

While research conducted by counselors and counselor educators has increased in the past several decades (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014), even with this progress there continues to be an ongoing need to produce more rigorous research within the counseling discipline (Wester, Borders, Boul, & Horton, 2013). Conducting quality research takes time, resources, and financial support, often requiring researchers to pursue external funding. In the authors' combined 30 years of grant writing at the university level, they have observed anecdotally that many counselor educators want to pursue grants. However, these counselor educators often feel overwhelmed and/or under-supported with initiating the process due to a lack of experience in and understanding of pursuing grant funding.

At the same time, there is a call for expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling, as many evidence-based practices are dictated to counselors by other helping professions (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011). If the profession is to move forward in establishing a research identity and building knowledge that is grounded in counselor identity, there is a need to move beyond anecdotal data regarding grant-writing training, needs, and successes of counselor education faculty. Although small pilot studies with limited funds can be an initial starting point for clinical research, research that qualifies as evidence based typically requires external resources to complete.

Leaders within the counseling discipline have advocated for improving the knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward research methodology (Peterson, Hall, & Buser, 2016; Wester & Borders, 2014; Wester et al., 2013). Many have suggested ways to engage counseling students in enhancing their research identities, including innovative pedagogical approaches (Huber & Savage, 2009; Rehfuss & Meyer, 2012; Nolte, Bruce, & Becker, 2015), yet there are scant articles in the counseling literature (Delaney, 2016; Villalba & Young, 2012) to guide the profession on

grant writing for external funding. As it is often critical to pursue grant funding to conduct research (Serrano Velarde, 2018), and little is known regarding counselor educators' grant-writing practices, the research questions guiding this study include: (1) do counselors and/or counselor educators pursue external funding, (2) what perceptions counselors and counselor educators have toward pursuing external funding, and (3) what resources do counselors and counselor educators need in order to pursue external funding?

### **Counselors and External Funding**

The need for research in the counseling profession is paramount in order to continue forward momentum and establish a strong empirical base within the discipline. Ray et al. (2011) analyzed over 4,000 articles published in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals and discovered that only 31% of published articles were research based. The remaining articles were on topics involving practical application and theory, with only 6% of the articles reviewed focusing on counseling interventions. A review of the counseling literature reveals that there is a need to enhance master's-level counselors-in-training experiences and exposure to research in order to promote research identity (Nolte et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2016; Rehfuss & Meyer, 2012). Furthermore, much of the empirical evidence informing counselors today is based upon research conducted by experts in other disciplines such as psychology and social work (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Mellin et al., 2011). Leaders within the counseling discipline state that if we, as counselors, are going to promote our unique perspectives on conceptualizing and treating clients, we must enhance and develop counselor research identity through education and research opportunities (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Kaplan et al., 2014).

Counselor education faculty are producing and publishing research in peer-reviewed journals, as it is customarily required for tenure and promotion. Faculty also juggle multiple

commitments including teaching, university committees, department responsibilities, advising, mentoring students, and presenting at conferences (Davis, Levitt, McGlothlin, & Hill, 2006). Conducting research takes time, commitment, and monetary resources. To produce quality research, an investigator often needs financial support in order to have devoted time (such as summer salary or course release); provide incentives to participants; purchase equipment, assessments, transcription services, and software; and/or pay graduate assistants. Grant-writing practice is well documented in the natural sciences (Serrano Velarde, 2018), yet there is little in the counseling literature that explores the grant-writing experience in the counseling discipline.

It is unclear from the literature 1) if counselors and/or counselor educators are pursuing external funding; 2) what perceptions counselors and counselor educators have toward pursuing external funding and 3) what resources counselors and counselor educators might need in order to pursue external funding. Therefore, the aim of this pilot study is to investigate these three questions and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of counselor educators in regard to awareness of, training in, and securing of internal and external funding for research purposes.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

This cross-sectional study was an online survey of faculty from Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) programs in the United States. CACREP faculty were recruited through an e-mail solicitation to participate in an anonymous online survey via Qualtrics survey software, with a lottery incentive of a \$50 Amazon gift card for 10 participants. Data for this study came from a sample of counselor education faculty from 859 CACREP-accredited programs in the United States. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, we searched the websites for all CACREP-accredited programs and constructed a

list of 1,620 faculty members. This is not a universal sample, as 34 institutions did not post faculty e-mail information. Of the 1,620 e-mails sent, 1,542 were valid. Seven faculty responded that although listed as faculty in counselor education web pages, they were faculty in other programs that shared a department with counselor education. These cases were deleted. As this may be true at other institutions as well, the sample pool is likely smaller than the proposed 1,542. Two follow-up e-mails were sent to non-completers only, overall allowing faculty four weeks to complete the survey.

### **Measures and Variables**

In addition to asking basic demographic questions including gender, race, and educational background, the survey explored areas of needed support to promote grant writing among faculty with pre-identified areas of support listed. This closed-ended list was developed through both a review of the literature and through experience with decades of supporting faculty in grant writing development, respondents could select all that applied. Additional open-ended questions allowed respondents to report previous grant-writing experience and areas of previous and existing funding awards (federal, state, foundation, corporate, and institutional), including sources and total amounts within each source. No established measures were used in the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

Frequency distributions were calculated to assess the prevalence of grant-writing engagement and success among faculty. An additional distribution was conducted to assess areas of needed support that would promote such future engagement. To assess possible differences predicting faculty engagement and success in grant writing, *t* tests were used to determine whether there was a difference in quantity of funding received and tenure status (1 = tenured, 2 = nontenured).

## **Results**

### **Sample Description**

A final sample of 180 faculty completed the survey (11% percent response rate). Five respondents identified as staff, and one identified as an administrator only; these six cases were removed from the data set. Seven e-mails were received from nonrespondents indicating that although they were listed as counselor education faculty on their department website, they were actually faculty in other departments that had been blended operationally with counselor education departments; they did not complete the survey. Within this final sample of 167 respondents, 137 identified as faculty (82%) and 30 identified as serving a dual role of both faculty and staff (18%). The respondents were primarily tenure-track (81.3%), nontenured (57%), female (67.9%), and Caucasian (74.7%). Although respondents represented CACREP- accredited programs throughout the United States, over 40% of respondents were from programs in the southern region. There is a probable nonresponse bias with this survey administration, as some nonrespondents were also likely staff, administrators, or faculty in other programs who share a department, in which case the actual response rate is likely higher than the reported 11%. The survey was also about the specific behavior of grant writing and may have been overlooked by faculty who do not engage in grant writing.

### **Faculty Need for External Funding**

Over 63% of faculty reported they currently need external funding to support their scholarship (72% pre-tenure and 51% tenured), with 37% reporting having existing funding, and 53.7% of faculty reporting they are extremely or somewhat likely to submit a grant proposal within the academic year. Of those who report needing funding, 63% reported the funding was needed to support the start of a new research project. When asked about barriers to applying for

grants, faculty cited the most common reasons as not needing/wanting a grant (35.6%) and not having enough time to prepare a grant (20%). Not knowing enough about how to write a grant, not feeling there was adequate institutional support with the grant-writing process, and feeling that the process itself was overwhelming were each reported by 11.1% of faculty. Table 1 shows counselor educators' knowledge of grant writing on a 10-point Likert scale (1 meaning no knowledge at all, and 10 meaning very knowledgeable) Sixty percent (60%) of faculty reporting their knowledge about grant writing as 6 or less on a 10-point Likert scale, with this rate higher for nontenured faculty (65.5%) than tenured faculty (56.1%). Almost 76% of faculty indicated that they know how to search for federal grants, while faculty were less familiar with how to search state (60%) and foundation (63.6%) grants, even though most faculty (73.6%) had a dedicated person to assist with grant preparation at their institution.

Table 1  
*Counselor Educators' Knowledge of the Grant-Writing Process*

Grant-writing knowledge*	Total (N = 150)		Pre-tenure (n = 55)		Tenured (n = 41)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
1–3	22.0	33	20.0	11	14.6	6
4–6	38.7	65	45.5	25	41.5	17
7–8	23.2	39	32.8	18	29.2	12
9–10	7.8	13	1.8	1	14.6	6

\*10-point Likert scale (1 meaning no knowledge at all, and 10 meaning very knowledgeable).

## Funding Sources

Of the four funding types examined, counselor education faculty were most successful in obtaining institutional funding, with pre-tenure faculty twice as likely to apply as tenured faculty (56.1% and 21.2%, respectively). Counselor education faculty also reported a 76% success rate with securing state funding, a rate higher than reported for foundation (67%) or federal funding (57%). The largest discrepancy between pre-tenure and tenure states was with federal funding, with tenured faculty writing an average of 4.9 federal proposals, while nontenured faculty wrote an average of two. This difference was statistically significant,  $t(30) = -3.51, p < .001$ , and the effect size was large,  $d = -1.2$ . Table 2 shows the history of grant-writing applications and successes.

Table 2

*History of Grant-Writing Application and Success*

Variables	Total ( $N = 174$ )		Pre-tenure ( $n = 57$ )		Tenured ( $n = 43$ )	
	%	$N$	%	$n$	%	$n$
Applied for institutional funding	42.3	71	56.1	32	21.2	22
Received institutional funding	40.3	61	45.6	26	44.2	19
Applied for foundation funding	39.9	67	40.3	23	48.8	21
Received foundation funding	26.8	45	21.1	12	34.8	15
Applied for state funding	32.1	54	31.5	18	41.9	18
Received state funding	24.4	41	19.2	11	32.6	14
Applied for federal funding	45.2	76	43.8	25	69.8	30
Received federal funding	24.7	43	15.8	9	41.9	18

Other than awareness of how to locate potential funding sources, nontenured faculty reported substantially higher needs in all categories related to needed support for grant writing. Table 3 shows faculty-identified areas of needed support for both tenured and nontenured faculty. Pre-tenure faculty reported greater need for support than tenured faculty in all categories, with the highest need for support with turning ideas into proposals (71.9%), a need reported by only 34.9% of tenured faculty.

Table 3

*Areas of Needed Grant-Writing Support*

Variables	Total ( <i>N</i> = 100)		Pre-tenure ( <i>n</i> = 67)		Tenured ( <i>n</i> = 33)	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Understanding requests for proposals	28	28	35.1	20	18.6	8
Resources for obtaining funding	36	36	38.6	22	32.6	14
How to communicate with funding source program officers	33	33	42.1	24	20.9	9
Turning ideas into proposals	56	56	71.9	41	34.9	15
How to create a budget	38	38	43.9	25	30.2	13
How to collaborate with partners	36	36	49.1	28	18.6	8

Respondents were also offered the opportunity to qualitatively identify areas of needed support in order to feel prepared to submit grant funding applications, with an overwhelming response identifying a single theme of time. This included not only time to be able to complete the grant-writing process, although this was noted in almost every qualitative response, but also release time to complete research that gets funded. One respondent noted: “The biggest issues for me is [*sic*] that my department and college refuse to provide course buyouts or reward individual investigators for the efforts or awards.” The largest discrepancy between tenured and nontenured faculty was institutional funding, with nontenured faculty relying more heavily on this source for



research support. Only one faculty member was currently funded by a county (tenured), two pre-tenure faculty had foundation funding, and no faculty had active corporate funding.

### **Discussion**

Results from this study indicate several perceived barriers that may inhibit or preclude counseling faculty from pursuing grant funding. For example, results indicate that pre-tenure faculty are more likely to apply for institutional funding, while tenured faculty are more likely to apply for federal funding. Since pre-tenure faculty are more likely to be at the beginning of their research agendas and need start-up or seed funding to launch their projects, internal funding is a logical first step to get started in grant writing. Often the requirements for institutional funding applications are less rigorous and the process less competitive than for other sources of funding, yet applications still require applicants to follow guidelines and meet deadlines, which is a good primer for future grant-writing pursuits. Such institutional funding options are typically small and commonly used to initiate pilot projects upon which to build more rigorous research proposals from other funding sources. Furthermore, institutional funding bodes well for future grant proposals, as it provides evidence that the researcher is already successful at securing grant funding and completing a research project. Most county, state, and federal funding sources require applicants to describe their capabilities and competencies to complete the research proposed in the application, a task best promoted through the disclosure of previous experience. Most importantly, the process of applying for institutional funding may build researcher confidence in their grant-writing abilities as well as result in preliminary data to support subsequent proposals.

Results also indicate that tenured faculty are more likely to apply for and receive federal funding, a logical result reflecting the complexity of federal applications. Often federal applications require applicants to demonstrate their qualifications, expertise and experience in

order to secure funding, with such experiences and qualifications more likely to exist with longer-serving faculty. Since federally funded projects are more likely to be multiyear and larger in scope, it is understandable that a tenured faculty member would have more time and be better equipped and experienced to handle the rigor of a larger project (Coley & Scheinberg, 2007). Additionally, larger-scale clinical research studies that serve to build knowledge may take a year or longer to produce usable data for publication, a luxury pre-tenure faculty may not have.

For those who want, and the few who need, to secure external funding, perceived barriers to securing funding identified in the present study can be addressed through institutional commitment to supporting faculty. Results indicate that pre-tenure faculty need support in many areas of proposal preparation and submission and in turning conceptualized ideas into formal proposals. Staff from the university research and grants office can be helpful in advising faculty members as they transform their research ideas into proposals and can advise on methods to pursue funding for all or part of their research. For example, a local foundation may help subsidize staffing needs for a project that collaborates with a community agency. Support can also be offered to clarify the nuances of allowable expenses, budget narrative, and crafting proposals that align with the funding agency's priorities.

Learning to collaborate with others to develop proposals is an understandable challenge for newer faculty members. Developing relationships takes time and often happens through connections based on past experiences. New faculty also commonly relocate geographically to secure their first positions, which may result in losing their existing relationships with community agencies and institutional colleagues, and cold-calling unknown community agencies and asking for partnerships in research is unlikely to yield success. Over time, new faculty cultivate both interdisciplinary and community relationships that may later serve as natural fits or even

inspirations for collaboration. A suggestion for new faculty includes partnering not only with the grants office but also with their institution's office of community-engaged learning, which likely has deep community connections that have a history of partnering with the institution. More seasoned faculty and university staff can also help newer faculty members by introducing them to potential collaborators and funding sources.

For new faculty who may not have experience with securing funding for projects, it is important that chairs and/or deans provide an overview of the services available within the university. Counselor education chairs can also take a leadership role by working to cultivate a climate where grant writing is both encouraged and supported. Such climate modification could include lunch-and-learns with seasoned faculty members, or surveying faculty for areas of scholarship interest and inviting the grant office staff to attend a faculty meeting to share information about the institutional supports available for grant identification and writing. In the interest of supporting counselor educators in grant writing, senior faculty may also consider providing their previous grant proposals in a depository for others to view as models. This would be particularly valuable if faculty also include the feedback they received from their funding sources, as this feedback details which areas of the proposal are strongest and which were perceived as having limitations. Such examples may serve to illuminate the otherwise unfamiliar path of preparing a grant proposal.

Recognizing that some programs operate within primarily teaching institutions, the ability to engage in grant writing is limited by higher teaching and advising loads. Institutional climates at teaching institutions also differ in the value of grants and research, therefore expecting Chairs to lead and mentor faculty grant writing development may be unrealistic. That may not preclude faculty from pursuing funding, however, especially to support programmatic grants.

Programmatic grants can provide funding that supports student tuition, fellowship opportunities, additional staff, travel funding and/or other monetary resources that support a project. Surveying institutional culture and monitoring one's own workload is always important before committing to a grant-funded project.

Varying degrees of experience are required when preparing proposals for different sources of external funding, with the most commonly sought after and easily obtained source for new faculty being institutional funding. Such funding is typically dedicated specifically for the purpose of supporting new faculty in their scholarship, and competition is much lower than for other sources of external funding. Briggs and Pehrsson (2008) studied research mentorship of nontenured counselor education faculty and revealed that institutional and federal funding are the two most commonly mentored external funding sources. As tenured faculty are more successful in securing funding, their seasoned competition for limited resources, such as internal grants, with new, pre-tenure faculty decreases the availability of such funds for those faculty most in need of initiating a new research agenda. To support pre-tenure faculty, institutions may add funding specifically for, or at least favoring, pre-tenure faculty in their review and determination.

The research required to meet the professional obligations to contribute to the establishment and implementation of best clinical practices can be expensive, and such funds are typically well beyond those allocated to counselor education departments from host institutions. This leads to requiring the financial support of external funding in order to fulfill this obligation, a source of increased stress on counselor education highlighted by the research of Villalba and Young (2012). Federal funding may appear to be a holy grail of funding on tenure and promotion applications, but in reality, it requires extensive time and effort in a highly competitive environment, with fewer dollars being released now than in previous years (Mervis, 2017). As

competition for federal funding continues to intensify, one option is for faculty to seek more local sources of funding (Elliott, 2016). Local sources of funding can include county, foundation, and corporate funding, each of which is less competitive than federal funding.

Despite the availability of funding, there appears to be limited secured county and state funding reported by both tenured and nontenured faculty and no corporate funding reported at all. Such county and state funding is often a generous source of opportunities for faculty willing to be more flexible with their research agenda. For example, a faculty member interested in addiction research could secure a contract with the state to develop a new curriculum for individuals who get a conviction for driving under the influence and are required by the state to attend education classes. The development of this curriculum would also be the source of program evaluation, affording the faculty member access to statewide programs and outcomes that would otherwise have been very difficult to secure. When working for a state college/university, faculty members may have even greater access to grants or contracts, as such funding often does not require the state/county agency to advertise a request for proposal (RFP) and review all applications. Instead, often the agency can simply choose to give funds to state- employed entities (e.g., state college/university faculty). This is another area where mentoring can be useful with senior faculty who have established relationships with state and county officials, to link new faculty with these potential sources of funding.

### **A Call to the Counseling Profession**

The ACA mission (2014) promotes the advancement of the counseling profession through research and the establishment of evidence-based practices. This is further elaborated through the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014), which states, “Counselors have a responsibility to the public to engage in counseling practices that are based on rigorous research methodologies” (p. 8). Patel,

Hagedorn, and Bai (2013) reveal that such evidence-based practices receive little attention in counselor education despite the *ACA Code of Ethics* requirement to do so.

As counselor educators, we have an obligation not only to teach evidence-based practices but to contribute to their development and establishment in order to advance the parity of the counseling field (Erford et al., 2017). Unless we train and support counselor education faculty in grant writing and research direction, we will have a self-perpetuating loop of new faculty who are also unprepared for this role. While Section 6, Item B.4.k, in the Doctoral Professional Identity CACREP standard (2016) indicates that “grant proposals and other sources of funding” (p. 40) be covered in doctoral curriculum, the results of Patel’s study (2013) indicate otherwise. A lack of attention to research competency by counselor education doctoral programs was noted by Barrio-Minton, Wachter Morris, and Yaites (2014), suggesting this may be a contributing factor to the limited counselor educator client-outcome research. Without counselor educator engagement in clinical research, the establishment of clinical best practices will be fulfilled by other disciplines, leaving counselors with limited interventions that are guided by the values and mission of the counseling profession. As a result, these interventions will not promote or enhance counselor identity, but rather dilute it.

Another barrier to grant writing among counseling faculty may be tenure expectations. A study of CACREP-accredited counselor education promotion expectations by Davis et al. (2006) revealed no significant difference in scholarship expectations for assistant, associate, or full professors. More importantly, the researchers found that the perceived publication expectancy ranged from one to three publications per promotion. Teaching was significantly more important in tenure consideration (Davis et al., 2006). If the promotion process does not rely heavily on the development of new knowledge through scholarship, there is only the intrinsic motivation of

faculty themselves to lead them to engage in grant writing to secure research funding. Perhaps the reason grant-writing and clinical research participation rates are so low is that such engagement is virtually unrelated to the promotion process.

A challenge identified by Davis et al. (2006) is that CACREP faculty responded to their survey with overwhelming support for embracing the Boyer model of scholarship, which redefined scholarship into four domains: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. This model, however, considers as scholarship the consumption of research to remain aware of current best practices to use in one's teaching. This brings us back to the challenge of using the clinical research from other professions to guide our own practice, which excludes our own counseling theories and perspectives. If we do not produce our own research, how do we promote the counseling profession as independent from others?

On a national level, the ACA and the affiliated divisions, regions, and branches can promote content knowledge to counselors and counselor educators via websites, conferences, webinars, and podcasts. A search within the 2018 ACA conference presentations produced no results discussing grant writing or external funding. On the ACA Learning home page, a search for "grant writing" and "external funding" produced only one learning activity of this author's live-streamed presentation at the 2017 ACA conference. A review of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) conference education sessions showed an uptick in commitment to promoting of grant-writing knowledge, as the 2015 ACES conference had two presentations on grant writing and the 2017 conference had seven. Providing more tools, resources, and access to information regarding grant funding and proposal development at the national level from ACA and ACES could be an effective way to educate counselors and counselor educators on ways to pursue and secure external funding. Perhaps these professional associations could consider

hosting mentoring hours with seasoned research faculty during conferences where counselors can discuss funding opportunities, review RFPs, and outline proposals.

Finally, CACREP may consider collecting data during on grant-funding practices, supports, outcomes, sources, and awards during annual report submissions. These data could help the discipline as a whole understand internal and external funding practices across CACREP institutions. Institutions that have little support could use these data to support advocacy initiatives within their own institutions. Furthermore, these data could be used to create a national database of those within the discipline conducting research. A searchable and accessible database could help create collaboration, partnership, and mentoring opportunities.

### **Limitations**

This study was exploratory in nature. The study explored self-reported grant-writing experience and success, including actual funding dollars. No data were collected from actual funders to verify self-reports. Therefore, the results do not necessarily provide an accurate portrayal of grant-writing engagement and successes. Furthermore, understanding of grant writing and external funding varies among faculty, this includes terminology and understanding of the process. This variability could have influenced responses. The perceptions gathered, however, do provide interesting insights for the work needed to further solidify a research identity within the counseling profession.

The response rate of 11% is below the accepted rate to allow for generalizability to the sample population of all CACREP counselor education faculty (e.g., Carlisle, Hays, Pribesh, & Wood, 2017; Neukrug, Peterson, Bonner, & Lomas, 2013). Counselor education faculty quickly become saturated with requests for online survey participation, with doctoral students frequently recruiting them for dissertation research subjects, potentially promoting response fatigue for



survey participation among faculty. There is also the potential for nonresponse bias, with respondents to this survey likely over representing people who are actively or were historically involved with grant writing. Social desirability bias may also play a role in the response rate, as some faculty may have been deterred from completing the survey if they do have grant-writing experience, either because they assumed they had nothing to contribute or because they feared their lack of engagement would negatively reflect on them. Furthermore, there was a low response to this survey from the NARACES region. The NARACES region being under-represented in the study may be reflective of a more limited engagement with grant writing. It is a goal of the authors of this manuscript to inspire those in our region to advocate for the support and mentoring they need to build their experience with grant writing in order to fund research and further our profession.

### **Future Research**

Controlling for social desirability and nonresponse bias is difficult with online surveys and is an impediment to understanding faculty engagement in research and establishing evidence-based practices. As the field of counselor education needs to understand the role its programs are playing in promoting required actions such as the development of a research identity, perhaps it is time to consider requiring the reporting of such activities in CACREP annual reports or when registering annually for ACES membership. The field is clearly in need of a more reliable and valid source of data to effectively understand research identity development and the advancement of the counseling profession through our own research and the establishment of evidence-based practices.

## **Conclusion**

CACREP Standard 2.F.8.a. reveals the requirement of establishing a research identity in advancing the counseling profession (CACREP, 2016). There is an underrepresentation of counselors and counselor educators in the development and publication of evidence-based practices that can serve to dilute counselor identity through the study of practices developed by other professions. Increased faculty mentoring and institutional support in the grant-seeking and writing processes could support faculty with engaging in empirical clinical research to develop and publish best practices in clinical research guided by the counselor identity. A modification of promotion requirements to value the development of clinical best practices could also further promote such faculty engagement. Finally, promoting an expansion of learning opportunities at the national level through workshops, webinars, and mentorship could propel the discipline to pursue external funding.

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