

Research Statement

Advocacy is a fundamental part of the counseling profession. Counselors are guided by numerous ethical codes, standards, and competencies and are expected to engage in advocacy efforts that promote the wellbeing of the clients they serve. The American Counseling Association has adopted Advocacy Competencies (2020) that guide practitioners in serving clients through six domains. Additionally, CACREP Standards (2016) require that programs instill a strong advocate identity in master's students in order to prepare them for their future work as counselors and highlight advocacy in doctoral education as an essential component to the development of counselor educators. Over the last 20 years, substantial work has been added to the field regarding social justice and advocacy within the counseling profession, however there is scarcity in research that specifically explores advocacy as an area of competence. Further, research is lacking in the exploration of advocacy identity development (i.e., how counselors and counselors-in-training develop their own perceptions and advocacy actions over time). Therefore, my research in this area is aimed at filling these needs.

The underlying questions guiding my research on advocacy competencies and advocacy identity development include: (1) do counselors and counselors-in-training feel competent in their advocacy responsibilities? (2) does advocate identity change over time and, if so, how? (3) does experience predict advocacy competence? (4) how do counselor education programs facilitate advocate identity development? To explore these questions further, I have begun exploring the concept of advocate identity through both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to ensure I capture the most accurate representation of counselor and counselor-in-training knowledge, experience, and identities related to advocacy work.

My current research has primarily focused on answering questions 1, 2, and 3. Through a recent survey questionnaire, I asked participants to rate their advocacy competencies and professional identity through the use of two existing tools, the Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment (ACSA) Survey© (Ratts & Ford, 2010) and the Professional Identity Scale in Counseling (PISC) (Woo et al., 2018). I also requested that participants respond to open-ended questions that explored educational or professional development experiences that have positively impacted their advocate identity as well as barriers or limitations that have impacted their advocate identity development. Results from this study are currently in development and will be submitted for publication in early 2024. Preliminary results from this study were presented at the 2023 ACES Conference in Denver, CO.

In future studies, I plan to further explore questions regarding the effectiveness of teaching practices within counselor education including: (1) Do students feel prepared to advocate for their clients? (2) What resources are programs utilizing to teach advocacy? (3) How do student intersecting identities play a role in the comprehension and implementation of advocacy competencies? Additionally, I plan to investigate how advocacy competency and engagement occurs across space and time. For example, do counselors' perceptions of their role as advocates differ based on their institution of employment (e.g., school, private practice, clinical mental health session) and/or location (e.g., rural, suburban, urban)?

There is a great need for further exploration into advocacy and advocate identity development within our field. Ultimately, I hope to add vital research to the field that informs teaching and practice. Through further investigation of advocacy competencies and advocate identity, counselor educators will have a better understanding of what gaps exist in their current

instruction on the importance of advocacy in the field. Finally, practitioners will be able to explore their own competencies to better understand their role as they advocate for their clients.