
Student Advocacy in Canadian Counselling Psychology Programs: 2018 CCPC Working Group Outcomes Promotion et défense des intérêts des étudiantes et étudiants inscrits aux programmes canadiens de psychologie du counseling : résultats du groupe de travail du Congrès canadien 2018 de psychologie du counseling

Jeff Landine

University of New Brunswick

K. Jessica Van Vliet

University of Alberta

Chelsea Hobbs

University of Alberta

Alysha Chan Kent

University of Calgary

ABSTRACT

The second Canadian Counselling Psychology Conference, held in Calgary in October 2018, provided an opportunity for conference attendees to participate in one of seven working groups that met over the course of 2 days. Members of one group were tasked with delving into the topic of student advocacy in Canadian counselling psychology. Student advocacy was defined as students speaking up for themselves about what they need in their various graduate programs and educational experiences across Canada. The resulting discussion identified the following broad areas of need and potential program improvement: (a) practicum process and opportunities, (b) preparation for the “real world,” (c) partnerships between university programs and professional communities, (d) increased student funding, and (e) clarity and consistency in program requirements and professional credentialing. Members of the working group developed detailed recommendations and plans of action for each of these areas. This paper reviews the relevant literature on the above topics and expands upon the group’s recommendations for addressing the needs of counselling psychology students in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ

Le deuxième Congrès canadien de psychologie du counseling, tenu à Calgary en octobre 2018, fut l’occasion pour les participants de se joindre à l’un des sept groupes de travail réunis au cours des 2 jours de l’événement. Un groupe s’est vu attribuer la

tâche de fouiller le dossier de la promotion et de la défense des intérêts des étudiants inscrits en psychologie du counseling au Canada. On a défini la promotion et la défense des intérêts comme étant la possibilité des étudiantes et étudiants d'exprimer eux-mêmes ce dont ils avaient besoin dans le cadre des divers programmes universitaires et expériences éducatives à l'échelle du Canada. Les discussions ont permis de cerner les grands enjeux suivants concernant les besoins et les améliorations possibles aux programmes : (a) l'organisation des stages et des placements, (b) la préparation à la « vie réelle », (c) les partenariats entre les programmes universitaires et les collectivités professionnelles, (d) la bonification du financement étudiant, et (e) la clarté et la cohérence des exigences des programmes et de l'accréditation professionnelle. Le groupe de travail a élaboré des recommandations détaillées et des plans d'action pour chacun de ces enjeux. Le présent article passe en revue la documentation pertinente en lien avec ces questions et explique les recommandations du groupe en réponse aux besoins exprimés par les étudiantes et étudiants en psychologie du counseling au Canada.

Advocacy has been defined as “the process or act of arguing or pleading for a cause or proposal” to promote social change (Lee as cited in Myers et al., 2002, p. 394). While advocacy on behalf of clients has been part of the role of psychologists for some time, advocacy for the field of psychology itself has a shorter history as a process that promotes the social, political, and economic interests of individuals or groups, including people working in the field as well as clients (Stewart et al., 2009). Over the course of 2 days at the 2018 Canadian Counselling Psychology Conference in Calgary, the working group on student advocacy was tasked with two main objectives. The first objective was to promote discussion on the experiences, needs, challenges, and expectations of students in counselling psychology programs across Canada. We were interested in hearing what students had to say about their needs and concerns related to their graduate training, with an emphasis on advocacy for and by students. Arising from such discussion was our second objective, which was to generate recommendations on how Canadian counselling psychology programs could be improved to better address students' interests.

The working group, which met for two 90-minute sessions during the 1st day of the conference, was facilitated by two faculty members from counselling psychology programs at the University of New Brunswick and the University of Alberta, along with five master's students, two doctoral students, and one recent master's graduate from counselling programs across the country. Two of the students served as note-takers to ensure we had a comprehensive and accurate written record of the group's discussions. To help focus our efforts, our group started with discussion questions that were suggested by the conference organizers. These questions centred on students' experiences and challenges in their programs (e.g., How do counselling psychology students experience their training across programs and geographic locations? How do students manage various academic

expectations?), as well as on how programs could help improve students' experiences in their programs and facilitate the transition to professional careers (e.g., How can we enhance the student experience in counselling psychology training? How can we enhance the well-being of counselling psychology students? How can we help students make the transition into clinical practice or into other professional roles?). In keeping with the group's focus on how both students and faculty across Canada could transform programs to serve students' interests better, we asked additional questions aimed at understanding (a) students' needs and expectations within their graduate programs, (b) the extent to which students perceived these needs and expectations as being met, and (c) programmatic changes that students would like to see to better meet their needs and expectations. The workshop facilitators met later to review and to summarize the notes provided by the note-takers. As part of this process, the facilitators organized the notes into broad themes that were presented as the working group's outcomes on the 2nd day of the conference.

In the sections that follow, we describe the five broad themes that were identified in our working group as a result of the two discussion sessions. We then discuss each area in the context of the existing research literature. The final section considers the group's action items, or "wish list," related to each of the five themes, as well as future directions, including our recommendations for helping to move Canadian counselling psychology programs forward, to better serve the interests of counselling students and recent graduates.

Main Themes: Areas of Student Need and Improvement

Over the course of two discussion sessions, our working group identified five broad areas of student need and potential program improvement: (a) practicum process and opportunities, (b) preparation for the "real world," (c) partnerships between university programs and professional communities, (d) increased student funding, and (e) clarity and consistency in program requirements and professional credentialing. In the sections that follow, we examine these areas more closely, in the context of the literature.

Theme 1: Practicum Process and Opportunities

This theme relates to access, support, and discrepancies between programs when it comes to students' practicum placements and opportunities. Working group participants noted how some students benefit from access to their programs' in-house practicum placements (e.g., on-campus, student-run counselling clinics), while other students must find their own off-site practicum placements, often without the support of their programs. Participants pointed out that the availability of an on-site community clinic (i.e., one open to the general public), as opposed to a university's student mental health clinic, had the advantage of

allowing students to work with a more diverse range of clients and client issues than those encountered typically in student populations, without student clinicians having to travel off campus. Under this theme, participants also spoke of the benefits of being able to find their own practicum because this granted them the opportunity to customize their experience and to specialize in an area of work. Unfortunately, some participants felt that there were inadequate resources available to students to assist them in starting the necessary conversations with community partners to secure practicum sites.

Furthermore, due to challenges such as not being connected to a campus physically, participants indicated that students registered in online counselling programs may feel excluded from certain practica and from other forms of support to which students who are enrolled in on-site programs have ready access. For example, it is typically the responsibility of students in a program to find practicum sites for themselves with little guidance from the institution. If a student is unable to arrange a placement, their program is often delayed by a year or more. Participants spoke of experiences of limited support for students completing their program online, leading to as many as a quarter of the students in this category not getting a practicum. Participants felt that post-secondary institutions should recognize an obligation to provide the means for students to complete their program requirements on time.

Theme 2: Preparation for the “Real World”

A major theme that arose in the working group’s discussion related to students’ uncertainty about the extent to which their programs were preparing students for careers in the “real world.” Our discussion focused on the varying programmatic experiences of students, the role students played in their own learning experiences, and whether or not their respective programs were offering everything students needed to be prepared to work in the field of counselling psychology. This discussion considered the kinds of experience provided and the role of students in taking responsibility for their own experiences. For example, participants recognized that practicum experiences vary from program to program and that students have a role in ensuring that they had suitable experience upon graduation.

Participants noted the importance of consistency at the entry point to study, as incoming students typically enter their programs with different levels of counselling-related experience. In 2015, Murdoch et al. published a study comparing the entrance and program requirements related to psychology of Canadian master’s and doctoral level programs in counselling psychology with those of clinical psychology, social work, nursing, and medicine. Although their results indicated that both counselling and clinical psychology programs require significantly more training in mental health and psychology than the other professions considered, the study pointed to the wide disparity in mental health and psychology credits required for entry into master’s level counselling psychology

programs (a range of 0 to 48 credits). They also found considerable differences in the program credits related to mental health and psychology that were needed for graduation at both the master's level (a range of 15 to 51 credits) and the doctoral level (a range of 9 to 37 credits). Doctoral programs in counselling psychology in Canada are fairly consistent in their entrance credit requirements, with a range of 30 to 33 credits in mental health and psychology expected of entering students (Murdoch et al., 2015). Some participants felt that it would be beneficial to set a specific amount of volunteer/work experience as a prerequisite for admission to the program. In part, this discussion arose from the belief that some classes in students' programs had limited relevance for them personally, particularly for students entering the program with more experience. Conversely, some students may not be as well prepared for the experiences in their program, which could have a negative impact on students' subsequent preparation for postgraduate work experience.

Another major aspect of this theme pertained to the personal mental health and well-being of students. Participants talked about the need to focus on their own mental health as part of their training programs and as a competency for future practice. From the perspective of some participants, counselling programs tout the importance of "self-care" as an essential aspect of clinical work (both in training and in professional practice) without defining what it is or discussing how it is practised. Although self-care is presented as something that students need to do, students often are not given the space or the time to take care of themselves in a meaningful way. Participants felt that permission to take time off from school, without judgment, is important, as are practical suggestions to ensure that self-care is an ongoing practice. Therefore, programs should make space for the topic in course content. The practice of self-care was related back to the larger theme of students preparing themselves for the real world, as participants expressed the importance of taking care of themselves so that they would be well-positioned to care for their clients. In one participant's words, "Taking care of ourselves will help us to take care of our clients, and it needs to be prioritized in our programs because students are unlikely to make time for it on their own if they don't have the space to learn and practise it."

Related to the topic of self-care was the issue of a program requirement to access and to attend counselling as a student. In relation to the overarching theme of preparing themselves for the real world, participants felt that a requirement to see a counsellor would be important because of a need to know and understand themselves before they are able to help others. It may be especially important that counselling services be offered to students on a sliding scale in the community, particularly if students are unable to access on-site counselling services as a result of being in the program. The reasons cited for not wanting to go to counselling on-site included the desire not to eliminate the possibility of having the site as a potential practicum or internship location by seeking out support there as a

client. Participants believed that addressing this limitation at the institutional level might reduce barriers to students accessing their own mental health support.

Participants acknowledged that their professors' role was to push students to complete their assignments and course requirements but stated that it would also be helpful for faculty to "pull students back" to ensure that they are not overextending or putting undue pressure on themselves. Participants noted the value of having faculty members who are willing and able to reign in students' activities when they start getting unmanageable, for instance with regard to thesis or research ideas. Some participants said that, in their experience, a few professors focus too much on students' academic success without paying enough attention to the personal side of students' lives.

Finally, participants questioned how much their own mental health and personal development were their own responsibility and how much of that responsibility should be borne by the program. Participants recognized that questions like this one shed light on the intersection of the personal and the professional in regard to who is responsible for making sure these needs are met. This negotiation of responsibility can be extended into real-world practice when students become wholly responsible for their own care or where self-care is supported and facilitated by employers and professional associations.

Theme 3: Partnerships Between University Programs and the Professional Community

The third major theme resulting from the working group's discussion involved increasing connections with professionals and with professional bodies. In particular, practicum sites were identified as having the potential to serve as a method of strengthening relationships between the community and the university. Participants pointed out that if a student did not complete their practicum outside the university, they likely would not have made any connections in the community, making the transition to practice more difficult. Participants asked how practising psychologists could be made available to meet students in a more formalized way outside of practicum placements. The value of partnerships between training programs, professional bodies, psychologists in the community, and other stakeholders was mentioned, but it was also recognized that this sort of initiative is difficult because of a lack of resources and because of limited time available to professionals in their busy schedules. Greater student representation within professional bodies, however, was viewed as a less onerous way to allow students to have their voices and concerns be heard.

Theme 4: Increased Student Funding

Another theme arising from the working group discussion was what students perceived as a lack of funding and as biased funding opportunities within programs. Participants spoke of limited opportunities for funding, especially in

course-based programs, where students do not receive the same level of funding as do students in thesis-based programs. As a result, participants believed that funding is biased toward students in research-based programs and biased against more “practice-based” programs. Participants also pointed out that, due to policies set out by the Tri-Agency regarding who is eligible for funding, international students are not able to apply for the Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master’s program (CGS-M) grants and for other forms of external funding, making it difficult for them to continue on to doctoral studies. It should be noted that decisions about scholarships and funding eligibility are made at institutional and government levels and do not represent a bias within counselling psychology programs.

Theme 5: Clarity and Consistency in Program Requirements and Professional Credentialing

For the participants in this working group, there was an expressed need for reduced ambiguity in program and university requirements. One area of particular concern was a lack of information and guidance on how counselling programs met the credentialing criteria of regulatory bodies for psychologists as students prepared for the transition into practice. Inconsistency within and between professional colleges across Canada was a major concern as participants expressed how useful it would be if colleges were more accessible to them as students. They spoke of wanting to avoid the stress of wondering whether their credentials would be accepted, particularly given that it seemed to the students that the interpretation of the criteria would change from one reviewer to the next. More consistency in the process was a definite desire of the group. Participants talked about the misinformation and inconsistent or confusing interpretations of requirements that were sometimes encountered. It seemed to them that regulatory colleges, in their mandate to provide gatekeeping for the profession, sometimes left students unclear about the colleges’ requirements and whether students had met them. In summary, participants felt stressed that there was a lack of a clearly defined route into the profession and that the expectations of the various colleges are not made clear to students. On the positive side, participants recognized that improvements in the process were being made. In particular, they pointed to the College of Alberta Psychologists, which was in the process of providing programmatic pre-approval to some of the clinical and counselling psychology programs in Alberta. This change was expected to reduce ambiguity for students in and graduates of those programs. Another possible development suggested by the working group was having a student representative involved with regulatory colleges so that student voices could be heard.

Also related to this theme was participants’ identification of inequalities between programs that make it difficult for students to transfer between institutions or to be accepted into thesis-based programs. Participants described how,

due to the variations in credits and specific requirements of each program, it is difficult for graduate students to pursue a doctorate at a different institution from their master's program, which leaves some students feeling stuck. The possibility of taking extra years and transferring credits was seen as discouraging and as an obstacle to going elsewhere. Participants felt that programs could communicate admittance expectations and requirements regarding doctoral degrees more clearly. For example, some master's programs are course-heavy, and students coming from another institution may be required to complete a number of additional courses in order to gain entrance. A further point of discussion was how requirements for a psychology doctorate (Psy.D.) are also quite institution-specific, making it difficult for students to determine whether they are eligible for admission and what they need in order to apply.

The limited number of spaces available in doctoral programs was also cited as a barrier to students achieving their goals in the field of counselling psychology. Even if students apply for a thesis-route program as a master's student, most institutions accept only a small number of research students, and the others are left having to take a course-based program if they want to start their program immediately. This approach creates subsequent barriers for course-based students seeking admittance to Ph.D. programs. For such students, the only option may be to pursue online Ph.D. programs. Most of the available online doctoral programs are offered through the United States and can be prohibitively expensive. Finally, some universities and provincial regulatory colleges do not accept online degrees toward admittance or licensing.

In the ensuing discussion of how programs could help students overcome these obstacles, participants pointed to the need for mentorship opportunities within their programs. Participants highlighted how mentorship could provide students with support, information, and other resources for navigating through the many challenges encountered during their training. Participants believed that mentors, by sharing their experiences, could provide students with a deeper understanding of how to navigate specific programs successfully.

Discussion

The 2nd day of discussion started with a review of the established themes followed by the development of suggestions, which were essentially a "wish list" of seven items (see Table 1) stemming from the concerns expressed in the prior working group discussion. These suggestions are discussed here in the context of four of the five themes (student funding was not discussed at length during the second session) and what the research literature had to add to our understanding of the topic. Specific wish list items relate to one or more of these themes.

Table 1
Wish List Items and Participant Examples

Wish list item	Participant example
Need for revisions to the practicum experience	Need for paid practicum opportunities Longer period of time available to complete practica More flexibility around timing of practica
Better preparation of students entering the workforce	Ensuring that the curriculum is specific to the needs of the workforce More focus on the student process of helping others and on vicarious trauma Adding requirements to the practicum experience (e.g., booking clients, collecting fees, how to manage a business)
Flexibility in relation to courses	Increased opportunity to take courses at different times of the year
Sharing of institutional knowledge	Yearning for greater understanding of specific nuances within particular programs
Consistency in doctoral program entrance requirements	Installation of a student representative on admissions committees
Fostering bridges between alumni, current students, and recent graduates of programs	Online system for connecting current students to alumni
Better preparation for the registration process	Inform students in situations where they may need to take additional courses that are not a part of their current program of study

The Importance of Practicum Sites

One of the wish list suggestions was related to the need for revisions to the practicum experience. Participants spoke at length about the need for paid practicum opportunities to offset the living expenses incurred during a lengthy degree program. They also expressed how they wanted to have a longer period of time available to complete practica and/or more flexibility around the timing of their practica (e.g., start dates other than September). The importance of practica and of internships is articulated clearly in the literature. The role of the practicum in student development is integral to both preparation for work and the forming of a professional identity (Haverkamp et al., 2011). As students progress from classes to practica, their new professional identity is put “to the test” in real work situations (Handelsman et al., 2005, p. 63). In the field of counselling psychology, the supervision of counselling students is often provided by doctoral students in clinical and counselling psychology, and the quality of supervision provided in the practicum has a significant impact on student development and preparation

for independent practice. Wheeler and Richards (2007), in a systematic review of the literature on supervision of counsellors, found that supervision in practicum or internship settings enhanced self-awareness, improved counselling skills, increased counsellor self-efficacy, and enhanced the development of a theoretical orientation. In Canada, there is an increasing recognition of the need to provide formal training in supervision as part of doctoral coursework and predoctoral internships to prepare supervisors better, but the way that this need is addressed varies significantly from program to program (Harris et al., 2018). Of additional concern is the barrier that the small number of existing Canadian counselling psychology internship sites, in particular those that include the supervision of master's level counselling students, has on the future development of the field (Haverkamp et al., 2011).

Better Preparation for Professional Practice

As part of the theme on preparing students better for the realities of professional practice, the working group identified the need for counselling programs to emphasize self-care more formally and intentionally. Indeed, in the context of professional psychology more generally, Maranzan et al. (2018) suggest that self-care (as well as training in self-care) is an ethical imperative embodied in the principles and standards of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). Conceptualized as attitudes and practices that promote emotional, mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being (Maranzan et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2003), self-care not only is an aspect of professional competency but also is essential for promoting students' mental health and wellness amid the many stressors associated with graduate school. Graduate students must contend typically with academic pressures, financial issues, career-related concerns (e.g., obtaining an internship or finding a job after graduation), and interpersonal demands (e.g., juggling academic workload with family demands as well as meeting the expectations of academic supervisors) (Lawson & Myers, 2011; Maranzan et al., 2018). For counselling students, the emotion-laden work of conducting therapy with clients may take an additional toll (Lawson & Myers, 2011; Smith et al., 2007).

The emphasis on self-care is important for students, not only to prepare them for professional practice but also to help them maintain good mental health and wellness while completing their graduate degrees. One student participant pointed out that, at times, the requirements and expectations of programs are in direct conflict with this important aspect of our profession. Students may feel guilt, shame, and failure in not living up to the standard idea of self-care expected of graduate students. Participants believed that there needs to be a shift in the conversation about how students are taking care of themselves, how programs can work with what is happening, and how students can create "micro moments" of self-care. Working group participants, as part of their wish list, asked for more

of a focus on students in relation to the process of helping others and for greater understanding of vicarious trauma. Changing the conversation about self-care would also involve addressing images of self-care that are exclusionary and make people feel as though they are not taking care of themselves correctly; in the participants' minds, self-care needs to be viewed more flexibly.

In the specific context of counselling psychology programs in Canada, the literature on self-care is sparse. Most studies on master's-level training have examined programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the United States (see Lindo et al., 2015; Meany-Walen et al., 2016). At the doctoral level, a limited number of studies focuses on Canadian programs (Maranzan et al., 2018; Peluso et al., 2011). However, the few published studies that exist typically include counselling psychology under the larger umbrella of professional psychology. Thus, the particularities of self-care among Canadian counselling programs and students are unclear. Nonetheless, the extant literature was valuable in stimulating our thinking about self-care as a major student advocacy issue.

The importance of placing greater emphasis on self-care is evident in light of studies on the mental health challenges facing many graduate students in professional psychology. Overall, findings in this area are mixed. Peluso et al. (2011) examined rates and correlates of depression in master's and doctoral students enrolled in Canadian professional psychology programs. Among the 20 counselling psychology students included in the larger sample of 292 participants, 25% showed clinically relevant symptoms of depression as measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (although only one student scored above the cut-off for severe depression). The prevalence of depressive symptoms was similar to the rates found in other psychology programs and is approximately double the rate in the general population (Peluso et al., 2011). In contrast, some studies suggest that students in master's and doctoral programs in counselling have higher levels of wellness and lower levels of mental health concerns compared to the general population (Myers et al., 2003; Roach & Young, 2007; Smith et al., 2007). More research is needed to tease out these contradictory findings.

Regardless of where counselling students fall on the mental health continuum, we agree with other researchers who have argued that it behooves counsellor programs to promote self-care and wellness practices actively as an integral part of training and preparation for professional practice (Roach & Young, 2007; Wolf et al., 2012). Ideally, students would graduate from their programs with stronger competency in self-care and wellness practices than at the start of their training (Roach & Young, 2007; Smith et al., 2007). In our view, self-care should be emphasized not only for its role in buffering students from the stresses of graduate school but also as an essential component of counsellors' "career-sustaining behaviours" (Lawson & Myers, 2011, p. 163). In addition to promoting positive well-being, such behaviours may help prevent burnout, compassion fatigue,

vicarious trauma, and other risks associated with the professional practice of psychology (Maranzan et al., 2018; Meany-Walen et al., 2016). Because these issues may seriously impair the quality of services provided to clients, the ethical imperative of consistent training and practice in self-care is obvious (Lawson & Myers, 2011; Maranzan et al., 2018).

We recognize the self-care imperative as the responsibility both of the individual student and of counselling programs. From the standpoint of student advocacy, though, our focus is on how programs may help develop student self-care knowledge and practices. Currently, empirical evidence is lacking on how well Canadian counselling programs are performing in this area. However, in the United States and in the wider scope of professional psychology in Canada, it has been suggested that programs have much room for improvement. As Christopher et al. (2006) have suggested, "Although mainstream, accredited counseling training programs often emphasize the need for self-care strategies to prevent burnout, the demands of the curricula and clinical training often leave little room for directly teaching these strategies" (p. 496). Thus the rhetoric of self-care needs to be matched by actions on the part of training programs to create learning opportunities and spaces in which self-care can occur (Christopher et al., 2006, p. 496). Similarly, Maranzan et al. (2018) argue that Canadian professional programs "need to do more than pay lip service to the importance of self-care; rather, self-care needs to be systematically incorporated into training and opportunities given for practice" (p. 364). Given counselling psychology's traditional emphasis on wellness, prevention, and career (Bedi et al., 2016), we regard the discipline as being particularly well-poised to take leadership in this area. To begin with, counselling programs need to ensure that self-care is systematically infused throughout the curriculum, rather than being introduced solely at the start of training (Maranzan et al., 2018; Meany-Walen et al., 2016; Wolf et al., 2012). Discussion and the teaching of strategies for strengthening wellness and mental health should begin at program orientation and be integrated throughout coursework, practica and internships, clinical supervision, and research supervision. For instance, Nelson et al. (2018) detail how activities for developing self-compassion (an empirically validated approach in the self-care toolbox; see Germer & Neff, 2013) could easily be incorporated into counselling practica, theory courses, and ethics training. Some programs might opt to provide workshops or entire courses devoted to self-care. As an example, Christopher et al. (2006) describe a full-semester elective course in counselling entitled "Mind/Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care," where, in addition to in-class training, students were required to choose and to practise a mindfulness-based activity (e.g., yoga, body scan, or tai chi) outside of class. Additionally, several authors recommend that students be guided and encouraged to do a regular self-assessment of wellness and self-care (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Martin et al., 2013; Wolf et al., 2012), perhaps as part of a formalized personal wellness plan (Wolf et al., 2012). Importantly, any

self-care initiative on the part of counselling programs should allow for choice and flexibility, as self-care is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour (Colman et al., 2016). Furthermore, we recommend that self-care be embedded within an overall culture that values and supports wellness (Colman et al., 2016; Roach & Young, 2007), where faculty members and clinical supervisors serve as positive role models who “walk the self-care talk” (Maranzan et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2003). Finally, the need for self-care exists in the context of external factors such as problems with funding, heavy workloads, and a lack of affordable counselling resources that students could access as part of their wellness plan. Insofar as possible, efforts to alleviate such pressures should occur alongside a self-care agenda.

The theme of tuition and student funding was not discussed at length after the first session and did not appear in the wish list items. There is, however, a relationship between funding and self-care, and we address this issue here briefly. The body of research literature that considers the financial challenges facing students in Canadian graduate counselling programs is limited at best. In their snapshot of Canada’s psychology graduates using the 2015 Psychology Graduates Survey conducted by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), Votta-Bleeker et al. (2016) pointed to an indicated desire for increased mentorship and training as well as to concerns about student debt. The survey looked at graduate education funding sources and debt levels, respondents’ current employment status and satisfaction with the same, and areas of potential mismatch between respondents’ training and their current position. Most importantly, the survey highlighted the continuing challenge of student debt for psychology graduates, drawing attention to the fact that the average debt accumulated by master’s students is approximately \$21,000 and approximately \$28,000 for doctoral students. Votta-Bleeker et al. cite the “significant correlation between average debt level and end year of graduate studies” (p. 178) as a factor that makes this a potential area for advocacy by students and by psychological associations moving forward. Reducing debt load can make for a more manageable and less stressful transition into the workforce.

Our group identified a number of other areas of concern related to their programs’ requirements and curriculum and how well these prepared them for professional practice. One of the seven wish list suggestions was for better preparation of students entering the workforce by ensuring that a curriculum is specific to the needs of the workforce. Participants believed that much of the curriculum is written through an academic lens, without enough emphasis placed on the practical aspects of psychology for those students wanting to focus primarily on being clinicians. One suggested method for enhancing program practicality involved adding requirements to the practicum experience. Participants noted that there already appears to be a range of experiences for students within practica and that this range could be expanded to include coverage of case management from beginning to end (e.g., booking clients, collecting fees, and how to run a business).

In relation to the curriculum and program structure, another wish list suggestion was for more flexibility in relation to courses. Students talked about wanting increased opportunities to take courses at different times of the year in order to lessen their course load. As with the practicum, participants expressed a desire for more flexibility in terms of when courses are offered (e.g., spring/summer).

Finally, participants expressed the desire for more sharing of institutional knowledge. This final suggestion was in response to the perception that not everyone within an institution may know and understand the specific nuances of a particular program. The question was raised about what happens when this institutional knowledge is lost, which is particularly concerning for students in a learning environment that is already somewhat ambiguous. It would be desirable that this knowledge be shared for the benefit of future students in the program. In keeping with this concern, another of the seven wish list items was the desire for more consistency with regard to the requirements for being admitted into doctoral programs. Each of Canada's five CPA-accredited doctoral programs has a unique set of entrance requirements, including prerequisite courses for entry and qualifications for master's level practicum supervisors. These differences make preparation for all five programs in a single master's degree program an impossible task. Beyond the challenge of the differing entrance requirements among the current CPA-accredited doctoral programs, participants wished for clearer communication regarding doctoral program entrance requirements. Additionally, participants recommended that a student representative be installed on admissions committees, similar to the position commonly found on admission committees for medical schools, with the aim of having multiple perspectives involved in the admissions process. Student representatives in this role could serve as a point of contact for prospective students, address requirements of the admissions process, speak to specifics of the program, and begin the process of forming an informal mentorship relationship.

Partnerships Between Programs and Regulatory Bodies

While partnerships exist between programs and their provincial regulatory colleges and governments, the nature of these relationships varies by province, and there is little uniformity in terms of how programs relate to each other and to federal jurisdictions such as the Canadian Psychological Association and the Government of Canada. Complicating these partner relationships further is the fact that variations exist across the country in terms of program offerings and expectations (Bedi, 2016). Canadian authors in this area have recognized the difficulties that exist in instilling professional identity as a psychologist when one specializes in the area of counselling psychology. These difficulties may be particularly troublesome with counselling psychology programs because so many result in a terminal master's degree in counselling psychology, a credential that does not uniformly allow these students to practise as psychologists across Canada

(Haverkamp et al., 2011). For example, in the province of Alberta, instructors who teach practicum courses that prepare students for the practice of psychology must be registered psychologists. Although this is a policy specific to Alberta, it is an example of an area where provincial licensure bodies have some influence over counselling psychology programs.

One of the wish list suggestions discussed by the working group involved the fostering of bridges between alumni, current students, and recent graduates. The group suggested an online system that could be implemented for connecting current students to alumni. The group also talked about the value of fostering mentorship relationships between current graduate students. For example, a senior student could be paired with a junior student. Participating in this sort of mentorship arrangement may make it more likely for these students to participate in a mentorship program when they become alumni and are interested in building a culture of mentorship.

Respondents to the 2015 Psychology Graduates Survey conducted by the CPA expressed their desire for mentorship, and alumni represent an attractive partnership option. Graduate students related their desire for mentorship to their need for clear and reliable support regarding their program as well as for guidance on how their training prepared them for their future career (Votta-Bleeker et al., 2016). Votta-Bleeker et al. (2016) also acknowledged that the guidance of a mentor could be taken on as part of a partnership between the institution and the regulatory college, to help graduates recognize their skills as transferable and applicable to a variety of domains.

Student Experiences of the Transition to Professional Practice

Despite the very real concerns of graduate student participants in our working group, the literature exploring the experiences of graduate students in psychology as they transition into the workforce is very limited. Participants talked of ongoing struggles with aligning their program course requirements with provincial authorities, along with apprehension about the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP), the acceptability of practicum and internship criteria, and even program acceptability. Changes in the profession, including shifts in employment sites, an increasing number of allied professions (e.g., counselling psychology, counselling therapy, and social work), and a proliferation of new degree options (e.g., the Psy.D. and online options) have increased the amount of ambiguity in determining whether a graduating student meets criteria for the profession.

Our group included in its wish list the hope that programs might get involved in better preparing students for the registration process. The group noted that some terminal degrees in Canada do not lead to registration without students having to complete additional coursework outside of their degree programs. Participants believed that better screening at the master's level regarding the

requirements for registration might circumvent the need to take additional courses. They suggested that programs build such screening into the admissions process, for example, by informing students from the start about the areas in which they may need to take additional courses that are not part of the current program of study. This situation may be somewhat rectified with the proposed movement in Alberta to focus on pre-approving programs rather than individuals. Participants also requested the opportunity for advisement prior to applying to the regulatory colleges and consistency with regard to course numbering across programs.

Psychology, as with other health care professions, is moving toward a competency-based model of education, training, and practice (Rodolfa et al., 2013). The process of aligning criteria with professional standards, given the shifts in the profession and the relative autonomy of academic programs, is a difficult one. The potential for discrepancies between students' attained experience and credentials on the one hand and the criteria used to evaluate them by regulatory colleges on the other hand is substantial. These potential discrepancies may contribute to the anxiety experienced by many graduates as they proceed through their education toward their chosen career. It is worth noting that this process and the ambiguity inherent in the system are particularly difficult for immigrant professionals (Guo, 2009).

Future Directions and Action Items: Summary of Main Themes and Priorities

The discussion time during the second working group session, which focused on future directions, was guided by two broad questions: (1) What might moving forward with advocacy look like? (2) What might help students become better prepared to enter doctoral studies? The members of our working group felt that the answer to the first question involved fostering partnerships and collaborations. For example, the group saw value in institutions creating pathways to Ph.D.s, partnering with licensing bodies, and developing collaborations with community members for the purpose of practicum, personal counselling, and mentorship opportunities for students. It was suggested that moving forward with advocacy should involve creating a space for representation by student and faculty leadership in the various colleges, associations, and institutions that impact the practice of counselling psychology. This direction emphasizes the need for more resources and time dedicated to supporting students and faculty members who choose to advocate in this way. Additional roles in student leadership are required to create links between students, faculty, and other partners. An example might be a student liaison between the provincial college and the university, program student representatives, and even a student practicum liaison.

The second question generated two suggestions. The first suggestion, better funding for both doctoral and master's students, is a response to the fact that combining full-time studies and engaging in paid work in order to afford graduate studies is often not feasible over the long term. The second suggestion, increased program flexibility, included initiatives such as accommodating students with children and better recognizing the challenges of mobility and the fact that programs may be accessible to some but not to others (e.g., those who have families or who need to remain in a certain city). Finally, the group suggested the need for more flexibility in terms of how students might meet program expectations.

The group consolidated the discussion themes and wish list items further into five priorities for student advocacy in the future. Priorities for future directions were presented by the facilitators on the final day of the conference. It is important to note that there is some overlap between the five priority areas. The first priority was facilitating the practicum process. Suggested actions included promoting the value that students add to their practicum sites, advocating for sites to become more open to taking on a practicum student, and connecting with career development centres to assist in the task of joining students to people doing similar work. For the participants in the working group, the importance of buy-in from the community was integral to students' experiences of adding value to their practicum sites.

The second priority was the fostering of partnerships between students and professionals, between students and faculty members, and between faculties and professional associations. Practical suggestions for action included providing opportunities and resources for student representatives. This would involve creating a specific role and providing direction and resources for students within this role, such as a guide to contacting community partners. Increased structure around the role of a student representative would also likely make it a more attractive position for students to consider. Additional action items included creating a community of practice that connects student representatives in similar roles across universities and that enables them to share information with other student representatives, as well as discussing challenges and successes within their respective roles. Finally, partnerships with the community could be facilitated by identifying people who are already doing the work of a coordinator or of a director of training and finding common ground regarding work that is already being done.

The third priority was increased funding for students. Suggested action items directed at advocating for students in this area included the involvement of students in civic and political engagement. This action could involve advocating for more funding at the governmental level, targeting voters, and encouraging students to write letters to their MPs using a template letter provided by graduate student associations, given that these associations can be quite powerful in advocacy and their presence may simply ensure that graduate students are part of the

conversation about funding. Students in our working group expressed the desire for governments and funding agencies to recognize the stress created by graduate students' current level of funding/debt and how their functioning is impacted. The literature reiterates this concern, citing the cost of mental health services and limited monetary resources as two of the leading reasons that students may not access wellness strategies to help cope with the stress experienced in graduate school (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

A fourth priority is the preparation of students for professional practice. An action item related to this priority is a focus on preparation for professional practice being built directly into counselling psychology programs. This may include focused training and increased applicability to real-world situations implemented into the curriculum. Further, given how graduate students value their practicum experiences highly (Bogo, 2006; Korthagen, 2010), building the preparation for professional practice into supervision plans could contribute to student learning further.

The final priority was the reduction of ambiguity in the process of gaining admission into graduate programs and transitioning into professional practice. The working group specified the need for increased clarity and communication of program requirements and college requirements, as these tend to be different and often ambiguous across provinces. This priority can be addressed with actions that include informal mentorship practices such as senior graduate students sharing knowledge pertaining to the academic credential review process with more junior students as well as the provision of publicly available information that is accessible and tangible (e.g., through handbooks or checklists that identify clearly the courses needed for registration).

Conclusion

This article reports on the discussions that occurred in the 2018 CCPC working group focused on student advocacy. The group focused on the concerns, needs, and experiences of students in relation to their graduate programs in counselling psychology, and through the group's discussions, a list of suggestions and action items was generated. In part, what appears to contribute to the challenges facing students are the considerable differences and inconsistencies both within and between programs. At the same time, as Bedi (2016) points out, it is the differences between programs that contribute to the diverse student training experiences that exist in counselling psychology across the country. Seen in a positive light, differences identified as problematic for students can also be viewed as contributing to a rich and diverse experience that strengthens the practice of counselling psychology. Moving ahead, counselling psychology programs in Canada are challenged with balancing their diversity with the need to provide more consistent training, guidance, and support to graduate students.

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About the Authors

Jeff Landine is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education (Counselling) at the University of New Brunswick. His primary research interests include the development of identity and self-concepts, career development, and employability.

K. Jessica Van Vliet is an associate professor of counselling psychology at the University of Alberta. Her primary research interests are in compassion, self-compassion, and mindfulness, both in everyday lived experience and in counselling.

Chelsea Hobbs is a doctoral student in counselling psychology at the University of Alberta. Her primary research interests include grief and loss, maternal mental health, and hope.

Alysha Chan Kent is a Ph.D. student in counselling psychology at the University of Calgary. Her scholarly interests focus on Chinese Canadian studies, identity development, psychosocial transitions, and qualitative methodologies.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jeff Landine, Faculty of Education (Counselling), University of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 4400, Fredericton, NB, E3B 5A3. Email: jlandine@unb.ca