at UBC, who had successfully gone through the CACREP accreditation process, were willing to share their knowledge and expertise about accreditation with others. In 1990, William Borgen and Sharon Robertson copresented on CACREP and CGCA accreditation at the Counsellor Educators Chapter meeting in Montreal. There were subsequent presentations on CGCA accreditation standards and procedures including information regarding the conduct of on-site visits. The Counsellor Educators Chapter continued discussion about accreditation into the late 1990s, and a pilot study of the 1987 accreditation standards and procedures was considered. However, by that time it was decided that there was a need to review the 1987 standards and procedures, particularly in light of other experiences with program reviews and accreditation. It was not until about 1997 that the issue of accreditation was taken up again in a serious way by CGCA.

DEVELOPING AND APPROVING ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS (1997–2002)

In 1997, the Canadian Counselling Association (CCA) invited Dr. Borgen and Dr. Robertson to form a special committee on accreditation with a mandate to revise and update the CCA accreditation policies, procedures, and standards

for master's-level counsellor education programs in Canada. An initial draft accreditation manual was developed by 2001, guided by the *CGCA Guidelines for Counsellor Education in Canada* (Peavy et al., 1982), the *CGCA/SCOC Accreditation Procedures Manual for Counsellor Education Programs in Canada* (Robertson & West, 1987), the *CPA Accreditation Manual* (Cohen, 1991), and the *CACREP Standards for Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs* in the United States (CACREP, 2001). The draft manual contained three sections: Introduction, Procedures, and Standards. The Introduction addressed issues such as the purposes of accreditation, the distinction between accreditation and certification, and a proposed committee structure. Similar to the 1987 version, the Procedures section of the manual included steps in the accreditation process such as making an application, application review, conduct of a site visit, the site visit report, and accreditation decisions. The Standards section was extended from five to eight areas: (a) the Institution; (b) Mission, Orientation, Objectives, and Priorities; (c) Program of Studies; (d) Students; (e) Faculty; (f) Program Governance; (g) Instructional Support; and (h) Evaluation.

The inclusion of standards pertaining to the institution, program governance, and evaluation was new, while other areas were updated. The required core content areas were basically the same across both versions. Electives/Areas of Specialization were revised to allow for increased flexibility and to include areas such as School Counselling, Counselling in Postsecondary Settings, Community/Agency Counselling, Career Counselling, Family Counselling, and Rehabilitation Counselling. Pre-practicum requirements remained the same. Two main changes were made. The minimum number of required course credits was changed from unspecified in the 1987 version to 48 credits in the 2001 version. Similarly, in keeping with changes in the field, practicum requirements were increased from 120 hours of supervised practicum including 90 hours of direct client contact of which 30 hours were to be spent in each of individual counselling and group counselling in the 1987 version to 500 hours of supervised practica with 250 hours of direct client contact of which a minimum of 200 hours were to be spent in individual counselling and 50 hours in group counselling in the 2001 version.

Once the draft accreditation manual was developed, the Special Committee on Accreditation engaged in extensive consultation with the CCA Board of Directors and counsellor educators across Canada over a period of about two years (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002). Following review by the CCA Board of Directors, Drs. Robertson and Borgen presented the proposed accreditation standards to about 50 counsellor educators attending a workshop at the CCA Counsellor Educators Chapter meeting at the CCA/IAEVG conference held in Richmond, BC, in March 2001. The feedback was summarized in a report for the Chapter (Stafford, 2001) and provided to the co-chairs, who used it to make changes to the manual (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

The counsellor educators identified many advantages to accreditation. They also recognized their need for strategic help from their university administrations, from CCA, from institutions that had already gained accredited status, and from

experienced peers in order to move toward achieving accreditation for their programs. It was suggested that counsellor educators needed to ask themselves what their program would look like when it was accredited and then participate in measures to help bring about the necessary changes. At the time of the workshop, the Chapter was conducting a survey to evaluate where institutions were “at” in the accreditation process. It was suggested that the Chapter could support institutions in the process by offering half-day “accreditation clinics” to universities every year at the time of the CCA annual conference, where universities in process could bring forth their plans and challenges for resources and help and receive feedback from experienced peers.

Among the major issues discussed were programming, supervision, ethics, distance education, and admission requirements. Several programs indicated that they were ready to move in the direction of accreditation (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

In May 2001, the revised manual was submitted to the CCA Board of Directors for approval. The Board approved the Procedures section with the understanding that friendly suggestions for changes in wording would be made. The Board did not approve the Standards but recommended that further consultation should be held in order to obtain feedback about them from a wider group of counsellor educators (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

In order to carry out the Board’s request for a broader consultation on the Accreditation Standards, in June/July 2001 a survey of counsellor educators was developed and was reviewed by the President of CCA. Counsellor educators were surveyed for feedback on the standards, as they were the ones most closely involved in the delivery of the programs and most likely to be affected by any standards that were set. Because the standards were being developed by CCA, those contacted also had to be members of the Counsellor Educators Chapter. As the Accreditation Manual was written in English, initially only faculty at anglophone universities were contacted. Counsellor educators who were faculty members in master’s-level counsellor education programs at 15 different anglophone Canadian universities were identified. In order to gain feedback from counsellor educators at franco-phone universities, three faculty members at different universities were contacted by the CCA Executive Director and asked if they would provide feedback on the standards even though they were written in English. All three agreed to do this. In all, then, one faculty member at each of 18 universities across Canada representing small, medium, and large programs and both official languages was invited to respond to the survey. As part of this, they were asked to solicit and coordinate feedback about the standards from colleagues who were counsellor educators in their program. The survey forms were sent out during the first week of August 2001 (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

One faculty member at each of nine counsellor education programs completed the survey. The nine submissions were from small, medium, and large programs, from both anglophone and francophone universities in various parts of the country, and from both established programs and ones that were just admitting students

for the first time. The overall feedback was supportive of the standards outlined in the document. However, there appeared to be three main areas of concern for three of the anglophone universities: (a) the requirement of 48 credit hours, (b) the content of the core, and (c) the practicum hours (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

In order to gain a more accurate picture of the status of the anglophone counsellor education programs surveyed with respect to these three concerns, the Accreditation Committee conducted a study of the existing program requirements as outlined by 15 programs on their websites (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002). A chart of 15 anglophone universities, the degrees they provided, the admission requirements/prerequisites for entry into the program, course requirements in terms of credit hours, practicum requirements, research/project requirements, and total program requirements in terms of credit hours was developed. Following is a summary of the three concerns and how they were considered and addressed (CCA, Special Committee on Accreditation, 2002).

1. *The requirement of 48 credit hours.* Since the 48 credit-hour requirement was raised as a concern, the 15 anglophone universities and their counsellor education programs were regrouped into one of four categories as shown in Table 1.

As indicated in Table 1, many Canadian counsellor education programs either already met the 48 credit-hour requirement or could have met it with minimal program adjustment. Most programs required prerequisite course work at the undergraduate level for admission, between 30 and 50 credit hours of course work at the graduate level, plus a thesis, project, or comprehensive exams. The prerequisites for admission were not counted as part of the graduate credit hours, nor was the work on a thesis, project, or comprehensive exams. In addition, credit hours received for practicum work often did not sufficiently reflect the extent of the practicum work required.

Table 1
Anglophone Master's-Level Counsellor Education Programs by 48 Credit-Hour Requirement

Program by 48 credit-hour requirement	Number of programs ^a
(A) Programs that appear to meet the 48 credit-hour requirement	4
(B) Programs that would probably meet the 48 credit-hour requirement if they counted what they do in another way (i.e., took into account prior courses and offered course credit for all program offerings like practicum and thesis)	8
(C) Programs for which it is unclear whether or not they would meet the 48 credit-hour requirement	4
(D) Programs that appear not to meet the 48 credit-hour requirements.	3

^aSome programs have two streams (e.g., thesis and nonthesis). These are included as one program here.

In view of the demanding and complex situations that counsellors were required to face in the diverse Canadian society at the time, the Special Committee on Accreditation believed it was important that they be well prepared through a broad-based core of knowledge and skills, which formed the basis on which to build specializations. Furthermore, the Committee believed this core should be specified by the accreditation body so that programs might be developed in a purposeful way to address these areas. The 48 credit hours were needed to cover the range of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that constituted the core and specializations. A program might meet the 48 credit-hour requirement in a number of ways. Some of these included (a) covering the core and specialization content and competencies entirely through graduate-level work, (b) using the maximum number of senior undergraduate courses allowed by a university's Faculty of Graduate Studies to cover core and specialization content and competencies as well as graduate-level work, or (c) granting advanced credit for the maximum allowable number of senior undergraduate courses that covered core and specialization content and competencies and requiring that the student's reduced program consist entirely of graduate-level work as part of a graduate program. Given these kinds of possibilities, the Special Committee on Accreditation recommended that the 48 credit-hour requirement be maintained as it also reflected what a number of programs already had in place or could have in place with minimal program adjustment. It also reflected an internationally recognized standard for master's-level counselling programs.

2. *The content of the core.* Eight of the programs that responded to the survey made comments specific to the proposed core for the program. Six programs indicated that it was appropriate, and two expressed concerns. These concerns seemed to centre mainly on the relevance and breadth of the competencies required and a perceived lack of flexibility in acknowledging students' prior learning. Regarding the concern about the relevance and breadth of the core, one program was concerned about the lack of evidence of any ground-up development of professional consensus about core competencies and suggested that there needed to be further consensus developed around what constitutes core learning to be required of all students. With respect to this issue, the Special Committee on Accreditation proposed the core be based on a number of factors: (a) the core concepts and competencies that had already been adopted by CGCA in 1981 after extensive study, (b) the increased demands on counsellors amid the complexities and diversity of Canadian society (as noted above), (c) accreditation documents from other professional bodies as noted previously, and (d) the fact that some existing programs in Canada and internationally were already incorporating most of these competencies into their programs. It was also decided that acknowledging prior learning of students could continue as it was, with programs offering a core that reflected what was needed to educate a beginning pro-

fessional counsellor and students making individual cases for prior learning experiences that could allow for some courses in the program being waived.

3. *Practicum hours.* The Special Committee on Accreditation proposed a 500-hour practicum, knowing that it would mean an adjustment of hours for some programs and that the requirement at that time set by CACREP was 600 total practicum hours while the one set by the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists was 500 hours of direct client contact and 100 hours of clinical supervision. The Special Committee saw this as a way to move toward a standard that was more in keeping with the standards set by other accreditation bodies in the counselling field without making the requirement too onerous for some Canadian programs to consider accreditation. Many of the comments made were suggestions for adding clarity to what was required and questions about specific requirements.

Because an ongoing concern had been that the Special Committee had not sufficiently taken into account the feedback from the Richmond workshop held for counsellor educators in March 2001, this feedback was reviewed again and changes were made as seemed appropriate.

Finally, after extensive consultation across the country, including review by the CCA Board of Directors, feedback from 50 counsellor educators at a Counsellor Educators meeting, a survey of faculty at 15 anglophone and 3 francophone Canadian universities, and a review of the existing anglophone program websites, the CCA Board of Directors approved the standards in May 2002. The approved core and elective requirements for the program of studies are shown in Table 2, and practicum requirements are broken down in Table 3.

Table 2
*2002 CCA Standards for Accreditation of Master's-Level Programs in Canada:
Core Content and Elective Requirements*

Prerequisites for admission to be determined by program

Credit Hours = 48

Core content

Professional orientation	Human development and learning
Ethical and legal issues	Diversity
Counselling theories	Lifestyle and career development
Helping relationships	Assessment processes
Individual counselling and consultation	Research methods
Group counselling	Program evaluation

Electives/areas of specialization

School counselling	Rehabilitation counselling
Counselling in postsecondary settings	Career counselling
Community/agency counselling	Family counselling

Pre-practicum: 40 hours lab practice in basic counselling skills and simulated interviews

Practica = 500 hours

Table 3
*2002 CCA Standards for Accreditation of Master's-Level Programs in Canada:
 Practicum Requirements*

Total hours of supervised practicum	500
Hours of direct client contact	250
Hours of individual counselling	200
Hours in group counselling	50

In November 2002, the CCA Board of Directors also approved a motion to set up and administer the accreditation program through a new body, the Council on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs (CACEP), with specific terms of reference. Drs. Borgen and Robertson became its first co-chairs with a mandate to implement this motion. The CCA accreditation procedures and standards were published in English and in French in 2003 (Robertson & Borgen, 2003a, 2003b), and the English version was placed on the CCA website. These were significant steps for CCA, as it recognized its role and responsibility in providing leadership in setting standards for the education of counsellors in Canada, especially given the tremendous variability in program offerings at that time.

THE FORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ON ACCREDITATION OF COUNSELLOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS (CACEP)

Setting up an accreditation body is a complex process and no small feat for any professional organization, least of all CCA. Apart from developing and approving a set of accreditation procedures and standards as outlined previously, in November 2002, the CCA Board of Directors also approved terms of reference for CACEP to oversee the accreditation process. No changes have been made to the terms of reference since the CCA Board of Directors originally approved them. Beginning with an abbreviated description of the terms of reference for CACEP, what follows is a brief history of the work of CACEP from its inception.

In November 2002, the CCA Board of Directors approved the following terms of reference for CACEP:

Council

The full name of the Council is: The Canadian Counselling Association Council on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs (CACEP).

The Council is to be composed of a minimum of a Chair, and three additional members, all of whom are recognized counsellor educators and one of whom is proficient in both official languages. Members of the Council are appointed by the Board of Directors of CCA [changed to CCPA in 2009] upon the recommendation of the Council and are appointed for staggered terms of up to four years. The Chair is elected by the Council from among its members and is recommended to the Board for approval. (CCA, 2002)

Mandate of the Council

- To oversee and manage the CCA [now CCPA] accreditation program, which involves providing professional and arms-length evaluation of counsellor education programs.
- To develop policies and procedures pertaining to the operation of the Council and to make recommendations regarding these to the CCA Board of Directors.
- To periodically review the CCA Accreditation Procedures and Standards and to make recommendations for change to the CCA Board of Directors.
- To develop and implement a program for training site visitors.
- To develop documents and instruments needed to administer the accreditation program.
- To provide consultation to counsellor education programs.
- To provide information to the President of the institution applying for accreditation, regarding the outcome of the institution's application.
- To interact through the CCA President with other elements of the CCA governance structure on matters related to accreditation.
- To develop marketing strategies to interest universities in the accreditation of their counsellor education programs.
- To cooperate with provincial and federal institutions and agencies as well as other professional groups in promoting high standards of counsellor education. (CCA, 2002)

All deliberations of the Accreditation Council are confidential, and its decisions are grounded in principles of fairness and natural justice. When Council members have knowledge, or roles, that would compromise their ability to be fair and unbiased in the evaluation of an accreditation application, they absent themselves from the deliberations to avoid any such conflict of interest (CCA, 2002).

Consistent with the terms of reference for CACEP approved by the CCA Board of Directors in 2002, the CCPA Board of Directors has responsibility for approving any changes to the CACEP accreditation procedures and standards, approving the appointment of Council members and chairs upon the recommendation of the Council, and approving the annual CACEP budget. Furthermore, the Board has responsibility for delegating authority over accreditation matters to the Council in order to avoid the perception of any influence of or interference by the association with the accreditation decisions of the Council (CCA, 2002). In November 2002, the CCA Board of Directors also approved additional CACEP terms of reference pertaining to (a) reporting requirements, (b) liaison with the CCA [now CCPA] national office, and (c) administrative assistance (CCA, 2002).

CACEP ACTIVITIES SINCE 2003

Since its inception, CACEP has operated with Drs. Borgen and Robertson as co-chairs and with Dr. Karen Wright from the University of Saskatchewan as a

member of the Council. Dr. Marcelle Gingras from the University of Sherbrooke served on the Council until 2006 and was followed by Dr. Robert Baudouin from the University of Moncton. Initially CACEP met at least once per year in person and once by teleconference, but it now meets via teleconference more frequently and as needed.

Outreach

For the first few years following the creation of the Council, the CACEP co-chairs were heavily involved in communication activities regarding accreditation procedures and standards. They made a number of presentations and conducted several workshops with the CCA/CCPA Counsellor Educators Chapter and made presentations at the annual CCA/CCPA conferences. They began with a one-day workshop in Halifax in 2003, as part of a Counsellor Educators Chapter meeting, in which representatives from a number of counsellor education programs across Canada were invited to compare their current programs with the accreditation standards. They were also provided with an overview of the accreditation process. Since then, CACEP accreditation has often been on the agenda of annual meetings of the Counsellor Educators Chapter for discussion of accreditation-related issues. In addition, in response to an invitation from the CCA Board of Directors, they made a presentation to the Board in 2008 regarding activities of the Accreditation Council as well as opportunities and challenges in moving accreditation forward in Canada. Dr. Borgen and Dr. Robertson have also made presentations regarding CACEP accreditation standards and processes at every annual CCA/CCPA conference since 2003 and at International Association for Counselling (IAC) conferences in 2002, 2005, 2006, and 2014. Information about CACEP has also been published in *COGNICA* (Borgen & Robertson, 2007; Robertson, 2006) and on the CCPA website.

Site Visitor Training

A key component of the accreditation process is a visit to the program applying for accreditation by site visitors whose task it is to review the program's self-study document and then meet with key personnel in the program to assess the degree to which accreditation standards have been met. Site visitors require training to prepare them to carry out this role effectively (Borgen & Robertson, 2007). Consequently, a number of site visitor training workshops were conducted to build a cadre of site visitors across Canada. These workshops were offered in conjunction with annual CCPA conferences. As already indicated, the first site visitor training workshop was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2003. Subsequent workshops were held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2004, and in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 2005. In 2006, a site visitor training workshop was offered jointly with CACREP, the accrediting body for counsellor education programs in the United States, at the joint ACA/CCPA conference held in Montréal, Quebec. At that point, 14 site visitors had been trained. All of the site visitors are counsellor educators who come from different regions of Canada, and all volunteer their time to assist in the ac-

creditation process. It is interesting to note that a number of counsellor educators indicated that participating in the training workshops not only prepared them to conduct site visits, but also provided them with a deeper level of information regarding the possible accreditation of their own programs.

The Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs

It is important to note that establishing an accreditation process takes time. Not only does it require the setting of standards and procedures with an accompanying infrastructure to support it, but also it takes time for academic programs to gain the necessary institutional support to pursue accreditation, engage in a self-study review process, gain university and sometimes governmental approvals for necessary changes, and develop and submit an application. For example, CPA, which only accredits programs at the doctoral level, included counselling psychology in its accreditation standards in 1989 and it was 10 years before the first counselling psychology program (McGill) received CPA accreditation. Currently there are five CPA-accredited doctoral-level counselling psychology programs in Canada.

Since 2005, CACEP has awarded accreditation to four counsellor education programs: the MA and MEd programs in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia, the MEd in counselling at Acadia University, and the MA in counselling psychology at Trinity Western University. Two universities have applied for reaccreditation; the program in one of these universities has been reaccredited and one university is in the final stages of the reaccreditation process. In addition, one new application is currently under review, and two other programs have indicated that they have reviewed their programs in light of the CACEP accreditation standards and have made or are making needed adjustments with the intent to apply for CACEP accreditation. A third group of universities have augmented their programs in light of the standards but have not indicated an interest in becoming accredited at this point.

The Council has had clear feedback from the accredited programs and those making adjustments in preparation for applying for accreditation that the self-study process preceding an application has resulted in a clearer articulation of program objectives and support from their universities in the provision of augmented resources, if they were required. Furthermore, since quality assurance and continuity of program offerings are also strong features of accreditation, the continuing yearly dialogue helps to ensure that the needed supports for a quality program are in place while a program is accredited.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CACEP ACCREDITATION

A question often asked is “Why is CACEP accreditation important?” CACEP program accreditation has particular significance for counselling as a profession, for CCPA, for counsellor education programs, for prospective applicants and students in programs, for employers, and for clients.

For the Profession

Having standards regarding the depth and breadth of education required to practice is an important hallmark of a profession. Most professions (e.g., psychology, social work, medicine, nursing, engineering in North America, as well as counselling and family therapy in the U.S.) have introduced a process of accreditation to help ensure that educational programs are sufficiently rigorous in their requirements with offerings that are current, integrated, and consistent in their quality. Whereas individuals are licensed to practice (normally by provincial regulatory bodies), programs are accredited (normally by national associations). In addition to setting standards for program content, the accrediting body sets requirements with respect to (a) institutional setting; (b) mission/vision/goals/objectives of the program; (c) the program of studies including content areas, practica, and internship; (d) students, including information for students; (e) faculty; (f) program governance; (g) instructional support; and (h) evaluation.

CACEP procedures mirror those of most other accrediting bodies in North America and, as with other accrediting bodies, CACEP relies heavily on the volunteer time of counsellor educators across the country, augmented with some office support. Accreditation is a voluntary process, which involves rigorous self-study and review by peers external to the program and to the university. Its benefits in enhancing the credibility of the profession are clear.

For CCPA

Because of its commitment to high quality in training and quality assurance, as well as ongoing monitoring and improvement, accreditation not only enhances the prestige of the profession, it also enhances the credibility of the professional association that supports it. Given the emerging nature of counselling as an officially recognized profession in Canada and changes in the regulatory environment provincially, CCPA now has an opportunity to further position itself as *the* national professional association for counselling in Canada through its accreditation process, as the Canadian Psychological Association and the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing have done in their fields. The experience with the formation of colleges of psychologists suggests that the initial standards rapidly evolve and increase within the first few years of their existence. The CACEP national accreditation standards supported by CCPA can be an important point of reference for the newly emerging provincial colleges as they move forward with their ongoing mandate to protect the public. CACEP accreditation is also important in signaling to provincial associations and the general public, including employers and potential clients, that CCPA has set a national standard to help ensure quality preparation of counselling professionals in Canada. CCPA is included in the Professional Program Accreditation section of the UC website (Universities Canada, 2015).

For Counsellor Education Programs

CACEP accreditation has definite benefits for counsellor education programs in Canada. It provides a clear indicator of program quality and an ongoing com-

mitment to engagement in quality improvement, as well as the intention to attract high quality students and faculty members from across the country and internationally. Within the context of increasing competition for students, universities look for indices of quality in what they offer. The raised profile and credibility that comes with program accreditation also usually comes with a priority in resource allocation for program maintenance and improvement, particularly in times of fiscal restraint. CACEP accreditation standards also offer a point of reference for programs that are not accredited to argue for changes that will enhance their programs (e.g., in increasing practicum requirements) and to maintain existing offerings. In terms of the level of the standards, it is important to remember that the minimum number of program credits set by CACEP will quickly become the maximum number of credits that universities consider necessary for quality master's programs in counsellor education.

For Prospective Applicants and Students in Programs

CACEP accreditation is also important for prospective applicants and students in programs. With the increasing number and type of counsellor education programs being offered in Canada, CACEP program accreditation provides prospective applicants, as consumers, with information regarding programs that are recognized for their high quality according to established external standards. It also provides students within CACEP-accredited programs some measure of assurance that the training they are receiving will not only prepare them well to be practicing counsellors, but also will serve them well in seeking employment and certification/registration upon completion. Graduates of CACEP-accredited programs are fast-tracked for CCPA certification.

For Employers

Employers may benefit from the knowledge, skills, and experience that graduates from CACEP-accredited programs bring to them. Hiring graduates from CACEP-accredited programs may provide employers with greater assurance that their employees possess what most counsellor educators consider to be essential knowledge and skills for professional counselling practice.

For Clients

The ultimate goal of CACEP accreditation is to meet the needs of clients more effectively through enhanced counsellor competence. With greater quality assurance in training, clients are likely to be less exposed to the risk of seeking help from someone who does not possess professional competencies to meet their needs.

THE WAY FORWARD

2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the creation of a national counselling organization in Canada. The issue of accreditation of counsellor education programs has been on the agenda of the CCPA for 40 of those years. In reviewing the

initiatives that have been undertaken since 1975, it is clear that contextual issues have evolved and other pressing issues have at times delayed actions with respect to program accreditation. It is also clear, however, that CCPA has remained committed to the advancement of the profession of counselling through the promotion of quality counsellor education programs.

The most recent initiative regarding program accreditation undertaken by the Association, which resulted in the creation of CACEP, has now been in place for a decade. It is an opportune time to review the successes and challenges of CACEP during its first 10 years of operation and to consider ways for program accreditation in Canada to evolve and expand. In terms of successes, four programs are currently accredited and another university has recently applied for accreditation. In addition, two other programs are working toward becoming accredited, and others have indicated that they have used accreditation standards as a benchmark for considering and making changes to their programs. A number of contextual changes have happened within counsellor education programs in Canada in the last decade. One of these was the economic downturn in 2008, which reduced the ability of programs to engage in faculty renewal and to consider new initiatives. In a discussion about CACEP accreditation at a meeting of the CCPA Counsellor Educators Chapter held in Victoria, BC, in May 2014, it seemed clear that many in attendance were recently appointed counsellor educators. A number of them expressed interest in finding out more about the CACEP accreditation standards and processes.

In moving forward, it will be important for both CCPA and CACEP to raise the profile of accreditation of master's programs in counsellor education in Canada while maintaining high standards of quality. This may be initiated in a number of ways. The standards and processes developed for accreditation have not been changed in a decade. In developing a process to consider updating both accreditation standards and processes, it will be useful to examine the procedures used by similar bodies in Canada and the United States, such as CPA and CACREP. It will also be important to reinvolve the Counsellor Educators Chapter of CCPA, particularly with a view to engaging newer faculty members. Finally, it will be important to engage in a process of renewal of members of the Council to help ensure the sustainability of CACEP in the future. With a number of these issues in mind, in 2015 CCPA created a task force to review CACEP with the aim of renewing and revitalizing accreditation processes, and reviewing accreditation standards with respect to the current professional counselling landscape in Canada.

Notes

- 1 At the time it was founded in 1965, the organization was called the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (CGCA). This name was changed to the Canadian Counselling Association (CCA) in 1999, and was changed to its current name, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), in 2009.
- 2 The *Canadian Counsellor* was the predecessor of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, which is now called the *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*.

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