Community college counseling: present realities; perspectives for the future

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Community college counseling: Present realities; perspectives for the future

by

Linda M. Peterson

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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For the Major Program
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

“The role of community college counselors has been continuously challenged by a higher education system that has grown and changed over the decades” (Durodoyo, Harris, & Bolden, 2000, p. 455). Pascarella (1999) described community colleges as higher education’s fastest growing institutions, comprising one-fourth of all postsecondary institutions. Enrollment in the nation’s 1,200 community colleges grew from 4.5 million students in 1980 to 5.5 million in 1997, and it is projected that by 2006 enrollments may top 6 million students (Aslanian, 1997–1998; Boone, 1997).

Evelyn, in The Chronicle of Higher Education (2001), reported that United States community colleges saw increases in their student populations that year as high as 50 percent. This may be due, in part, to a recent downturn in the national economy that has brought higher levels of unemployment. Displaced workers, according to Evelyn (2001), often end up in community colleges, whose open door policy offers quick retraining programs and who are most prepared to serve the needs of returning adult students. Community colleges, by mission, are the most responsive of all higher education institutions to social, economic, and political changes (Haggan, 2000).

Community colleges serve a typically more diverse student population than their four-year counterparts. According to Levine and Cureton (1998), less than one-sixth of all college students today actually fit the “traditional student” profile. Ray and Altekruse (2000) reported that the student population today is changing in many ways including gender, ethnicity, academic preparedness, family background, and socioeconomic status. The mission of the community college is to provide higher education for all those who desire it. This
mission puts community colleges on the front lines for providing services to students with
great variations in motivation, ability, and background.

Although addressing changes in the college student population is a concern for all
higher education faculty and staff, community college counselors face the unique and
challenging job of assisting this diverse group of students with their academic and personal
success. Diversity comes in many forms, many of which can lead to a higher risk for student
failure. The diverse student population at America's community colleges include:

- Single parents
- Displaced workers
- First-generation students
- Students who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher
- Welfare recipients moving toward economic self-sufficiency
- ESL students. (Faces of the Future, 2000)

The problems students are bringing with them to college are increasingly complex and
difficult to deal with (Murphy & Archer, 1996). As one community college president put it,
"The need for counseling at the community college is a bottomless abyss" (Cvancara, 1997,
p. 9). Counselors agree students are more psychologically damaged and in need of services.
Community college counselors have consistently reported an increased frequency and
severity of issues presented by today's college students (Col, 1995; Geraghty, 1997; Dean &
Meadows, 1995; Gallagher, 1992; Corazzini, 1997; Bishop, 1995). Of the 274 Counseling
Center Directors surveyed in the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors, 85 percent
reported seeing an increase of students with severe psychological problems over the past five
years (Gallagher, 2001). Heitzmann and Nafziger (2001) reported it is possible that there has never been a greater need for effective counseling services for college students.

The rapid changes we are experiencing as a society are likely to increase the problems of today’s college students (Archer & Cooper, 1998). Stone and Archer (1990) predicted that these changes would also produce three major challenges for college counselors in the '90s; changing student demographics, greater need and demand for counseling services and increased competition for resources. As we reflect back on the 1990s and review the literature from that decade, it appears that Stone and Archer (1990) were accurate with their predictions.

Some believe the value of having counseling services in community colleges has not always been matched by providing counselors with the necessary resources, support, or recognition they deserve (Tillery, 1983). This lack of support may be evident by the fact that while the need for counseling appears to have increased in recent years, some community colleges are choosing to downsize, outsource or completely eliminate counseling services (Cvancara, 1997; Phillips, Halstead, & Carpenter, 1996; Gallagher, 1992). The discord regarding the necessity of counseling in community colleges is exemplified by what is taking place at City Colleges in Chicago. The Chancellor has decided to outsource counseling services and eliminate the jobs of all 19 counselors working in the district’s five colleges. Counselors were asked to demonstrate their worth and accused of not performing up to par or staying current in their discipline. The 19 master’s degreed counselors are being replaced with 30–40 bachelor’s or lower degree academic advisors (Evelyn, 2002).

In addition to the wealth of recent literature pointing to the loss of counseling positions in colleges nationwide, a pilot study I conducted in 1999 also revealed a decrease of seven
counseling positions in Iowa community colleges between 1994–1999. The decision to decrease counseling services might be linked to many factors. Some decisions to reduce counseling staff may be politically or economically based and perceived as outside the control of the individual counselor. Some decisions may be influenced by counselors' willingness, or lack thereof, to assess and document the critical nature of their services as related to the institutional mission.

Relevant literature over the past several decades has pointed to the critical need for counselors to evaluate their services and document their impact on student success (Heitzmann & Nafziger, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; Robbins, 1983). Whiston (2002) suggested that the profession of school counseling “is at risk because we do not have substantial research showing that school counseling programs produce positive results” (p. 153).

**Problem Statement**

The point of entry into higher education for approximately half of all students is America's community colleges (Pascarella, 1999) and community colleges are the fastest growing sector of higher education. One of the core missions of the community college is to provide open access for anyone who desires an education. This includes the diverse group of individuals who choose to access higher education at a community college. The diversity that distinguishes this group of students often places them at a higher risk for academic failure due to being academically under-prepared or dealing with any number of psychosocial problems.
Counselors are at the heart of a strong student services program (Robbins, 1983) and are in the best position to provide the multiple services that today’s diverse community college students need to succeed. Counselors are usually on the front lines of contact with new students and students at high risk of failure. Their professional training and experiences are unique within the community college and that should make them a valuable commodity in the area of student retention and success.

Counseling centers in all sectors of education are experiencing position decreases and in some colleges, the counseling function is being eliminated altogether. If counseling positions continue to be reduced, particularly in community colleges, many students may not receive the assistance they need to reach their goals and succeed in college. This study is designed to investigate why community college counseling positions are being decreased or eliminated altogether. The study will attempt to determine what factors have led to the decrease in counseling positions and what actions counselors and administrators can take to rectify the problem.

Purpose and Importance of the Study

The purpose of this multi-site case study was to understand and describe the perceptions of community college counselors and administrators regarding the professional challenges facing counselors. The challenges most frequently reported by counselors included heavier workloads due to a growing student population or staff reductions, students with increasing or more diverse needs, tighter budgets within student services, and how all of these factors are impacting the counseling profession. Ideological differences and
commonalities will be explored with the intention of moving all participants toward the common goal of mutual understanding and, in turn, student success.

This action-based research takes the study a step beyond the traditional approaches to research and ensures that an action component will take place. Stringer (1999) stated that if action research fails to make a difference in a specific way for participants or the researcher, it has failed to achieve its objective. Therefore, research data were analyzed and a plan was developed that will allow participants to take immediate actions toward resolution of the common problem.

Focus and Research Questions

I believe professional counselors play a unique and increasingly important role on all college campuses. But based on my 1999 pilot study, it appears that community college counselors may be at a critical crossroads. The pilot study revealed that several Iowa community colleges have decided to cut professional counseling positions, to replace them with paraprofessionals or academic advisors, or to eliminate counselors from their campuses completely.

Although the pilot study focused on counselor perspectives only, there was a need to understand the situation from the administrative perspective. Therefore, the central focus of this qualitative study was to gather perspectives and insights from Iowa community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors in order to facilitate a clearer and fuller understanding of this growing phenomenon. This action-based research was designed, ultimately, to lead to a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the problem as well as positive change for the participants and researcher. As a result of this collaborative study,
research participants, including the researcher, should gain the knowledge and tools to become better advocates for the counseling profession and, in turn, possibly discover more effective means to work jointly to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

Several questions guided the early stages of this research. The continual recycling process of participatory action research assured that these preliminary questions were reviewed and restructured as the research process evolved. Initial research questions were modified as new issues became apparent. Parlett and Hamilton (1976) called this progressive focusing. The research questions guiding this study were:

- How do community college presidents, student services administrators, counselors, perceive the need for counseling services on the community college campus?
- What factors do community college counselors, presidents, and student services administrators perceive as having led to the decrease in the number of counseling positions in Iowa community colleges?
- What meaning is conveyed to counseling professionals when their services are sometimes perceived as expendable or peripheral to the institutional mission?
- What steps can counselors take to assess and demonstrate their professional value and ensure that their services reflect the mission of their institution?

Limitations

There are acknowledged limitations to this study. Although my literature review has revealed similar concerns of counselors' nationwide in two- and four-year colleges, as well as in the K–12 system (Simmons, 2002; Bers & Calhoun, 2002), this study is limited to four
community colleges in the state of Iowa. Due to budget and time constraints, the perspectives of those who benefit directly from counseling services, students, were minimally addressed in this study. Students were briefly given a voice by questioning a group of students from participating community colleges as to whether counseling impacted their success as a student in any way. Future research should investigate the impact of counseling services, or lack of services, on this primary group of stakeholders.

One should remember that qualitative research, case studies in particular, is not sampling research. We do not study a case to understand other cases (Stake, 1995); my obligation was to completely understand this case. For this multi-site case study, I interviewed several Iowa community college counselors and administrators, but I make no claim that these individuals are representative of a larger population. This study attempts to provide a thick, rich description of the research process and analysis of the data gathered. The readers will have enough detail to find their own generalizations and be able to decide whether the results are transferable to their own setting. The goal of this study was “particularization, not generalization” (Stake, 1995, p. 8).

Definitions of Terms

**Action Research**: Term first used by Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin in his 1946 paper “Action Research and Minority Problems.” The premise of action research is that “it commences with the interest in the problems of a group, a community or an organization. Its purpose is to assist people in extending their understanding of their situation and thus; in resolving problems that confront them…it provides a model for
enacting local, action-oriented approaches to inquiry, applying small scale theorizing to specific problems in specific situations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

**Community College:** A public, two-year institution of higher education. The state of Iowa has 15 community colleges.

**Community College Counseling:** “Community college counseling is a professional activity that provides help to students, either as individuals or in groups, in meeting their personal and educational needs for development and that is characterized by consultation, advisement, instruction, and collaborative skills. It is a core professional function within the broader thrust of student services” (Robbins, 1983, p. 7).

**DSM-VI:** Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders. Fourth Edition.

**First Generation College Student:** A student for which neither parent has had any post-secondary educational experience (Faces of the Future, 2000).

**Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS):** A system of surveys designed to collect data from all primary providers of post-secondary education in the United States. Data are easily retrievable on the Internet.

**Iowa Community College Student Services Association (ICCSSA):** Organization established in 1969 to address the concerns of student services professionals and promote a comprehensive program of student services throughout the state of Iowa.

**Praxis:** A term used by Aristotle meaning “the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them” (O’Brien, 1998, p. 1).
Summary

In this chapter, the rapid growth of the community college system was reviewed, along with the changing nature of today's college student. This chapter also established the important role that counselors play in community colleges and that providing effective counseling services in a culture of downsizing, outsourcing, and increased need for services appears to be a major issue facing community college counselors. In addition, the purpose, focus, and significance of the study were established. Limitations of the study, relevant terms, and initial research questions were also revealed. Chapter II presents a review of the literature that provided a foundation for this qualitative research study. Chapter III will discuss the theoretical perspectives that guided this study along with methodological considerations.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will weave together six basic strands of information that will guide the reader through the evolution of college counseling from its founding more than a century ago, through the expansion of specialized services for students, and into expected future challenges facing the profession. The strands include:

- The history of student personnel services and college counseling,
- The current state of college counseling,
- Community college counseling,
- Assessment and evaluation in college counseling,
- Funding for student services in community colleges, and
- The changing face of today’s college student.

History of Student Personnel Services

Early college administrators in America believed it was their obligation to perpetuate the values of the community within their institutions (Fitzpatrick, 1968). During this time, the American student was viewed as an immature adolescent who needed guidance, as opposed to the European student who was viewed as an adult (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Faculty and college presidents acted as the first college counselors at a time when numbers of colleges and student enrollment were low (Pace, Stamler, Yarris, & June, 1996). Parents expected the college president to act in loco parentis, or to be their surrogate. This was common practice until the rapid expansion of colleges and student enrollment in the later half of the 19th century (Fitzpatrick, 1968). According to Mueller (1961), during this time “personnel work
consisted of a persistent emphasis on extracurricular religion and also considerable snooping into the personal lives of students” (p. 51).

Several factors led to the growth of student personnel services as a profession. During the Federal period, the general public was introduced to higher education on a nationwide basis (Fitzpatrick, 1968). Over 300 colleges were established during this period with a growing opinion that higher education was the right of every citizen (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). After the Morrill Act of 1862, over 600 colleges were established with student enrollments growing from 40,000 to over 400,000 (Fitzpatrick, 1968). With this explosion of student enrollments and the advent of coeducational colleges, housing became a complex issue. Discipline problems could no longer be handled solely by the college president or faculty. The introduction of electives to the college curriculum in the late 1800s opened up more choices for students, and consequently, the need for “specialists” to assist students with these choices (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). The growth in sheer numbers and the increased complexity of student problems led to the first student personnel specialists, then called “rectors” or “proctors” (Fitzpatrick, 1968).

The use of the term “personnel specialist” began early in the 20th century. In 1918, the Dean of Men at the University of Iowa, Robert Rienow, suggested a conference to his peers to discuss student issues. That same year, the National Association of Women Deans addressed similar issues as their male counterparts (Young, 1993). Shortly after these conferences, the term “personnel work” was used to describe college counseling and testing services.

Both World Wars I and II created interest in human aptitudes, abilities, and personalities that led to the development of standardized tests (Smith & Robinson, 1995).
The University Testing Bureau, established at the University of Minnesota in 1932, was the earliest separate unit organized to offer professional educational and vocational guidance (Hedahl, 1978). Similar centers were established in the 1930s and 1940s at the University of Chicago, Ohio State University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Missouri (Hedahl, 1978). An early pioneer in the area of tests and measurements, according to Smith and Robinson (1995), was G. Stanley Hall, a teacher at Johns Hopkins and mental health specialist.

The major contributing factor in the growth of college counseling centers was the flood of students entering colleges after World War II (Dean & Meadows, 1995). The GI Bill was passed in 1944, opening the doors of higher education to more people than ever before. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 also led to a growth in school counseling in the 1960s (Schmidt & Ciechalski, 2001). Heppner and Neal (1983) divided early college counseling into four eras. The eras and their characteristics included:

Before 1945—*The Beginnings*: Deans and advisors counsel students.

1945–1955—*Transition and Professionalism*: Veterans return from World War II; funding for vocational counseling,

1955–1970—*Expansion and Consolidation*: Personal counseling; outreach and consultation,


College mental health counseling evolved from centers originally staffed by psychiatrists (Archer & Cooper, 1999). Dr. Karl Menninger established a counseling system at Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas in 1920 (Fitzpatrick, 1968). Also in 1920, psychiatrist H. M. Kearns was appointed to the staff at West Point (Fitzpatrick, 1968). Other
psychiatric services were established as part of health programs at Dartmouth in 1921, Vassar in 1923, and Yale in 1925 (Pearlman, 1968). In 1957, 550 psychiatrists consulted for colleges but only 25 worked solely for educational institutions (Fitzpatrick, 1968).

Continued expansion in higher education and a rapidly changing society led to an increase in specialty areas within student personnel services. Counseling centers are a relative newcomer to academic institutions in the United States. There were three main sources of influence that precipitated the growth of counseling centers. These were the growth of student personnel as a distinct unit, the expansion of vocational guidance, and the development of psychology and popularity of some of the leaders of that field such as Carl Rogers (Hedahl, 1978). In fact, there was an overlap of personnel within all three fields, when many leaders in vocational guidance and student personnel work were also psychologists and the tools used in the profession were developed by those psychologists (Hedahl, 1978).

Student services expanded to match the growth of the student population after World War II. By the 1960s, two-thirds of institutions of higher education housed counseling centers offering a wide variety of services (Dean & Meadows, 1995). The role of counselors continued to expand into the area of mental health counseling, orientation, learning resources programs, disability testing and ADA compliance, and campus-wide outreach programs. Although the role of the college counselor has expanded and the visibility of the counseling center has increased, the three early models of college counseling remain the same: vocational, mental health, and student personnel.
Current State of College Counseling

Counselors are institutional and personal change agents (Preston, 1978) who help to produce an academic climate that facilitates the personal, intellectual, and social development of students. They help students identify and mobilize their strengths and help them to develop coping strategies that can be translated to other life situations. Many college students today require what Petit and White (1996) referred to as “academic reconstructive surgery” (p. 9). According to Archer and Cooper (1998), many college students simply cannot function effectively without the help of counseling services on campus.

The current need and demand for counseling services by students on campus appear to be increasing and simultaneously, resources for these services are being limited (Gallagher, 1992, 2001). Students are presenting at college counseling centers with more serious problems and in greater numbers than ever before (Dean & Meadows, 1995). In a survey of counseling center directors, Gallagher (1992, 2001) and Gallagher and Bruner (1993, 1994) found that the number one concern for these directors was the increase of students with severe psychological problems. Gallagher (2001) reported the greatest increases were in the areas of learning disabilities, self-injury cases, and illicit drug use. Stone and Archer (1990) also found evidence that there was an increased level of psychopathology among college students. Keys, Bemack, and Lockhart (1998) reported there are an increasing number of students of all ages entering institutions of higher education whose mental health needs put them at high risk for school failure. Many other researchers have also reported an increased need and demand for college counseling services (Pace, Stamler, Yarris, & June, 1996; Bishop, 1995; Corazzini, 1997; Gilbert, 1992; Obetz, Farber & Rosenstein, 1997).
Over the past two decades more students have sought counseling services and counseling centers report they have experienced budget cuts and staff downsizing (Gallagher, 1992). In a 1992 survey of 298 counseling center directors, Gallagher found that almost half of those centers had experienced a reduction in staff and over half had experienced no increase in staff salaries. Over half of the centers had also lost funding in other budget areas. The most recent study by Gallagher (2001) shows a slight decrease in the number of staff cuts and a slight increase in funding. However, counseling center directors still ranked finding resources to meet the demand for student counseling needs as one of their greatest challenges.

As noted by Wrenn (1962), counselors must be prepared to assist students living in a world of rapid change. In this time of societal, institutional, and personal change, a study by Sher, Wood and Gotham (1996) found rates of distress among 70–90 percent of the college students they studied. According to Stone and Archer (1990), these distress rates are a direct result of depression, anxiety, and developmental problems. Bishop (1990) estimated the suicide rate to be 50 percent higher for college students than for a comparable age group in the general population. The freshman year is critical adjustment period for most students. The results of a new survey, “Your First College Year,” conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute, found that a greater number of students reported feeling depressed or overwhelmed and fewer students rated their emotional health as above average than in previous years (Bartlett, 2002).

A student needs assessment study by Bertocci, Hirsh, Sommer, and William (1992) revealed that 10–40 percent of college students are psychologically impaired and one-half to three-fourths of students have significant emotional problems. Many students are entering
college with histories of mental illness and long-term medication use (Pace et al., 1996). Depression, anxiety, sexual abuse, ADHD, substance abuse, personality disorders, and severe eating disorders are just a few of the issues students are presenting to counselors in greater numbers than ever before. According to Corazzini (1997), all these issues have a vast potential impact on the academic experiences of students, even though they are not usually viewed as academic issues.

It appears the challenges for counselors will not diminish in the future. According to Keys et al., (1998), 15–20 percent of children and adolescents suffer from severe mental health problems, but less than 20 percent of these young people receive any type of mental health treatment. In 1992, the American Psychiatric Association estimated that from 3–6 million children suffer from clinical depression and that makes them a higher risk for suicide (Keys et al., 1998). Levine and Cureton (1998) reported a 141 percent increase in drug use within the ages 12 through 17 cohort. A more diverse cross-section of society is now attending college and this is especially true in America’s community colleges. According to Gilbert (1992), many of these young people with mental health problems are attending our colleges now or will walk through our doors in just a few years.

According to Cornish, Kominars, Riva, McIntosh, and Henderson (2000), some researchers have found little documented evidence to support the reports of increased severity of student psychological problems. Sharkin (1997) warns that most evidence regarding increased student psychological problems has been based on the estimates, perceptions, and anecdotal experiences of counselors and counseling center directors.

What, then, is the explanation for such a widespread “perception” of the increase in student demand for counseling services? According to Cornish et al. (2000), even small
increases in the number of students with severe psychological problems can have a major impact on an already overburdened counseling staff. O'Malley, Wheeler, Murphy, O’Connell, and Waldo (1990) offer four explanations for the increase in need and demand for counseling services on campus:

1. Greater levels of psychological illness in society,
2. Greater awareness and willingness to seek treatment for mental health problems,
3. Changing demographics of the college student population, and
4. Better record keeping and diagnostics in counseling centers.

Whatever the reasons, counselors across the country at two- and four-year institutions continue to report that their students are coming to college with a history of family dysfunction, greater awareness of their problems, and a willingness and need for professional help in dealing with these issues (Archer & Cooper, 1998).

Another critical issue facing counselors today is the request for more accountability. The demand for accountability in student services, especially the counseling area, began in the 1970s (Shaevitz, 1977). Constricted funding dollars often leads administrators to reevaluate student support services and reduce budgets and staff (Phillips, Halstead, & Carpenter, 1996). Counseling services are not typically a revenue producer on campus, so some administrators view this student services unit as nonessential. Counseling services is often the first to suffer budget and staff cuts (Clement & Rickard, 1992). Some institutions are moving toward the privatization of counseling services (Webb, Widseth, & John, 1997). Administrators perceive service outsourcing to private mental health agencies as more cost-effective, but according to Phillips, Halstead, and Carpenter (1996), most institutions that have tried this option have returned to some form of in-house counseling services.
These budget constraints have forced counseling center staff to consider alternative sources of funding. Many counseling centers have resorted to charging fees for individual counseling and are now charging for testing services. Some centers have started using health insurance for payment. To do so requires the staff to provide a DSM-VI diagnosis for the client (Bishop, 1995). Students are being asked to pay more for their college education and many times this is in the area of student fees. According to Schuh (1996), the financial pressures on student services is likely to increase in the future and students will be forced to contribute even more toward their education.

Administrators must determine whether their institution can afford not to have counselors on staff. What is the cost to the institution if a student drops out, commits suicide, or violently disrupts the campus? Bishop (1995) states, “Cost-benefit studies can be difficult to apply to counseling services in a way that accurately assesses the contribution of the counseling center” (p. 33). A crisis that is not managed well can damage the image of an institution for years. With professional counselors on staff to provide early problem detection and specialized interventions, those crises might be avoided.

Community College Counseling

Community colleges are dynamic institutions in a state of constant revision, always responding to the needs of the community they serve. One of the core missions of the two-year college is to provide access to higher education to all those who desire it. This “open door” policy brings with it a diversity of students with greatly varying levels of ability and motivation. Bers and Calhoun (2002) estimated that “the population of students choosing to enroll at two-year colleges will continue to increase over the next few years and will mirror
the increasing diversity of American society" (p. 68). We must remember that when we think about a diverse student population to include not only students of color. Diversity includes gender, race, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, family structure and functionality, socioeconomic status, learning ability level, languages, level of school involvement, and other characteristics (Gysbers, 2001).

Community colleges appear to be the higher education choice for the preponderance of minority students starting college. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1998) showed that community colleges enroll nearly half of all African American and Asian and Pacific Islander students, 56 percent of American Indian students, and 61 percent of all Hispanic students. Community colleges are also on the front lines for narrowing what was termed "the digital divide" in Faces of the Future (p. 3). Community colleges are helping a large number of people gain the computer skills necessary to compete in the information age. Many of these students are older Americans who have never used the internet.

Community college students are a diverse group and in many ways unique in their educational needs and goals. These students are often underprepared academically, have limited financial resources, are less self-confident, come from a lower socioeconomic background, are first generation college students, come with more emotional baggage, and have a poorer understanding of the educational process than their four-year counterparts (Wolf & Aguren, 1978). Community college students often work full time, have family obligations, and have multiple demands on their time (Bers & Calhoun, 2002). Community college counselors must use creative and innovative strategies to provide effective services to this diverse student population.
Community college counselors today are being asked to assume additional roles and prepare for changing student demographics while feeling pressured to prove counseling outcomes in order to justify their professional survival (Dean & Meadows, 1995). Counselors have a multidimensional set of duties, roles, and responsibilities on most campuses, but their role is even more diverse on the community college campus. The community college counselor is usually a jack-of-all-trades and on any given day may be working in the areas of orientation, registration, recruitment, academic advising, career counseling, scheduling, and personal counseling. Unfortunately, according to Phelps (1992), trying to be everything to everyone leads quickly to job burnout for many of these counselors. Robbins (1983) suggested that being all things to all people has led to counselors being given jobs that no one else can do or desires to do. He added, “In order to try to make a recognized contribution, to win support and show their value, counselors have often become irresponsibly overburdened” (p. 10).

Assessment and Evaluation Strategies

In a time of perceived increases in competition for resources and decreases in outside funding, it is more critical than ever that counselors are able to evaluate their services and communicate their effectiveness in order to justify their survival (Schuh, 1996). College counselors everywhere are being asked to do more with less and to document how well they are doing it (Steenbarger & Smith, 1996). The survival of counseling on college campuses may depend on how well administrators understand the connection between student success, retention, and providing personal development counseling. Counselors must provide
evidence that everything they do is related to student learning, academic achievement, and retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Experts cannot agree on the definition or purpose of assessment but they do agree that assessment is no longer an option (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). According to Upcraft and Schuh (1996), assessment can be defined as “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). The authors go on to define evaluation as “any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 19).

Counselors have been slow to incorporate assessment and evaluation into their units (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). This hesitancy may be due, in part, to the fact that, as Schuh and Upcraft (1998) suggest, “All assessment is a risk” (p. 10). The risk involved in assessment is that negative assessment results could stimulate the decision to reduce or even eliminate a program. Also, even positive results do not guarantee the survival of a program. Finally, even if program improvement is the declared goal of assessment, one cannot guarantee how the data may be used (Schuh & Upcraft, 1998). The nonexistence of data, according to Schuh and Upcraft (2001), “may lead to policies and practices based on intuition, prejudice, preconceived notions, or personal proclivities, none of them desirable bases for making decisions” (p. 8). Considering the vulnerability involved, having no data at all to demonstrate program effectiveness is possibly the greatest risk of all.

Heitzmann and Nafziger (2001) proposed that counselors be able to answer the question, “What value is added to the lives of students, and to the institution at large, by the presence of counseling services?” (p. 391). Assessing counseling services can also answer questions such as:
- How are counseling services vital to the functioning of the college?
- Are we delivering what we promise to our students?
- Exactly what are the needs of our students?
- Are we providing effective and high quality services to meet those needs?

Answering these questions can help relate counseling services to the academic success of students and demonstrate to administrators how counseling supports the institutional mission.

From the counselor perspective, the time, expense, and logistics of trying to administer, score, interpret, and distribute the results of assessment inventories pose a major hurdle for counseling centers which are already understaffed and may be dealing with waiting lists for services. Corazzini (1997) cautioned that assessment research must be undertaken by counseling staff who are already overburdened by a growing student population or shrinking staff. Many counselors continue to view their role as a practitioner, not a researcher—a standpoint that may have to change.

To survive, counselors must demonstrate that everything they do assists students to make effective use of their educational opportunity. Counselors must be ready to move beyond a personal belief in the value of their work with students to a more intentional effort to produce evidence of their outcomes (Bers & Calhoun, 2002). Counseling center staff should look for simple ways to collect and report data that will help administrators understand the changing nature and needs of today's college students (Bishop, 2002). Counselors can play a more central role in the life of their college by connecting their services to the academic mission, student retention, and academic achievement. It is not enough for counselors to demonstrate that they helped solve student problems; they must be able to demonstrate how this action led to student success (Heitzmann & Nafziger, 2001).
According to Steenbarger & Smith (1996), assessment and evaluation of quality counseling may become the key to professional survival in the future.

Funding for Student Services in Community Colleges

Higher education has been going through a period of limited budgets and an increased focus on the cost to educate students. These extensive financial constraints have increased over the past two decades (Rames, 2000), and competition for limited financial resources is expected to continue into the future (Stone & Archer, 1990). According to Sharkin (1997), in times of tight budgets institutions of higher education often chose not to invest in student services. Some college administrators view student services responsibilities as less essential than academic programs, new facilities, or technological improvements (Obits, Farber, & Rosenstein, 1997).

Literature on the current state of student services consistently reports an increasing concern among student affairs professionals regarding decreasing budgets. In 1990, Stone and Archer predicted a decline in student enrollment that would lead to decreased budgets. Bishop (1995) stated that financial resources available to student services are limited and shrinking. Historically, student services have been reduced and sometimes eliminated during periods of financial retrenchment since these services are seen as supportive, rather than central, to the primary mission of higher education institutions (Rames, 2000).

Many student service areas have experienced a reduction in resources, but the counseling area appears to have been hit extra hard. Tryon (1995) stated that the competition for financial resources is evident in the number of professional counseling positions lost over the past decade. In a recent study, Rames (2000) found counseling and placement services
were the student service areas most likely to experience budget reductions. In an effort to cut spending, some institutions have experimented with outsourcing certain student service areas. Counseling has been one of these outsourced areas, showing varying degrees of success (Webb, Widseth, & John, 1997; Phillips, Halstead, & Carpenter, 1996).

To determine if the perceptions of student services professional are accurate and that student services budgets actually have been decreasing in recent years, a search was carried out by accessing Integrated Post-secondary Education Database System (IPEDS) and National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1999) data. For the IPEDS study, only community colleges within the Midwest region of the United States were reviewed and compared.

The review of IPEDS data revealed surprising results. Instead of finding the expected, a steady decrease in student services budgets in this Midwest region, the data showed that there was actually a gradual increase in institutional dollars spent per student on services. Overall, the percent of the institutional budget spent on student services remained relatively stable for most institutions during the previous five-year period. A review of NCES data (1999) also demonstrated that funding for student services has increased in American institutions of higher education over the past decade.

Why is there a pervasive perception among student services professionals that budgets are decreasing when most statistics demonstrate there has been a consistent increase in student services spending nationwide? Some institutions have apparently even doubled their spending in the student services area. A study by Rames (2000) revealed that financial constraints have had a significant effect on certain student services, reducing some while others have remained stable or are increasing. Although funding for areas such as counseling
and placement have decreased, support for financial aid, minority support services, and admissions have increased (Rames, 2000). Institutions are budgeting more resources into financial aid due to decreased financial support from state and federal governments over the last two decades (The Tuition Puzzle, 1999). It appears institutions have decided to put more financial muscle into student recruitment than toward retention efforts at this time.

Although questions linger, it is clear that the majority of student services budgets are not on the decline, as many within the profession believe to be true. The perceptions remain, though, that student services professionals are being asked to do more with less. As this era of financial limitations and accountability continues, college administrators will have to creatively confront these limitations and make difficult choices between what they believe are essential student services and what they believe are merely a convenience for students.

The Changing Face of Today's College Student

Who are the students entering our institutions of higher education today? Today's student has grown up in a time of relentless change and transition (Levine & Cureton, 1998). In fact, the dominant factor in their lives is change. According to Levine and Cureton (1998), students today have grown up in two societies, one dying and one being born. Living in this time of great discontinuity has led this generation to grow up frightened. This group of young people has faced economic, social, political, and psychological pressures that earlier generations did not have to deal with (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Time magazine in 1995 reported that adolescents were in danger of becoming "lifelong casualties" of the myriad of problems they have faced growing up (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 16).
Today's college student has grown up in a time that has seen an increase in poverty, crime, and violence. Fear seems to be an emotion familiar to many of today's students. Stone and Archer (1990) reported that many students have faced sexual, emotional, or physical abuse before they ever get to college. According to Archer and Cooper (1998), 22 percent of today's college students have experienced date violence and one-fourth have been a victim of rape since age fourteen. Psychologically, today's student is coming to college more overwhelmed and damaged than ever before (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

But they are still coming, and in greater numbers than ever before. In 1997, 65 percent of all high school graduates continued on to some form of higher education (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Students today have very different needs and expectations than previous generations. The typical college student today does not fit the traditional stereotype of the 18-year-old, full-time student living on campus. They are: female, working full time, attending college part time, academically underprepared, have families, and are over age 25 (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Community college students are diverse in their backgrounds and need for services. *Faces of the Future*, a joint project developed by ACT and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), is a survey to assess the current state of community college students. The most recent survey (2002) found that 60 percent of community college students are first-generation students, generally minority students, adult students, or English language learners. The study also found that the adult student population is growing in community colleges, up 12 percent over the last decade.

College is often not the first priority for many students today. Students are no longer working their way through college but are trying to work college into their already busy lives. They have multiple demands on their time and view their role as that of a consumer of
the educational "product." They demand convenience, quality, and customer services all at a low cost. Being part of such a "nontraditional" group, one could expect the traditional college experience is not what today's student is looking for. There appears to be more distance between the student and his/her campus today. In fact, less than 30 percent of all college students live on campus (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

The multiple roles of college students have led them to sacrifice a social life. For those who do want to socialize, drinking is still the activity of choice. According to Levine and Cureton (1998), one-fifth of all college students are binge drinkers. Archer and Cooper (1998) report that out of 12 million current students, 240–360 thousand will eventually die of alcohol related causes. Currently, one in ten college students already has a problem with substance abuse. Although drug use by college students reportedly is down, there has been a 141 percent increase in use by the 12–17-year-old population. These will be our college students in the very near future.

This generation also fears intimacy and is looking to escape it through group dating and casual sex. Though AIDS is now spreading most rapidly among college-age heterosexuals, sex in college, as one student reported, "is a succession of one night stands fueled by alcohol." She added, "They don't talk about it; they just do it!" (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 111).

Today's students grew up in a culture that has an undefined value system (Archer & Cooper, 1998). The social institutions that once nurtured our youth such as family and religion appear to have become less prevalent and less powerful than in previous generations. Less than 10 percent of families represent the traditional nuclear family consisting of a mother, a father, and a single breadwinner (Archer & Cooper, 1998). The experience of
growing up in a dysfunctional family has influenced the majority of college students today (Archer & Cooper, 1998). Many children have grown up with one or no parent and some have lacked the nurturing to make them an emotionally healthy human being.

Educational institutions have the opportunity (responsibility?) to provide what other institutions have failed to instill in this generation of young people. It is not just intellectual development but the practical education this generation will need to become the leaders of tomorrow (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Practical education comes not only from the classroom but also from a campus-wide effort by all individuals, faculty, administrators, and student services staff devoting themselves to the success of today's college students.

This review of literature has traced college counseling from its earliest roots and evolution through the challenges faced by college counselors today due to the changing nature of college students. We looked at the characteristics of counseling in a community college. Additionally, the perceptions, or misperceptions, of staff regarding funding for student services and the importance of outcomes assessment were briefly explored. The literature review formed a picture of the challenging issues confronting community college counselors in the coming decade. It also demonstrated how changes in counselors' self-perceptions and willingness to document their services could lead to survival of the profession.

The preponderance of research addressing issues relating to college counseling has been carried out in four-year universities and colleges. The literature in this area pertaining to community college counseling is limited. The thrust of this research study is on reasons for the decrease of counseling positions in Iowa community colleges. Chapter III will discuss the
theoretical underpinnings of this study and the methodology that will be used by the researcher.
CHAPTER III. RESEARCH METHODS

Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual framework for this study is based on participatory action research and also draws from a bricolage of theoretical concepts including critical postmodernism, feminist theory, constructivism, and case study. I will provide a brief summary of how elements from these theoretical perspectives connect to action research and form a cohesive foundation for this research study. Chapter III continues with a thorough discussion of the research design and methods.

The primary data source for this study was a series of semi-structured interviews with community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors. Supplemental information was gathered from students, document analysis, and personal observations.

Critical postmodernism

Rhoads (1994) stated that the goal of critical postmodernism is to bridge the gap between research and action. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) defined critical postmodernism as the synthesis of two theoretical traditions: critical theory and postmodern social theory. According to hooks (1984), critical postmodernists confront oppression by uncovering cultural and ideological constraints that are barriers to self-determination.

Postmodern theorists structured the framework for action research decades ago by advocating the participation and empowerment of the population being studied. In 1946, Kurt Lewin, social psychologist, first used the phrase action research in a paper titled “Action Research and Minority Problems.” Foucault (1972) suggested that any large-scale analysis must be based on an understanding of the micro-politics of power at the local level.
According to Derrida (1976), the perspectives and agendas of client groups should be included in the development of the programs that serve them. All groups have the right to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and have those voices accepted as authentic and legitimate, states Huyssens (1986). West (1989) suggested that academic scholarship should advocate ways of living together that provide opportunities for research participants to participate in activities that affect their lives.

**Feminist theory**

Action research has roots in both critical postmodernism and feminist theory because it looks at the social, political, and economic forces affecting the stakeholders. Action research developed from the standpoint epistemologies that emerged from feminist theory (Stringer, 1999). As with postmodernism, a collaborative, action-oriented, and advocacy model of research with the goal of self-determination for the research participants, was espoused by Lather (1991). Her work integrated feminist and critical postmodern paradigms with a praxis orientation, a blending of critical analysis with enlightened action.

The concepts of empowerment, democracy, equity, liberation, freedom from oppression, and life enhancement are central to action research, as well as to feminist theory (Guba, 1999; Lather, 1991). The starting point of feminist research is the individual. Standpoint epistemology, according to Smith (1987), suggested that research should give full consideration to the individual’s lived experience and perspectives (standpoint) and should help them grasp their situation from where they stand. This research study began from the standpoint of the participants, a standpoint that was revealed during the pilot study. The pilot
study was a narrowly focused, problem-centered study that took a holistic view of a group of people who were experiencing a situation that they identified as being relevant to their lives.

Smith (1987) compared inquiry to a quilt where researchers begin where the participants are, and then piece together blocks of meaning as they move through the research process together. Collins (1991) suggested the same in her work regarding Afro-centric feminist epistemology. From the feminist perspective, Smith (1987) proposed that research participants are the “expert practitioners” in their everyday world and research should not make them into objects of study. The goal of this praxis-oriented case study was to do research with rather than for or about the participants.

**Constructivism**

“The epistemology of qualitative research is constructivist,” reported Stake (1995, p. 43). The constructivist paradigm is built upon the premise that reality, facts, or “truth” are not out there waiting to be studied or discovered. Reality is constructed by human beings who are influenced by social and cultural forces and lead to shared constructions (Schwandt, 1998). According to constructivist theory, knowledge is a product of the interaction between humans and results are literally created by these interactions, not uncovered (Schwandt, 1998).

Action researchers, as well, believe that social reality cannot be discovered because it is a continually changing cultural creation (Stringer, 1999). There is no tangible reality; reality is fabricated, maintained, and modified by humans as they interact with each other and their environment, according to Stringer (1999). In action research, everything studied depends on the personal, mental, and social constructions of the participants, as well as the researchers.
My research was collaboration between researcher and participants where understanding and knowledge were created, analyzed, and recycled back into the research process as the study evolved. The perceptions, or mental constructions, of the participants were the foundation upon which this study was built.

**Action research**

In contrast to traditional positivistic research, action research requires a different perspective on how to undertake research with humans. It is known by many other names such as participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research. O’Brien (1998) reported that action research is "learning by doing—a group of people identify a problem, does something to resolve it, sees how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, tries again" (p. 2). Even more succinctly, action research

[a]ims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of society simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of researcher and client, and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process...the emphasis is on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is informed by theoretical considerations. (O’Brien, 1998, p. 2)
Action research is based on the assumption that all those whose lives are affected by the problem being researched should be engaged in the investigation process. Stringer (1999) suggested that this grass root, collaborative approach to inquiry provides the group the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems. If action research fails to make a difference in a specific way for participants or the evaluator, it has failed to achieve its objective (Stringer, 1999).

The purpose of action research, Stringer continues, “is to collaboratively build constructed descriptions and interpretations of events that enable groups of people to formulate mutually acceptable solutions to their problems” (p. 188). Action research is ultimately a search for meaning. It is a process through which people can collaboratively clarify their problems and design new ways to envision their situation (Stringer, 1999). To do this while enhancing the dignity of all participants is the ideal goal. To adhere to the action research form of inquiry is to understand that there are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions to human problems. The goal of research should be to solve real problems with local meaning and usefulness in the real world (O’Brien, 1998). Based on the above definitions, this study met the criteria for action research. Along with the researcher, participants worked collaboratively to identify the collective problem, to find answers to the research questions, and to design solutions to their collective problems.

Case study

Merriam (1998) stated that case studies often have an action component as a part of their design. Case studies, according to Shaw (1978), “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation.
They are problem-centered, small scale, entrepreneurial endeavors” (p. 2). Based on real life situations, case studies show a slice of the participant’s life and result in a rich, holistic account of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) described a case study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25).

Creswell (1998) recommended choosing a case study when you want an in-depth picture of a “case” that is bounded by time or place. To decide if case study is a suitable research design, Merriam (1998) suggested researchers ask themselves, “Can I ‘fence in’ what I plan to study?” (p. 27). Case study was an appropriate design for my study because it sought to take a holistic view of the challenges facing, and perspectives of, a small group of community college counselors and administrators regarding a specific and common problem.

Merriam (1998) suggested studying multiple cases as a strategy for enhancing validity and transferability of findings. This research project was a multi-site case study because I interviewed presidents, student services administrators, and counselors at four community colleges within the state. The theoretical perspectives that form the foundation for this study—Postmodernism, Feminist Theory, Constructivism, and Action Research—all assert that reality is based on personal experiences and the individual lenses through which we view the world. Participants and researcher brought our individual perspectives together to form a new version of reality regarding the issues studied. Studying multiple cases, as Merriam (1998) proposed, provided more data variation and, in turn, more compelling interpretations.

During this research project, in keeping with the precepts of Postmodernism, Feminist Theory, Constructivism, and Action Research, I focused on discovering participant insights, perspectives, and interpretations and developing a holistic view of the phenomenon
confronting community college counselors. This study has sought to bridge the gap between research and action and was designed to move beyond an in-depth understanding of the context to cooperatively deciding on a course of action to improve the counselors’ status and political power. The action goal of the study was to enhance the communication and understanding between counselors and administrators and to provide a voice for counselors—a group whose professional identity typically involves helping students and others find their voices.

**Research Design and Methods**

Since this study was concerned with the perceptions of the research participants, primarily qualitative methods were used. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative methods are most adaptable to dealing with the multiple realities of human participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested researchers couldn’t separate human participants from the context of their reality if the research goal is complete understanding. Lather (1991) stated that research should involve participants in the construction and validation of knowledge. As I will describe in detail below, the participants in this research were involved in every aspect of the project from problem identification, through exploration and data gathering, and into the development of a final action plan.

**Site selection and participants**

In my pilot study undertaken in 1999, 50 counselors representing each of Iowa’s 15 community colleges were mailed a survey regarding their current roles, responsibilities, and
personal outlook on the future of their profession. Thirty of the 50 surveys were completed and returned from counselors representing 14 of the 15 community colleges in Iowa.

I originally identified the major stakeholders in this research study as community college counselors and community college student services administrators. Members from these two groups were included in defining and exploring the initial problem to be investigated. The research problem was defined through my affiliation with ICCSSA members as well as the data collected from my pilot study. Community college presidents and a small sample of students were added to the participant group, based upon the recommendation of my dissertation committee, in order to move beyond what was already known concerning the current counseling situation.

For the final research study, the site selection was narrowed to four Iowa community colleges. Presidents and student services administrators from those four institutions were added to the participant group, and counselors from the same institutions were targeted for more in-depth interviews. The community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors were interviewed on their campuses over a period of several months. Gaining access to the sites and building rapport was established early due to my previous professional interactions with counselors in the state of Iowa. The size of my participant group, as well as the selection of my participants, was determined by informational considerations, not in an effort to produce generalizations. Purposeful sampling was used to select the original research institutions. The participants were selected based on their potential to add perspective to the current situation facing counselors in Iowa community colleges. The four institutions were selected based on their full-time enrollment, student diversity, common administrative structure, and proximity to the researchers institution.
In participatory action research, participants are determined as the study evolves. Stringer (1999) stated that as one participant is interviewed, knowledge is created and interpreted. When using this technique, called *serial selection* by Lather (1991), the first participant is asked to provide names of other individuals who could give beneficial or conflicting information. The data gathering and analysis processes move forward in this manner. The purpose, according to Lather (1991), is to maximize information, not to facilitate generalization. As this study progressed, participants were asked to offer names of other individuals who might have alternative or otherwise valuable insights regarding the study. This method was used to identify student participants, some student services administrators, and new community college counselors who could provide more diverse insights and yield as full a picture as possible of this case.

**Data collection**

Data gathering, according to Stake (1995), begins with background information and first impressions that are often informally obtained. This is true of this research study in which data have been gathered over the past several years from interactions with my counseling colleagues and from my own personal and professional experiences as a counselor. Data collection in action research is not a linear process, but a spiral of activity and a continual recycling of the planning, action, observation, and reflection processes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This research process was not a neat, orderly process laid out in advance, but a complex flurry of activity.

The design of action research, as with all qualitative inquiry (Maxwell, 1996), is open-ended and emergent. Knowledge is created through the interactions of the inquiry process
and the process is permeated by the values of all stakeholders, including the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This research methodology requires that research participants continually process and analyze the data being created by the interaction between the stakeholders and the researcher.

In action research, the claims, concerns, and issues presented by the stakeholders themselves are what guide the focus and organization of the project. A preliminary understanding of the claims, concerns, and issues of Iowa community college counselors was gained through my 1999 preliminary study. Those issues were explored, investigated, and fleshed out during the final research process. In addition to the causes and effects of this problem, I searched for the multiple realities, the essence of the human experience, and the personal standpoint (Smith, 1987) of my participants.

Several different techniques were utilized to facilitate the research process. I conducted on-site interviews with community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors as the primary data collection method. Personal interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, interactive manner in which the researcher also disclosed opinions, ideas, and biases. The use of open-ended questions allowed individuals to reveal their personal perspectives. I analyzed preliminary data and then in sequential interviews with individuals and small groups, I facilitated a deeper probing for information and perceptions of participants. Although several predetermined questions guided the participant interviews, I expected their thoughts and feelings about these issues to take the interviews in new directions. I encouraged and stayed open to these new directions and alert to any opposing viewpoints expressed by the participants.
I maximized my research time by making use of professional conference attendance for focus groups and individual interviews. I also used e-mail communications, brief surveys, and counselor telnet meetings to gain additional information and check for data accuracy. The recent state of Iowa budget cuts have deeply affected funding in community colleges and, therefore, made conference travel for the 2001–2002 academic year difficult. This made electronic communications even more valuable. Other methods of data gathering were utilized as often as possible to ensure timely access to and feedback from participants.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, document analysis was used as a means of data gathering. Written or printed materials such as community college catalogues, college web pages, student services materials, personal résumés, and counselor reports were used when available. I also gathered data through direct observation as I visited counselors and administrators on their campuses across the state. These campus visits were essential to gain perspectives of the campus and the student services climate. These variations of data collection provided a means for triangulation of the research data.

Data management

Any qualitative inquiry produces a large volume of data to be managed. Accurately managing this information, or providing an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, p. 110), was critical. The audit trail included such things as file memos, reflexive journals, debriefings, minutes, audiotapes, interview transcripts, research syntheses, and any other raw data gathered during the inquiry.

To stay focused during this study, I prepared a calendar of research activities and deadlines. Following the recommendations of Huberman and Miles (1994), I carefully
retained, in an easily retrievable form, all material, notes, and data collected during this study. Stake (1995) suggested developing a data matrix as a visual means of locating and identifying information gathered for the study. As data were collected, I kept a master list of the information gathered to date and displayed my progress using a status board. All data collected were coded, stored on computer disks, and backed up on the computer hard drive. I kept copies of all materials in several large storage boxes with color-coded hanging folders, to keep material organized and accessible. The color-coded file folders, tabs, highlighters, and note cards were used to identify and distinguish issues, topics, sites, and participants.

I audiotaped my interviews and backed those up with field notes and frequent member checks to ensure the accuracy of data and meaning. I prepared an interpretive commentary from the audiotapes using a transcription machine as quickly as possible after the interviews and contacted the participants to check for accuracy and understanding. A recorder malfunction during one interview made transcription impossible but the interview highlights were recreated from memory and notes shortly after the malfunction was discovered.

The observational notes and analytic memos I used to record my thoughts, ideas, plans, and strategies were as detailed and complete as possible. Data from my preliminary study were saved and responses were recorded on poster board to allow for making visual connections and developing categories. These techniques initially worked well and were used once again to organize new data that were created during the research process.

**Data analysis**

Good research returns data to the participants with preliminary results and refines them in light of the participants’ reactions (Reason & Rowan, 1981). By using frequent member
checks, any errors can be detected early in the process and corrected immediately. Action research is based on this philosophy that ensures a constant recycling of information and reanalysis of meaning (Stringer, 1999). The researcher analyzes data inputs as they are received and then incorporates them into the reconstruction as the process evolves.

There are several techniques I used to analyze the large amount of data that were generated through this process. Yin (1984) suggested developing a coding system to fracture the existing data and rearrange it into categories that would facilitate a clearer conceptualization of the problem. Displays such as tables, charts, matrices, and other visual methods were used to help identify themes and relationships in the data, as suggested by Wolcott (1994). I found this worked well with the information provided by stakeholders in my preliminary study and utilized the technique again in the research process. Chunking the information into manageable pieces and then restructuring them into my own format facilitated linking the data and making connections between emerging categories and themes.

Electronic techniques, particularly e-mail, became vital during the study for timely member checks and follow-up questions. Simple word processing technology made the interview transcription process and the data fracturing a slightly less tedious process. After identifying themes and patterns within the data, using the cut and paste function allowed for smooth process of data restructuring. Transcribing the interview tapes myself using a transcription machine gave me the initial opportunity to identify themes and watch the patterns emerge from the data. As interview transcripts and other data were read, themes were highlighted and color-coded, and particularly relevant quotes were extracted from the materials.
Glesne (1999) compared qualitative inquiry to a child’s dot-to-dot game. A pattern or design gradually emerges from the research process as one dot of information leads to yet another. Each of the techniques discussed above was used to try to identify patterns in the data, to mentally dissect the data, or to generally try to “connect the dots” of the immense amount of data that were generated. Research participants were involved in all stages of the process, including the analysis of information. As Stake (1995) suggested, throughout the data collection, management, and analysis process, I continued to ask the participants and myself, “Do we have it right?”

Qualities of goodness

Within the positivist paradigm, method is the primary way to ensure results are trustworthy. The adequacy criteria that are most often referred to in positivist inquiry are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that these traditional criteria are unworkable when using a responsive, constructivist approach to research. Rigor in qualitative research, stated Merriam (1998), derives from the following factors: the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and the thick, rich description.

There are six strategies researchers can use to enhance the validity of the study (Merriam, 1998). In other sections of this document, I have discussed how several of these strategies were addressed in the study: triangulation, member checks, collaborative research, and researcher bias. In this section I will describe each technique briefly but primarily discuss how I will address the strategies of long-term observation and peer examination.
1. **Triangulation**—using multiple data sources and methods. In this study, interviews, document analysis, and observation were primarily used to provide triangulation of the data.

2. **Member checks**—returning data to participants to check for understanding and accuracy. This was an ongoing process between researcher and participants typically conducted by phone or electronic correspondence.

3. **Long-term observation**—repeated observation over a period of time. An extended visit to each case study site may not normally be considered sufficient time for long-term exposure to the participants and sites. My prior experience as a community college counselor led to an advanced knowledge of the context and concerns of my participants. As I found patterns emerging that required a greater depth of understanding, follow-up visits or additional contacts with participants were arranged.

4. **Peer examination**—using colleague feedback to check for soundness of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend asking a colleague who has an understanding of qualitative research to act as a peer debriefer. Dr. Laura Browne served in this role for my study. Dr. Browne is a graduate of the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Iowa State University and is a veteran of the qualitative research process. She has a certification in counseling and a thorough understanding of the community college culture.

5. **Participatory or collaborative mode of research**—participants are involved in every aspect of the study. This is the foundation of action research and was adhered to throughout this study.
6. **Researcher bias**—biases are stated clearly at the onset of research. I have been forthright about my biases and personal interest in this study and documented these biases clearly for the reader in the following section.

In addition to the criteria listed above, Guba and Lincoln (1989) added the concept of *authenticity criteria* that includes fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity all having their roots in constructivism. Catalytic and tactical authenticity apply directly to my study and are defined as the extent to which action is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation process and to which the participants were empowered to take action. The similar concept of *catalytic validity* was proposed by Lather (1991) and defined as “the degree to which the research process re- orients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 68).

According to Guba (1999), the fact that action research may not conform to the conventional adequacy criteria of rigor is not as important as its empowering and humanizing approach. Guba and Lincoln (1998) stated that in action research, not only is methodology important but also outcome, product, and negotiation to ensure that stakeholder rights are honored. They suggested the following questions be asked of the research process.

- Were the stakeholders' rights honored?
- Was the intent of the inquiry achieved?

Although empowerment and action are ultimate goals of my study, how this study impacted the participants and motivated them toward action cannot be accurately measured until the research process has concluded. This important aspect of the action research process will be assessed within the year following completion of the study. Every effort was taken to
uphold the rights and dignity of the research participants, including meeting the ethical standards of research and guarding the rights of the participants. Measuring a person’s motivation is not an easy task, but if the intent of this inquiry was to understand the perceptions of the participants and empower them to advocate for the counseling professions, this intent was met.

**Researcher role and biases**

A major distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is the role of the researcher. In quantitative research, researcher values and biases theoretically have no impact on the final outcomes of the study. Qualitative research assumes researcher bias (Merriam, 1998). In action research the role of the researcher is not that of the expert who does research, but as a facilitator, a consultant, and a catalyst for change (Stringer. 1999). Guba and Lincoln (1989) define the researcher as “orchestrator of the negotiation process” (p. 45).

The primary instrument in qualitative research is human. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), a human investigator cannot step outside his or her humanness and disregard his or her personal values, experiences, and constructions. Therefore, all observations and analyses are filtered through the lens (values, perspectives, biases) of that human being. Merriam (1998) posited that in qualitative research, the participants and researcher all bring their own constructions of reality to the study. The constructions join together to form new knowledge that is created as a result of the interactions. The final product is yet another construction, filtered through the lens of each participant, the researcher, as well as the reader of the final product.
In action research, researcher biases are placed on the table at the start of the process and, therefore, make the issue of personal biases less problematic (Stringer, 1999). I will attempt to outline the personal and professional experiences that might have influenced my interpretation of the research data. I am aware of and openly acknowledge the personal biases that were present in this study due to my prior connection with the research participants and my vested interest in the outcomes of this study. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warned qualitative researchers about studying your “own backyard” (p. 21) or a site in which you have a vested interest. They cautioned that your friends or colleagues might withhold information or tell you what they think you want to hear in order to help with your research. Throughout this process, I gauged my subjectivity and avoided the temptation to seek data that only supported my personal biases.

My interest in this research topic stems from a 12-year history of providing counseling and advising services to students in higher education. For the past seven years, I have been employed as a counselor in an Iowa community college. I have worked as a career counselor, academic advisor and mental health counselor in a community college and university setting. I have also provided mental health therapy to clients in a community agency setting. My Master of Arts degree is in Mental Health Counseling, an intensive 60-credit program from the University of Northern Iowa. I have been a National Certified Counselor with the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) for the past seven years.

For three years I served on the executive board of the Iowa Community College Student Services Association (ICCSSA) as chair of the counseling subgroup. I will serve the organization as president-elect in 2002–2003. This affiliation provided the opportunity for me to work closely with Iowa community college counselors and to gain an understanding of
the claims, concerns, and issues facing this dedicated group of student services professionals. This association sparked my interest to learn more about the opportunities and concerns facing Iowa community college counselors and also led to the pilot study that I refer to throughout this paper.

In all qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument used to gather and analyze data. Merriam (1998) suggests several personal characteristics make this *human instrument* better suited for qualitative research: tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity or intuition, and communication skills. These character traits are also the essence of a good counselor. These are skills that I use each day as a professional counselor and that I believe were my key to success as a qualitative researcher in this process. Guba and Lincoln (1989) reported that constructivists incorporate *tacit* knowledge into their research and define tacit knowledge as “all that we know minus all we can say” (p. 176). Counselors, as well as qualitative researchers, often rely on “gut instinct” or intuition to be successful in their work.

Action research, reported O’Brien (1998), is usually undertaken by practitioners who want to more thoroughly understand or improve their own practice. Stake (1995) stated that many qualitative case studies are “labors of love” (p. 46) for the researcher. I confirm, up front, that this study was a labor of love. I have great love for my profession, respect for my professional colleagues, and strongly believe that counselors can have a tremendous impact on student success. I have witnessed underprepared, insecure students who have fallen through the cracks all of their educational lives blossom and thrive in the community college with the support and encouragement of professional counselors. Clearly, my research intersects with my life in an integral way.
**Ethical considerations**

Although there was no potential harm to the safety, privacy, or dignity of the participants in this study, the following methods were used to ensure that the study was conducted ethically. Research was conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and the participants were not exploited in any way for my own gain. No deception was used in this study. Participants were asked to read and sign consent forms explaining their rights as participants and how the results of this study might be used in the future. I provided sufficient information for participants to give informed consent and ensured them that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. A Human Subjects form was filed and approved by Iowa State University before beginning the data collection phase of this research project.

I protected the confidentiality of the participants by coding the names of the institutions and the research participants in all written materials. I was concerned that counselors may fear retribution from their campus administrators if they divulged negative information about the institution or their supervisors. This could have been an area of concern because the essence of action research is that all stakeholders are partners in the process, counselors, presidents, and student services administrators alike. I was concerned that it might be difficult to maintain confidentiality during the study when all participants are working together as co-creators of knowledge. To my knowledge, this problem did not materialize. There was an atmosphere of mutual respect between participants, and even when there was minor disagreement, participants appeared open and honest about their feelings, concerns, and perceptions. All participants in this research study worked collaboratively toward the
common goal of finding ways to provide adequate counseling services to students in an era of decreasing budgets.

Pilot Study—Preliminary Findings

The preliminary study of 1999 revealed several interesting factors. When asked about current issues facing counselors today, respondents focused on four critical issues. First was the student/counselor ratio, which averaged 1200 students per counselor. A study by Cohen and Brawer (1996) found that the student/counselor ratio in community colleges was 382, much lower than the Iowa average. Six colleges reported that their institution had cut counseling positions within the past five years, which made the counselor/student ratio even greater at those institutions.

The second most frequent concern listed was the lack of a clear counselor identity within community colleges. One of the most startling facts that emerged from these data was the number and variety of job duties that most community college counselors perform in their institutions. The counselors surveyed compiled a comprehensive list of more than 50 job duties they were expected to perform.

The third issue was the influx of students with severe emotional problems entering the community colleges. A recent literature review suggested that counselors nationwide, in all settings, were experiencing an increase in student demand for services and in the severity of problems being presented. Iowa community college counselors agreed wholeheartedly with their colleagues across the country. All counselors reported an increased demand for services over the past five years, and all but one stated they had seen an increase in the severity of problems being presented by students.
Finally, counselors reported a concern for the changing student population and lack of institutional preparation for this change. A clear picture emerges of the major challenges facing counselors in the future when one looks at increased student problems, increased counselor job duties, and shrinking student services staff.

*Extinction, survival, and overload* were recurring themes expressed by Iowa community college counselors. There seemed to be a genuine fear for the survival of their profession within the community college system. One question repeated often by counselors was, “Will our jobs even exist in the future?” Counselors in Iowa are witnessing position cuts and feeling less respected by administrators at a time when more students need the unique assistance of a professional counselor. This research study intended to provide a better understanding of what Iowa community college counselors perceive as critical issues facing them and how community college administrators envision the counselor role in the future. This may lead administrators to value counseling services within their institutions and counselors may gain the tools to be better advocates for their profession.

**Summary**

Chapter III described the theoretical foundation for this research study on community college counseling. The thrust of action research was explained as well as how constructivism, feminist theory, postmodernism, and case study influenced the conceptual framework for the researcher. Research methods were detailed and researcher biases were acknowledged. The chapter concluded with a brief report on the findings from the 1999 pilot study that initiated the research study. Chapter IV will address the research findings.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Stringer (1999) suggested, "The researcher should ensure that accounts and reports capture the people's everyday, concrete, human experiences, allowing audiences to understand more clearly the realities of people's lives" (p. 207). Based on the work of Denzin (1997), Stringer proposed that research reports should be more than facts and that they must be "empathetic, evocative accounts that embody the significant experiences embedded in the taken-for-granted world of people's everyday lives" (p. 208). This chapter will provide the reader with a thorough description of the four cases that were studied and should impart a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the study's participants regarding community college counseling.

The chapter begins with a description and researcher perceptions of the participants and the four community colleges in which the participants are employed. A brief profile of the college president, student services administrator, and counselor(s) will be included. In order to maintain anonymity, the names of the participants and their community colleges have been replaced with a neutral letter designation. For example, the first college visited will be designated College A (C-A) and the participants as President A (P-A), Student Services Administrator A (SSA-A), and Counselor A (Cs-A). Although perhaps cumbersome for the reader, it ultimately was the most effective way to coordinate and present the data while maintaining confidentiality for the participants.
CASE A

College A (C-A)

College A is a growing community college in a large, culturally diverse, metropolitan city. The college has a relatively diverse population that reached approximately 4,500 students this year. College A is the primary feeder college for one of the state’s three regent institutions that is located in the adjacent city. College A has survived the administrative turmoil of three presidents and an interim president over the past decade. The current president has been in the leadership role for less than one year.

This was my first set of personal interviews and I approached the task with a nervousness I mentally reframed as enthusiasm. The magnitude of the task ahead of me felt overwhelming, yet exciting. Although I had visited College A previously, I consciously tried to view the surroundings with the analytical eye of a researcher. I noticed that the administrative offices at College A were open, bright, and clean. The student services area was attractive and students moved quickly and easily from one office to another. The building had a “student friendly” design and the student services offices I observed were bright and inviting, yet provided privacy for students meeting with staff.

President A (P-A)

President A holds dual master’s degrees in management and human resource development and speech communications and theatre arts. She earned a Ph.D. in educational administration and foundations and has worked in higher education for over 12 years. President A showed interest in my research and pointed out that her own dissertation was on mentoring leaders in community colleges. She said she welcomed the opportunity to mentor
other women in higher education. She graciously offered a copy of her own dissertation for me to read. Although her schedule allowed only a brief meeting that day, she responded to follow-up questions several times by e-mail correspondence.

**Student Services Administrator A (SSA-A)**

Administrator A seemed to be warm, open, and thoroughly committed to improving and advancing the student services profession. Student Services Administrator A earned a master’s degree in higher education administration and has worked in higher education for over 23 years. The general impression I gained from my interview with Administrator A was that he supported counselors at his institution, but was pragmatic about providing *only* the services needed by students.

There is a clear distinction at College A, in documents and application, regarding the job duties of counselors and academic advisors. This is primarily due to Administrator A who, when he took over as vice president of student services eight years ago, saw the need for counselors to clearly define their role and professional identity. He stated, “All counselors must step forward to define their roles on their campuses.” He added, “They need to differentiate their professional skills from those of advisors in order to justify their salary differences.”

**Counselor A (Cs-A)**

Counselor A stated that when dealing with student problems she often “feels like a pinball being slammed from one crisis to another.” She estimated that 85 percent of her time
is spent dealing with increasingly serious student situations. She reported that the students at her community college are more needy and less emotionally healthy today than in past years.

Counselor A has been employed at her community college for approximately four years. She earned a master's degree in K–14 counseling and recently began work on a Ph.D. Although Counselor A feels she has great latitude in her job to determine what counseling services she needs to provide for students, she stated the climate regarding position cuts in her department is "uncertain" at this point. She stated, "Sometimes it feels like we are struggling for our professional lives."

Summary

Counselors in Iowa view the student services division at College A as being relatively progressive in program development. There is a clear division of services between advisors and counselors that apparently has helped the student development office run more smoothly. Students have a myriad of services, programs, and workshops available to assist with their academic success. Although no counseling positions have been cut recently, College A has not added positions relative to its student population growth.

CASE B

College B (C-B)

This was my first visit to the College B campus. It is one of the smaller community colleges in the state with about 3,200 students but has the reputation of being one of the most scenic campus settings in Iowa. Even in the dull gray of this Iowa winter day, College B lived up to this advanced billing. From start to finish, everyone I met on my visit to College
B made me feel welcome. College B is located in a mid-sized Iowa town and in an economically depressed area of the state. The college is known for cutting-edge, high-tech programs and nationally competitive athletic programs.

Counselors at College B are used primarily as academic advisors. The faculty does not advise at this college so the entire advising and course-scheduling burden falls on the small counseling staff. The president and the counseling staff of College B seem to view the counseling role through different lenses, but there is an atmosphere of mutual respect between the individuals. Bearing in mind the former president of College B openly acknowledged a dislike for counselors, there seems to be a renewed hope that the new administration will take a more positive view of counselors and counseling than did the previous administration.

President B (P-B)

President B has been employed in higher education for over 20 years and earned a Ph.D. in higher education. He has been president at College B for less than one year. President B earned a master's degree in counseling but stated he never used the degree as a professional counselor. He confessed he uses the skills he developed in the counseling program daily in his work. Although he said he enjoyed the field of study, he never practiced counseling other than during his practicum and never carried a counseling load. "I am glad I got my degree in that, but I could not do that work on a full-day basis." He continued, "I don't have the stamina to do justice to that work. I put in full days, but that is different than doing counseling work all day."
Student Services Administrator B (SSA-B)

Administrator B works in a newly remodeled building designed specifically for student services. It is a bright, cheerful, and an obvious hub of student activity. I visited campus at the beginning of the student registration period, which meant there were groups and lines of students throughout the building, particularly at the counseling and financial aid offices.

Administrator B started as a student at College B 30 years ago. He stated that there is nowhere else he would rather be and he plans to retire from this college in the not so distant future. A few minutes into the interview, Administrator B excused himself to deal with a student issue. Back in a short time, he reported, "I had to expel a student—just part of the job." It was apparent throughout the interview that this student services administrator thoroughly loves the challenges and joys of working with college students.

Counselor B1 (Cs1-B)

I have been acquainted with Counselor B1 for several years through our association in ICCSSA and attendance at statewide conferences. When I met her at her office, she appeared visibly exhausted. During our meeting, she was called away three times to attend to student issues. Counselor B1 is in the unique position of being the director of counseling as well as the College B registrar. One person trying to do two full-time jobs could account for her look of exhaustion. She called the stacks of paper on her desk "organized chaos."

Counselor B1 is obviously frustrated that counselors at her institution are used mainly as academic advisors. She talked in great detail about how the talents of the counselors are not being utilized when the majority of their time is spent scheduling classes. She stated, "For a long time we were told we don't get into the therapy stuff because we aren't
therapists.” She continued by discussing how counselors do not deal with a shell of a human
being, but a whole person and counselors cannot separate the emotional and social problems
students bring with them to college. Despite the fact that advising is their primary job,
personal and social counseling is also a vital component of what counselors do at College B.

Counselor B2 (Cs2-B)

Counselor B2 is the newest counselor at College B and one of three full-time
counselors. Her master’s is in guidance counseling and her most recent position was as a high
school teacher/counselor. Counselor B2 is bright, optimistic, inquisitive, and genuine. After
speaking with counselors who have fought the political battles for many years and perhaps at
this point are a little cynical, I found Counselor B energizing to interview.

Counselor B2 was surprised to find so much of her time at the community college spent
pulled away from students working on curriculum and other campus projects. She reported
the majority of her time is spent on advising, scheduling, and other projects. Relatively little
of her time is spent on personal counseling, but she affirmed that mental health is of great
interest to her and she would like to work with more of those issues. Counselor B2
acknowledged that she feels valued by some, but not all, administrators on her campus. Even
as a new counselor, she appears to understand the value of campus outreach as evidenced by
her comment, “I would like to feel more valued so I will try to market myself to get that
feeling. It takes time to cultivate those kinds of relationships.”
Summary

There seems to be mutual respect among the counseling staff, student services administrator, and the new College B president, even though there is an undercurrent of frustration that counselors are not being used to their full potential. President B admitted, “If we lost a counselor here, I would ask the counseling director to look at replacing that position with an advisor.”

CASE C

College C (C-C)

College C is one of the largest community colleges in the state with an enrollment of approximately 11,000, including its five satellite campuses. Its main campus is located in a suburb of the state’s capital city. The building that houses the student services area has all the amenities of a college office but lacks the warmth and welcoming atmosphere I experienced at Colleges A and B. Perhaps this is due to the size of the institution. Many student services employees are stationed in open cubicles; others are fortunate to have an office around the outside edge of the large, open area. The counselors have doors on their offices that allow for confidential conversations with their clients.

Over the last several years College C has not replaced counselors as they have left or retired from the institution. They have replaced master’s level counseling staff with associate or bachelor’s level advisors. This seems to be a trend at College C, much to the dismay of the student services staff. Currently, there is a “wait and see” attitude as they monitor the policies of the new president.
President C (P-C)

President C is new to the state of Iowa and to his institution this year. After several attempts to meet in person and many scheduling conflicts, it was finally agreed that electronic communication might be the most efficient way to interview this busy new president. President C earned a master’s degree in English and creative writing and an Ed.D. in educational curriculum, instruction, and administration. He has been in the higher education profession for the past 25 years.

President C stated that college students need some level of counseling due to the number of social problems they face today, but admitted that he is still evaluating the overall need for counseling at his new institution.

Student Services Administrator C (SSA-C)

Student Services Administrator C has been in her position for less than one year but has over 15 years of experience in higher education at a major university, a private college, and community College C. Her master’s degree is in higher education with an emphasis in student development and counseling. Student Services Administrator C loves working in the community college and stated,

You get everything here. The 67-year-old person who wants to come back to take one class, the high school dropout, the kids who are advanced in high school, and the people who are coming back for retraining. You don’t get that at a four-year institution.
It was obvious during our interview that she is committed to making the college experience better for students and offered many examples of how she intends to accomplish that goal at College C.

Counselor C1 (Cs1-C)

Counselor C1 has worked at College C for over 28 years. He has earned a bachelor’s degree in social science education and a master’s degree in school counseling. His coaching background and military (Reserves) involvement was noticeable during our interview as his dialog was sprinkled liberally with athletic and military metaphors such as “leading the troops,” “on front lines,” “run the charge,” “blue chipper,” “hand off the baton,” and “days when you are not on your game.”

On a personal note, Counselor C1 has been my acquaintance for the seven years I have been involved in ICCSSA. I know him to be dedicated to helping students and find it discouraging that he is considering early retirement due to a feeling of being undervalued and overburdened at College C.

Counselor C2 (Cs2-C)

Counselor C2 is a highly valued resource at College C. He earned a master’s degree in counseling and has been employed at College C for approximately a quarter of a century. He retired last year, but is still working part time as a counselor and advisor at College C. He feels there is a misunderstanding on the part of the administration as to the need and value of having professional counselors on staff. Over the past 25 years, he has seen a growing complexity and severity of issues presented by college students and fears the trend to
eliminate counselors is not in the best interest of College C’s student population. He also admits that counselors have not done their part in regard to assessment and documentation of their effectiveness with students and urged counselors to pursue this area.

Summary

Of all the cases studied for this research project, the administrative decisions being made at College C seem to most closely represent the fears of counselors in Iowa. Whether the decision has been made public or not, the message appears to be that professional counselors are not highly valued at College C. Counselor C1 said it best, “The price is right—two advisors for the price of one counselor. It isn’t stated explicitly, but actions speak loudly!”

CASE D

College D (C-D)

College D is the largest community college in the state with an enrollment of over 14,000 students. Considered by many to be one of the most progressive and innovative community colleges in the state, it is located in a state industrial center and in close proximity to one of the state’s three regent institutions. The campus is large and it is evident as you move about campus that there is great campus pride. As is true with many larger institutions, the student services area lacks the feeling of warmth that the smaller colleges impart.

The administrators interviewed at College D seem to have an understanding, appreciation, and commitment to the counseling function at their institution. Counselors who
have retired or left the college have been replaced and both the president and student services administrator acknowledged that they have no intention of reducing counseling staff. But with the growing number of students enrolling at College D, Student Services Administrator D reminded me that they have not hired additional counseling staff, so in essence, the counselors are still trying to do more with fewer resources.

President D (P-D)

President D is considered a strong, dynamic, visionary community college leader. He has been the president of College D for over 17 years. President D earned a Ph.D. in educational administration and has a 25-year employment history in higher education. Due to unfortunate circumstances, I was unable to connect personally with President D so, once again, resorted to electronic communications to gain his perspectives on the issues. I found this disappointing because I have heard complimentary remarks about this man since joining the community college system and was looking forward to meeting him. Perhaps a reflection of his no-nonsense personality, President D’s response to my questions was brief, direct, and on my desk in less than one week.

Student Services Administrator D (SSA-D)

Student Services Administrator D worked her way up through the ranks at College D. She started in a clerical position in 1972, has held most positions within student services over her 30-year career, and is now “second in command” at College D. Student Services Administrator D earned a master’s in higher education with an emphasis in management and a Ph.D. in higher education. She has been in her current position for less than one year. Her
honest comments allowed me to examine several issues from a different perspective. I appreciated having an alternative standpoint to consider.

Counselor D1 (Csl-D)

I have been acquainted with Counselor D for many years through ICCSSA. We have often talked about the concerns of community college counselors and how to be better advocates for the profession. When we met for this interview, he was unusually discouraged about being stretched in more directions than ever. He reported that about 75 percent of his job relates to personal counseling and the issues students present are increasingly severe. Although the College D administration vocalized their support for counseling, Counselor D still reported that he and his colleagues feel uncertain and concerned.

Counselor D has been in the profession for about 25 years and spent 15 of those as a career counselor. His master’s degree is in counseling with an emphasis in personnel/human resources. His background in sales appears to have created a different perspective from Counselor D than from many of his counseling colleagues. He acknowledged he has always felt that counselors need to do a better job of marketing themselves to students, faculty, administration, and the community. “It is a matter of creating more demand than supply,” he stated. Counselor D probably does a better job of campus and community outreach than any counselor with which I am acquainted. Unfortunately, assuming more responsibilities than one’s colleagues, paired with a climate of perceived job insecurity, can quickly lead to job burnout.
Summary

On the surface, College D administrators understand and support the counseling function at a deeper level than any of the other four cases studied. It appears the support is not being communicated in a way that eases the frustration and fear of the College D counselors. Student Services Administrator D reminded me that although the student population continues to grow at College D, no additional counseling positions have been added. To do so, she claimed, counselors would need to produce data that clearly demonstrate that need.

Chapter IV examined four community colleges, their presidents, student services administrators, and counselors. The four campuses were visited and all but two participants were interviewed in person. Two presidents were interviewed via electronic communications due to scheduling conflicts. Data were gathered, analyzed, and recycled into follow-up questions that were then addressed by the participants by phone or e-mail.

The participants at all four community colleges in this research study were open and willing to share their perceptions regarding the counseling situation at their institutions. All participants acknowledged the need for their colleges to provide some level of counseling services. Each administrator suggested that counselors should expand and market their services, become more diversified and visible on campus, and assess and document their success with students. Three of the four community colleges have not eliminated any counseling positions over the past several years but enrollments have grown at each institution and no additional counseling positions have been added. The other community college has eliminated several counseling positions recently. Although the president did not allude to this, there is a fear among staff that the counseling function may be eliminated
altogether as current staff retire or leave the institution. A more in-depth account of participant comments follows in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V. EMERGENT THEMES

An analysis of the data gathered from the participant interviews revealed many interesting perspectives. Several major themes surfaced as being key for the research participants and those themes have been classified into two categories, Present Realities and Perspectives on the Future. Present Realities opens this chapter by reviewing the current state of community college counseling as viewed and experienced by the research participants. The second section, Perspectives on the Future, continues by addressing what the research participants suggested counselors must do to demonstrate their professional value and to be better advocates for their profession. General themes will be connected to the literature review found in Chapter II. Chapter V concludes with a summary of the research findings. As a reminder for the reader, the research questions guiding this study were:

- How do community college administrators, counselors, and students perceive the need for counseling services on the community college campus?
- What factors do community college counselors, presidents, and student services administrators perceive as having led to the decrease in counseling positions in Iowa community colleges?
- What meaning is conveyed to counseling professionals when their services are sometimes perceived as expendable or peripheral to the institutional mission?
- What steps can counselors take to assess and demonstrate their professional value and ensure that their services reflect the mission of their institution?
Present Realities

The literature review found in Chapter II gave the reader a glimpse into the counseling profession in higher education and several of the distinctive concerns counselors face in the community college setting. This section will present the research participants' viewpoints and voices regarding many of those same issues. The community college counseling concerns discussed by participants include:

- Need for counseling at the community college,
- Severity of student problems,
- Counselor role definition,
- Financial constraints,
- Stressed and stretched,
- Ideological differences, and
- Appeal for professional value.

The foundation of feminist theory advocated by Smith (1987) is that research begins from the participants' actual experiences in everyday life. It gives participants a voice to describe their world from where they stand and takes away barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves. The following section gives voice to the research participants regarding the current context of their lived experience. It also attempts to uncover and explain constraints that are barriers to counselors' self-determination as espoused by critical postmodern theory.

Critical postmodern theory, according to Lather (1991), is intended to enlighten, empower, and emancipate people from oppression. She urged that we use our research to
empower the oppressed to change their own oppressive realities by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their situation.

This section demonstrates that counselors' professional identities have been fragmented, their roles have been restricted, and they have been excluded from the decision-making process that has influenced their professional identity. It also illustrates the inequity of power within their institutions.

Feminist theory, as proposed by Lather (1991), posits that given enabling conditions, individuals have something valuable to say about their lives and have the means necessary to change. This research process has attempted to give participants the opportunity to reflect on the issues and bring into focus the factors that have led to the current predicament.

Need for counseling at the community college

One president at a Midwestern community college stated, “The need for counseling in the community college is a bottomless abyss” (Cavancara, 1997, p. 9). A study by Sher, Wood, and Gotham (1996) found a distress rate of 70–90 percent among students surveyed and suggested that there is evidence that freshmen are more likely than other students to experience what they termed “freshman distress” (p. 49). Considering that over 50 percent of new college students are choosing to begin their educational journey at a community college, this may well mean the majority of community college students are experiencing some level of distress that could lead to attrition. Counselors are in the unique position to intervene early with students who are at risk for dropping out of college.

All research participants agreed that at least some level of counseling services is needed at a community college. A few of the reasons counselors are needed are to avoid liability
issues, to deal with campus crises, and to be a catalyst for student success. President C feels he is too new to his position to fully assess the need for counseling services at his institution but acknowledged that

[w]ith the number of social problems faced by today’s community college student, some level of counseling services is needed. We [administrators] may be taking a risk of having a serious incident and being held liable for not preparing properly for that eventuality if we have no counseling services available. Students with serious problems may have no other place to go which could result in a serious incident or event that could have been avoided.

Other administrators agreed with his assessment of the situation, to varying degrees.

I think it is vital, I think it is going to change. I feel that our new president has a stronger opinion that there is a need compared to our last president. I think counseling is vital to these institutions [Community Colleges] but I think you have to make your importance empirical. (SSA-B)

Student Services Administrator D had this to say about the need for counseling:

I consider that the real worth of a counselor on this campus for me is to have a crisis intervention, it is well worth having the counselors here full time. All it takes is one student that can be in a myriad of situations that you alluded to. To have that counselor available to get them what they need, to get them through that next hour, was worth having the full-time counselors here. I cannot even imagine not having counselors here. College D will never not have counselors here. No one else is trained. no one else has that background in the discipline.
The Student Services Administrator C agreed regarding counseling services at College C.

It is extremely important to have counselors here. I think counselors are a resource that has been misdirected in the past ten years. I also am responsible for student discipline and there are a lot of cases that it would be very easy to say "just get off campus, we don't want you here," but most of those are situations that they are acting up for attention, they need help, they need guidance and what we need to be able to do is provide someone who can sit and talk with them. I don't view it as we are responsible for turning their life around but we can be the catalyst to get them to the right spot.

But she also provided an additional perspective on this issue:

Whether or not counselors are a vital part of the community college system might depend on if the services that the counselors offer could be picked up elsewhere. Part of me feels that having no counselors might have a devastating impact; the practical side of me says that students aren't going to know what they are missing so big deal (p. 11). Students may think that the counselor is the best thing that ever happened to them but after a couple of years and a whole new batch of students come in, they would never know what the service was so they would never miss it. It is a fact!

Student Services Administrator C continued by explaining the view of some others on her campus:

From a developmental standpoint, yes, I think we do. From a purely capitalistic standpoint, they know what they are getting themselves in to. I know it sounds really callused, but I can hear people say that. We are here to educate them, not
to pamper them; we are here to give them an opportunity to succeed and basically, they also have the opportunity to fail. I don’t like that! If we truly go by what our goals are, our institution talks about developing fully rounded individuals so they are appreciative of diversity, speak well, there are seven different things. If you don’t have a counseling area, where are they going to get some of those things?

Although she believes that the “need for counseling in the community college is endless and increasing,” President A also believes that if enough time is spent on intake advising, the student is more likely to be a good “fit” for his/her program, thus eliminating some emotional problems. She suggests “customized advising” at intake where individual needs, goals, and abilities are thoroughly assessed.

Student Services Administrator B presented the following strong warning for counselors and administrators. “If we (counselors) don’t change we are going to have big trouble and the institutions will have big trouble without them too. I guarantee you that if you get rid of all of your counselors you are in deep shit!”

Severity of student problems

There are a myriad of concerns that college students face today. Winston (1996) stated that perhaps no institution in the nation has sufficient staff to address the abundance of student needs and expectations for services. Community colleges cater to a diverse group of students in terms of demographics but also in personal characteristics. “The term ‘college student’ can no longer be thought of without recognizing a diversity that matches that of a multicultural and rapidly changing society” (Baird, 1996, p. 519).
Counselors express frustration that administrators may not understand the problems students carry with them to college today. Although difficult to document, counselors nationwide convey stories of the increased severity and frequency of emotional problems presented by their students. The argument from administration seems to be that institutions of higher education are not in the business of providing mental health treatment. “We are not a clinic” (Cvancara, 1997, p. 12), and “We’re a college. We’re not running a mental-health institution” (Evelyn, 2002, p. A30) are common phrases reportedly being expressed by community college administrators.

Professional counselors are trained to provide interventions intended to alleviate severe personal problems and most want to practice the techniques they learned in graduate school, a sentiment my participants expressed. But very few students with psychological problems need intensive, long-term therapy. The majority of students can benefit greatly from short-term interventions and counselors have adapted by offering group therapy, brief counseling, and off-campus referrals for the most serious cases (Heitzmann & Nafziger, 2001). Most counselors just want to ensure that a minimal level of assistance is available to students in need so that they can function optimally as students:

I think a lot of it is that those administration people don’t really understand the severity of those student needs that come in, in terms of... we know that there are many, many more students coming in now days with more problems than they used to and how much more complicated it is. They do not understand who our clientele is. (Cs2-C)

The standpoint of most counselors is to view their student clients holistically, whereas administrators may tend to compartmentalize student needs, view them as an “FTE,” or
merely assess their academic needs. One counselor acknowledged the importance of seeing the student holistically:

Students walk in the door with all this baggage, so to speak; we have to deal with that. They come to us and you cannot separate out all this other stuff they bring with them when you sit down with them to figure out a schedule. You cannot say “Well sorry, all we can deal with right now is what classes you will take next semester.” All that baggage they bring with them to your office is the same baggage they carry with them to class, when they sit down to study, every place they go. So it is that entire person that we, as counselors, have to deal with every time we sit down with them. Counselors look at the entire person. If you deal with the shell you are not dealing with the human being, you are dealing with a number and that’s it. They (counselors) are dealing with frustrated students during registration and that is when many of their problems arise because they are dealing with the problems of stress and anxiety with students and that is when the lid comes off and all hell breaks loose. That is when you meet yourself coming and going and you are dealing with so many problems at the height of registration so you do use a lot of counseling skills. They are frustrated because they are doing so much of the registration and paper pushing. For a long time when I was counseling we were told, “You don’t get into the therapy stuff because we aren’t therapists.” Well, a lot of our students need that kind of help. (Cs1-B)

Counselor Cs1-B also expressed frustration that she and her staff are not allowed to use the skills they are trained to use:
A lot of our students are no different than students on any college campus, they are dealing with substance abuse, domestic abuse, financial crises and a lot of them have nowhere to turn so they turn to us or they don’t turn to us and they are out there adrift and don’t come back. We read about them in the newspaper and such. If the strings were cut on our hands a little bit and we were allowed to intervene a little more we could be more effective with our students. Not that we are told we will get fired if we do more, but there is the unwritten rule that you are not a therapist, you don’t have time to do that. Well, why are you paying me for an MA in counseling when you don’t allow me to use my skills?

It was clear that this administrator understands the complexities of the community college student and the issues they carry with them to college:

Having worked at four-year institutions in the past, it is very homogeneous there, primarily 18–24 year olds. Some non-trads, but your issues there fall into the Chickering vectors of self-awareness that has nothing to do with what we encounter here. We have people who have gotten laid off, maybe a single parent, a family to support, trying to figure out how am I going to put food on the table, take classes, pay the rent, and write this rinky-dink paper. They have a lot of different pressures that they need some help with. (SSA-C)

This administrator, regarding the changes in faculty interactions with students, expressed another viewpoint.

Times have really changed. I think there is a market for people to deal with counseling. I now deal with things that 10 years ago a teacher was real comfortable dealing with, but today the issues are too complex. You have to be
half lawyer and not be afraid to fail and they [teachers] just do not want to deal with those things anymore. It has become a problem on our campus. Teachers just do not want to deal with it. (SSA-B)

Counselor Cs1-C explained how the problems of community college students reflect the issues of society:

We take everyone who walks in the door and we (community colleges) are a reflection of the total society. I like the aspect of serving everyone who desires an education, but we are getting a lot more emotional and mental illness, medication or drug use, disabilities, low functioning, and special needs. If we aren’t here to deal with this stuff, who will? Faculty aren’t trained and don’t want to deal with those issues. Who will?

Counselor role definition

Unfortunately, there is no clear role definition for community college counselors. Gysbers (2001) suggested that various groups view the purpose of counseling differently, a debate that has been ongoing for 70 years. In 1983, Thurston warned counselors “to give particular attention to building a professional image.” She continued, “No one seems to be quite sure what counselors do or should do (including counselors themselves)” (p. 114).

Community college counselors could be viewed as a hybrid that evolved from both the high school guidance model and the university mental health model. Although many counselors enjoy the variety of duties this model affords, that same multiplicity of duties complicates the counselor role and can lead to it being misunderstood, unappreciated, and even abused (Robbins, 1983).
In the community college, this role confusion is most evident in the area of advising. In the last decade, community college counselors have moved from providing personal counseling to being defined as academic counselors (Cvancara, 1997). If there is not a clear understanding of the differences between the counseling and advising role, administrators may find it easy to make the decision to hire the less expensive advisors. Counselors around the country echo frustration regarding this growing trend. A 2002 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* discussed a recent example at City Colleges of Chicago where 19 master’s level counselors were being replaced by 30–40 Bachelor’s level academic advisors (Evelyn, 2002). The co-director of the Consortium for Community College Development stated that the president at City College “is not doing anything other presidents haven’t at least thought of privately” (Evelyn, 2002, p. A30).

This current trend may continue if counselors don’t find a way to unmistakably define their professional roles within their institutions. Many participants offered suggestions regarding role definition and seemed to understand the urgency of this issue:

- Counselors must step forward and clearly define their role on the community college campus. They must do a better job of defining their specialized skills and training that differs from academic advising. Counselors must then tie those skills into retention and how they can lead to student success. (SSA-A)

Counselor Cs2-C explained,

- One of the fortunate things that we pushed for here is that we have had a good distinction between what we do and what advisors do. They (advisors) are required to have an associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree preferable. We have to make our case based on the needs of our students. In the classroom you have
grades to prove you are being successful with a student. In our profession we don’t.

Counselor D stated that the impact on students would be devastating if no counselors, only academic advisors, were available on campus.

Academic advisors do not have the professional training to deal with the kind of issues counselors deal with every day. No one else on campus has that training. Do we want amateurs directing students’ lives? That would be like having your dental hygienist perform your root canal. Our training and our credentials give us the credibility to help people find their way in life. But if we don’t view ourselves as professionals, others will not either.

Student Services Administrator C clearly understands the counselor role and the value of their presence on a college campus:

The advisors I have here, half of them do not have a bachelor’s degree, let alone a master’s. They are not suited to counseling situations. Last year we had someone call in and threaten to commit suicide, a student, fortunately we had a counselor available who wasn’t tied up with other projects that we could turn the call over to and get 911 to respond to the house. Possibly an advisor could have done that, but they have such a narrow training at this point that causes some concerns. So I think counselors are extremely important. We have such a diverse population and they bring so much to the campus.

One counselor expressed his concern in this way:

The administration started hiring educational advisors to help us with the things that didn’t really need a master’s degree. That was kind of the purpose way back
when. The last two and a half years or whatever, we’ve seen counselors leave and rather than replace them, they send an educational advisor in. Which saddens me on a quality kind of issue… the range of expertise. Especially in the community college system, many of these situations that you’ve got to go deeper than just “Here’s the courses to take.” There are life situations. (Cs1-C)

At College B, counselors are limited to the advising role. President B reported that the administrative stance at his institution has been that

[c]ounselors provide a smaller role than most counselor outlooks might provide for themselves. We told our counselors that they are predominately academic advisors, that’s what they do. I would say that the role our counselors play here is predominately advising, but I know from personal experience that they also do personal counseling.

One Student Services Administrator acknowledged that counselors are the only professionals trained to provide personal assistance, self-improvement advice, crisis management, and problem solving. He reported that “some faculty can do it, others are invisible, and others should never attempt it” (SSA-B).

Financial constraints

The most obvious reason that administrators decide to eliminate any position is due to budget constraints. In 2001 Heitzmann and Nafziger reported, “Counseling centers have been under enormous pressure to provide more cost effective services” (p. 403). Schuh (1996) stated, “The fiscal environment in which the student affairs profession finds itself is challenging at best” (p. 458). This may be even truer in today’s economy. The fiscal situation
in Iowa has worsened in the past year with education at all levels suffering major cuts in state funding. One problem counselors face is that “cost-benefit studies can be difficult to apply to counseling services in a way that truly gauges the contributions of such units” (Bishop, 1995). Research participants were asked how much of the current problem facing counselors may simply be due to budget cuts.

It is a frustrating issue they [administrators] have to deal with now in light of budgets and having to justify do you hire another person at a starting salary at $60,000 or hire a replacement at mid-$30s. A lot of times the bean counters think it is an easy choice, but it’s the quality of life that we provide for the students here. (SSA-C)

Student Services Administrator B agreed, “A lot of it is funding. You cannot do without an English teacher, if you have so many English sections. So what do you do without? You do without ancillary function sorts of people.” Student Services Administrator A suggested all cuts are due to budget considerations: “Any decision to cut counseling staff would come down to a budget decision. There is no need to have six counselors on staff, but having a counselor available on campus is essential.”

This counselor has been around budget battles many times due to his long tenure at his college and believes budget is the primary reason for the loss of counseling positions:

My perception is that it is 95 percent driven. Historically as budgets get tight SS people go out; as budgets get better and there is more money again then SS are back again. So it is budget driven...which is unfortunate because as we talked earlier, if those folks could be awakened that they need to be looking at the goals of the institution and what the students’ needs are, I think we should be...
considered as important as any instructor if the goal is to have our students leave here successfully. (Cs2-C)

The president of College C discussed the "Catch 22" situation in which administrators find themselves in regards to the counseling issue. When asked for reasons why counselors are not being replaced as they retire from his institution, he stated,

[e]conomics, for one. We have to cut back everywhere we can. Another factor he suggested was that some presidents are worried that by conducting personal counseling counselors may be exposing us (the institution) to liability in that this may not be as controlled an environment, like a medical clinic, to safely provide those services. (P-C)

The problem appears to be, according to President C, that some administrators may fear liability issues if they don’t supply the necessary preventative counseling services that could head off a potentially explosive individual or situation. They may also fear liability issues if a counselor provides an intervention beyond his/her area of expertise.

**Stressed and stretched**

When two counselors get together you can bet the topic of stress will arise. With shrinking staff and growing enrollments, counselors are being asked to do more with less. One counselor used the analogy of "feeling like a pinball being bounced from one crisis to another" (Cs-A). Another stated that all their counselors have time for is triage (Cs-B).

Combine growing job duties with a feeling of being undervalued and you have a formula for stress. Counselor C1 expressed his frustration in this way:
We have lost about 2½ counselors in the last two years, but none were replaced. Two others have moved from 12 to 9 month positions to try to save their job—as means of survival and self-preservation. We have had a 7 percent increase in student enrollment and are still losing counseling positions. They’re just not replacing people—basically, they are just “dumping” on the people who are left. The more you take on, the more they give you to do. You continue to do all you have been doing with the bodies that are left. They still want you to do those other things and more…register students, teach the computer registration, etc. It has put a crunch in our lives even more…I have just kind of…I am tired. I am spread so thin because I have to spend time doing mundane kinds of things…scheduling, copies, etc. There is no time to sit back to reflect on what you are doing, planning, think about where you are going. It has gotten so stressful at times. It is that kind of a situation that is driving me to consider taking early retirement. If I had to say today, I will probably retire next year at age 55—it’s kind of depressing.

At least one administrator seemed to empathize and conveyed that even though no positions may have been lost at an institution, a growing student population with no increase in staff still adds to the counselor burden:

The reason that it [position cuts] has not occurred lately at College D is that we have a president and a vice president who have an understanding of that profession [counseling], have made a personal commitment to counselors, and have told the counselors that they will be replaced. But what you have not seen is that College D has had exponential enrollment growth and has hired no
additional counselors. You need to see that because it has affected how College
D operates…not in a reduction, but in no increases. So, we still have the same
problem, more students with the same number of counselors means they are
stretched just as if there were cuts made. (SSA-D)

Ideological differences

Another interesting and unexpected perspective was reported by several participants
regarding reasons for the loss of counseling positions. In some instances, it may be due to a
personality conflict or ideological difference with an upper level administrator. In others, it
might be a counselor being viewed as ineffective or incompetent by administration. A few
participants were even willing to give examples, on the record.

Our last president made it known that he did not like counselors; he did not need
a lot of counselors and did not like them. That is not a confidential thing; he
made it known around here. I do not know. but his chief student services person
was a counselor, his chief personnel officer who is now the president was a
counselor, his grant writer and foundation guy was a counselor so he told you
that he did not like counselors but his top 5 of his top 7 people were counselor
educated. It sounds like a contradiction. No one knows him better than me, but I
do not know why. He just said that he did not want to hire a bunch of them, but
yet he liked them as his top-level administrators. That is what his top people
were. (SSA-B)

Another student services administrator gave an even more specific example of an ideological
difference:
The former president did not care for some of the personalities who were in charge of counseling center. We had a woman who tried to start a program exclusively for gay women. That really started the downward trend. It got the counselors excited because they would be able to use their counseling skills instead of "Here is your academic coursework, good job, you have grade problems." As a result, the first time a counselor retired, he chose not to replace that person...period! The next time we had a counselor retire we replaced with an academic advisor. It has been the trend up until three months ago. I approached my vice president and said one of my counselors is leaving and justified the need. I was able to replace her with another counselor. I do think there is still the trend, without a formal decision, that why should we hire counselors when we have advisors who can do pretty much the same thing?

(SSA-C)

The suggestion was made by several administrators to consider the possibility that counselors are being eliminated simply due to individual ineffectiveness. President D firmly stated that counselors are only eliminated if the individual counselor is ineffective and that at his institution, it has always been his administration's intention to replace counseling positions. Of course, this fails to answer the question as to why some institutions are choosing to eliminate entire counseling departments.

One student services administrator explained that there might be a misunderstanding between counselors and administrations regarding the counselor role that may lead to a watering down of counseling services:
For those individuals who do not understand that disciplinary background of what counseling is, that is misunderstood because this is what they see. They see a counselor in their office, waiting for an appointment, an hour appointment, and a schedule with several cancellations. It begins to look as though that function is not necessary. Or that function should be combined with many other tasks. As soon as you combine other tasks with that function, the counseling purist will have great philosophical differences and difficulties with that, and rightfully so. So what do you have? You try to have hybrids, so to speak. (SSA-D)

**Appeal for professional value**

Many counselors expressed the feeling of being undervalued by their administration and others on campus. They felt this was demonstrated in different ways, but primarily by being asked to do more with fewer resources, combined with the intimidating prospect of having their position eliminated. One counselor expressed his feelings this way:

The price is right—two advisors for the price of one counselor! It isn’t stated explicitly but actions speak loudly. It’s the value...or the lack of institutional value that they place on counseling. As I get to the end of the road here (retirement), I am not feeling good about feeling unvalued by this institution. On the other side, I am feeling dumped on because they are not replacing the folks who leave. And so there are two negatives coming together there and it is kind of burning out that desire to help others. You want to hear from
administrators that, hey, we have to replace that guy, he does valuable work at this institution. (Cs1-C)

Here is another example that will help the reader understand the feeling of being devalued as you read the experiences of this counselor:

For a long time, counselors were seen as a necessary evil or paper pusher, and that's all that they were seen as doing. They still hold them (counselors) at arm's length, they don't embrace them as useful but see them as “Maybe we should have counselors on staff” but are unwilling to hire more of them or to utilize them more as real counselors. What they use them for now is to register students and quite frankly, they can do so much more than that. They [counselors] are frustrated with that because they are not using their counseling skills to the fullest. (Cs1-B)

Another counselor offered a possible explanation for the lack of institutional value placed on counseling:

I think one of the reasons we counselors are not valued is partly because of faculty at this campus are not involved in the advising/counseling process. Early on it was designed that they were not involved and I think there are a lot of administrators that can't even see the difference between counselors and advisors other than the amount of salary. In fact, one of our prior administrators said just that, many times, and I would scream at him “How can you say that?” and he was a certified counselor himself. Maybe he was saying it tongue-in-cheek trying to get a reaction out of me, but he never really did anything in support of us. (Cs2-C)
President A honestly admitted that counseling may not be the first service to be considered for elimination, but may be one of the top because the service is seen as not being necessary for the college to run. Due to the current budget crisis, counseling positions at College A may be “reduced rather than eliminated, unless budgets are reduced more drastically than they are now” (P-A).

Many counselors have the feeling that their services are viewed, as President A stated, “as unnecessary or non-essential” to the mission of the college. President B had this to say about the value of counseling and the difficulty the counseling profession has in “proving” their value:

I don’t look at the counseling function as nonessential. What I think is that it is hard, more so than any other professional position we have, it is hard to quantify what we [counselors] do. When you get down to economics and people start to question, you can look at a faculty load and how many people are in the class. With counselors, you can fill out a contact card and say how many students they talked to but I might have someone walk in my office in the morning and might spend the rest of the week working on that issue. Student issues are the same way. One of those things that can intervene on your day and you can’t set aside an hour for a conference or whatever. And that is hard to quantify. Some counselors might be able to solve the problem in 20 minutes and another might spend 3–4 hours with it or several sessions. That may be part of the problem. When you try to evaluate on an economic basis, that is the most difficult position to quantify. But to say that they are nonessential, I think that is too
strong. I don't know of anyone who feels that way, I have never heard that said before.

Summary

Many of the same issues that were uncovered in the literature review surfaced during participant interviews. Although most of the recent literature regarding counseling issues details research carried out in four-year institutions and the K–12 system, it is clear that community college counselors are presently experiencing many of the same difficulties as their educational colleagues.

There was agreement among all research participants that some level of counseling services is needed for the community college's increasingly diverse and needy student population. It was clear that counselors did not believe their administrators fully understand the number and severity of problems today's students carry with them to college. Counselors expressed disappointment that, in many cases, they are discouraged from using their professional training and skills to the fullest; skills designed to assist students with personal and social problems. Counselors often expressed the feeling of being devalued. The feeling of being devalued, in part, is due to an unclear role identity that may lead some administrators to think that professional counselors can be replaced by academic advisors with no loss in the quality of services.

Administrators pointed to budget constraints as the main reason any position in a community college is reduced or eliminated. Even in the colleges in which there have been no counselor reductions, there have also been no increases in staff to match the growing student population.
Perspectives for the Future

It is increasingly important for counseling center staff to be able to describe and evaluate their activities from the educational perspective of the entire campus. There is an increased demand to evaluate their work, assess their outcomes, update their services, and strategically plan for the future. To preserve college counseling as a profession, counselors must demonstrate that they contribute directly to the educational and personal development of students and that their mission meshes with the institutional mission. This section continues by giving research participants a voice regarding what counselors can or should do to improve their professional status in their institutions. Themes in this section include:

- Marketing counseling services,
- Counselor role conflict,
- Campus collaboration, and
- Assessment and evaluation.

The aim of critical postmodernism is to bridge the gap between research and action (Rhoads, 1994). The following section clearly demonstrates the need for counselors to take decisive action and to empower themselves. Counselors have relinquished their power within their institutions by not demanding that their voices be heard. Based on feminist theory, by their silence, the value of their work has also been silenced (Lather, 1991). hooks maintains that “people can become accomplices in their own oppression” (Rhoads, 1994, p. 32). Counselors must guard against allowing oppression within their institutions.

Through the creative use of marketing and collaboration, counselors can empower themselves by breaking their silence and acting individually and collectively to improve the conditions of their professional lives. According to Lather (1991), empowerment is
something one does for oneself, not something done to or for someone else. Counselors must assert their authority within their institutions. By assessing and documenting their effectiveness, counselors can gain control over the production of data and the future direction of their profession.

The following section gives a voice to participants and reveals how counselors, through enlightened action, can increase their power and equity within their institutions.

**Marketing counseling services**

The need for counselors to learn to market themselves and their services to the entire campus community was a theme that resonated through all participant interviews. Bishop (2002) acknowledged that administrators may not always understand the needs of counselors, and this may be in part because they are not always kept informed about the changes that are occurring in the profession. Wolf and Aguren (1978) advised counselors to take responsibility for educating their campus about student needs and the appropriate role for counselors. Bishop (1990) suggested that the burden is on counselors to articulate their needs and to provide their administration with the data to support their requests.

It is not enough to know you are successful with students; counselors must learn to "beat the drum and toot their own horn" about those successes. One counselor asked, "Isn't that bragging?" I repeatedly heard that communicating your professional value loudly is exactly what needs to take place, but counselors often have the personality type that confuses self-promotion with arrogance. Nevertheless, participants agreed that marketing counseling services is absolutely necessary.
Student Services Administrator B suggested counselors are to blame also for not teaching their administration that they are trained professionals and are to be treated as such:

I think counselors are doing things right now that are vital to the survival of the institutions. What I don't think they are doing very well is marketing themselves. Part of that is the mindset, part of it is you get defensive; if you don't like me, I don't like you either. You get that mindset, you say okay you are not smart enough to know what I am doing, and so I am to going to spend a whole hell of a lot of time explaining it to you. Like it or not, those folks are bottom line finance people. Funding is going down and they are going to keep the people that they cannot do without and get rid of people that they can. That is just the deal.

Another student services administrator feels marketing is a problem for counselors as well as the rest of student services:

We have to “sell” student services in general to the campus as well as the administration. One way to demonstrate value to your administration, one that goes against all counseling principles, is tracking the clients and the type of clients and providing the weekly or monthly reports so we can say “We served the following types of situations” and advertise that, mainly to the upper administration, not the population at large. (SSA-C)

Student Services Administrator B had many things to say about the need for marketing services and several specific suggestions for how to do so. He strongly warned counselors to be proactive in their institutions and make themselves indispensable to their administrators. Following is an excerpt from his interview:
I told ICCSSA group, you have to market yourself. When I talked with the folks at ICCSSA, they had great ideas and were doing so much for their institutions but I doubt they told anyone except the group they were talking with. It is all a matter of marketing. You have to do a better job of it. The only way counseling will continue to be recognized is if they cannot do without you. It is your job to show them that they cannot do without you, that there may be some areas that they cannot do without. Retention is a financial issue, if we can keep 70 of those 134, that is a lot of money in tuition and state aid. If we can deal with difficult people and resolve conflict, those are things that we can do, but counselors do not like to do that. The more personal attention that we can give kids the better chance they have to succeed and counselors are the best people in the world to do that. That is going to keep their jobs for them if they get themselves in that situation. I really believe it is marketing. We have to show that what we do significantly improves the college environment.

Counselor role conflict

Several participants made reference to the type of person who is usually drawn to the counseling profession. People in the helping professions are often so busy taking care of others that they do not take the time to help themselves, or perhaps advocate for themselves. This could account for why so many counselors seem to find it difficult to tell others about their successes. According to many of the participants, this needs to change. Counselors must do a better job of marketing their services internally to the institution. “It is a sales game,” stated Counselor D. “We are selling options and ideas.” He feels part of the problem is that
too many counselors come from the non-aggressive world of education and not from the business world. "Counselors seem to shy away from or fear getting out there and really selling their services" (Cs-D).

Another counselor viewed the problem in this way:

We do not do a good job of marketing ourselves because we are in the kind of profession where we don’t beat our chest or beat the drum. When you look at the type of people, and I hate to stereotype people, but the type of people who go into counseling, aren’t we the type of people who go quietly about our jobs without fanfare, behind the scenes? We are very effective with the job we do, and the job gets done. People are excited about “Hey, this or that job is done” and they are unaware that it was us who did the job! And by golly we did such a great job but we don’t take the credit for it. (Cs1-B)

Another counselor acknowledged he finds self-promotion uncomfortable.

Then there is the nature of the beast...some of us are not aggressive, me first, big dog, ego driven. It’s not the front line, run the charge attitude. so there is partly that explanation of why our value hasn’t been broadcasted. (Cs1-C)

Student Services Administrator B pointed to counselor training programs, particularly those who adhere to the therapeutic practices of Carl Rogers, for producing a kind of passive, reactionary counselor. Simply stated, Roger’s theory was that maladjusted clients could improve given the proper therapeutic conditions of acceptance, empathy, and positive regard. The counselor role is minimal in this non-directive method, so the client is, in a sense, his/her own therapist or at least an active participant in his/her own healing. In reality, more counselors in college settings today are encouraged to practice some form of brief, solution-
focused therapy. But there seems to be a lingering perception of counselors taking this passive role with student clients. Student Services Administrator B believes part of the misunderstanding may be attributed to outdated perceptions of what counselors do.

The Carl Rogers philosophy kind of put people in this, "Oh, I am a counselor and I do not deal with that sort of stuff; I do not want to deal with that, I just want to listen to them." I think counselors are somewhat at fault because they limited themselves, as they came through that Rogerian era and that non-directive approach, that kind of a hands-off when dealing with difficulties. What they did is they "hands-off themselves" in some areas and then all of a sudden in the public schools and the community colleges counselors were all given a hodpodge of jobs that no one else wanted to do. An example: take a counselor and make them an activities director. That is not right either, but we kind of did it to ourselves. We cannot spend all of our time sitting around talking to people about why they hate their moms.

Campus collaboration

A marketing-related theme that surfaced during the interviews was the need for counselors to reach out to and collaborate with other departments across campus. In 1973 Figler advocated an outreach model for delivery of college counseling services (Bishop, 1990). Wolf and Aguren (1978) posited that counselors must go out into the campus community rather than wait for students and faculty to come to the counseling center for assistance. Kiracofe et. al. (1994) recommended that close linkages should be established between counselors, faculty, and staff and that creating a solid working relationship across
campus would best promote the psychological and emotional development of students. Counselors contribute to the educational mission by facilitating students' personal development so they can function and succeed in their educational endeavors. According to Schoenberg (1978), the effectiveness and maybe even the survival of college counseling centers may depend on how well counselors reach outside the boundaries of their unit to develop relationships with other sectors of the campus community.

Most community college counselors play supporting roles in nearly all areas within student services. Even though the initial pilot study on community college counselors revealed that counselors around the state are involved with in excess of 50 different job duties, the administrative perception seems to be that counselors need to get out of the office more. For example, President C suggested counselors should become more visible on campus. He proposed that they “conduct workshops and seminars on a regular basis, be seen interacting with students, and in general, be more proactive.” One administrator provided this formula for success:

To me a counselor role, while they should be able to assist with advising, they should be out doing workshops. Half the day involved with workshops, outreach, group counseling and the other half spent in the office meeting with students and being available for crisis interventions. (SSA-C)

Another student services administrator made a similar proposal for how counselors might become more proactive:

Counselors should make the time to do additional functions, whether or not they say I am doing six hours of counseling a day, I will organize a gay/lesbian group and will meet with them regularly as a support system. I will organize an
AA group. At least identify some of those pockets that historically have shown a need for additional professional support because of the nature of who and how they are. And so it becomes more proactive because someone sees that there is such a group. It is the group function that can give additional credibility to the counseling. For each counselor to at least be visible in a group situation would help tremendously. It would give them the chance to be out of their office interacting with students. (SSA-D)

So to justify their positions, counselors have to make themselves as valuable as possible; make themselves as essential to their institutions as possible. This administrator agreed that campus involvement is essential:

I don’t want to stereotype here, but rather than sitting in their office and waiting for students to come to them, if they are not busy with students they should take on retention efforts and things like that. They need to grow their jobs to make them more valuable. You can’t sit around. When administrators are forced to make cuts, they will cut where it hurts the least. If you have someone who is not productive, whether a counselor or a chemistry teacher, that is where you are going to cut. (P-B)

Student Services Administrator D gave counselors this advice regarding campus outreach:

Successful outreach in counseling is so much word of mouth so the best way to increase the likelihood that a student will seek a counselor out, without advertising, is for faculty and students to talk about their positive experiences. If counselors nurture relationships with faculty, a group counselors have not tapped to the extent they can, faculty are the ones who get the student first. If
the faculty has a relationship with a particular counselor they will recommend someone specific to the issue. You see that more with the counselors who get out and develop those relationships with faculty, and not just their friends, but also a regular, concerted effort to meet with all faculty.

Assessment and evaluation

The placement of this section last within the chapter is in no way indicative of its importance. Assessment, evaluation, and documentation are “hot” topics in higher education today. Everyone seems to agree that it is important for all divisions on college campuses to be able to document their effectiveness with students or somehow tie their services to student success. Although this is a difficult task for everyone, counselors, in particular, have unique challenges related to client confidentiality. Heitzmann and Nafziger (2001) stated, “Assessing counseling services presents more challenges than almost any other student service” (p. 391).

Counselors who have data documenting their impact on the campus are in a strong strategic position but historically, college counseling centers have not been effective at conducting assessment (Bishop, Bauer, & Becker, 1998). The importance of collecting evaluation data in counseling centers has been strongly endorsed for many years, although some counselors have resisted (Bishop, 1995). Decades ago, counselors were warned that it would be crucial to develop a method for evaluating effectiveness and documenting the relevance of their services in order to gain the attention, respect, and cooperation of their administrators (Wolf & Aguren, 1978). Wolf and Aguren (1978) cautioned, “Counselors
would be well advised to be prepared in the years to come to have relevant, sound research evidence” (p. 98).

Although counselors understand the importance of documenting their effectiveness, success in counseling is often difficult to measure. Furthermore, counselors can provide numbers of client contacts but cannot ethically or legally provide in-depth documentation regarding counseling specifics. The counseling code of ethics states that counselors cannot reveal confidential information regarding their student clients. “A significant portion of the work counselors do is behind the scenes and ethical considerations make this a must,” reported Webb, Widseth, and John (1997). Client confidentiality is the ethical foundation of the counseling profession and must be withheld in order to maintain professional credibility. Upcraft and Barr (1990), affirmed that “our primary task is to be sure that we confront each and every issue from an ethical point of view and that we exhibit ethical behavior in our practice” (p. 16).

Though difficult, counselors must find a way to demonstrate how they directly contribute to the education and personal enrichment of students. Outcomes assessment, according to Upcraft and Schuh (1996), means measuring the effect of a program or activity on students. Banta and associates (1993) suggested that many counselors question what constitutes “evidence” of their impact on students and that “student outcomes are so complex and multifaceted that we may never be able to derive simple linear cause-effect relationships between what faculty and staff put into the college experience and what students take away” (p. 362).
Some administrators are aware of the “Catch 22” in which counselors find themselves today. They are asked to document successes but are unable to provide detailed data and do so ethically:

The documentation is so limited, but in this era of accountability you have to… but we (administrators) cannot see the data and don’t expect to. It is so difficult because it is so hard to get into…it is just like academic freedom…that faculty member has the right to organize that classroom. The counselors need to perform their profession without someone standing over their shoulder demanding something. But if they want to increase the number of counselors…they will have to justify somehow. (SSA-D)

President D agrees that counselors need to demonstrate a level of effectiveness with students, but acknowledged that “measuring counseling success is a difficult task.” President C suggested that counselors should provide some type of activity reports that give their administrators information on the type of counseling they are providing and some sense of the results. Student Services Administrator A also felt that it is crucial for counselors to be able to document their impact on recruitment, retention, and student success. She suggested that counselors “document the number of clients served, the number who remained in college due to counseling interventions, and the problems that the counselors helped the college to avoid” (P-A, electronic communication).

This administrator proposed that assessment is essential and proposed the following methods:

I think counselors need to become invaluable and that invaluable comes oftentimes with the debit and credit lines. I think there is a way to do that by
showing as the counseling staff that you have retained X number of students and this number have been successful and they started with this test score and they left here successful in an area that, on some expectancy table, a very limited opportunity of succeeding (SSA-B). I don’t disagree that counseling has become less or decreased as funding has decreased and it is getting worse. The only way to combat that is to make your position irreplaceable sometimes that requires to some degree of debit and credit side or cost efficiency. When you go to your college president to justify those positions on paper and show you have so many students at the 1.0 GPA or below and show that within a year you can use your counseling to cut that number in half…you can figure that at $6,000 per student it doesn’t take a rocket scientist or CPA to figure out they’re going to keep you around. But if you spend your time trying to tell someone that you talked 30 students into not hating their mom, that doesn’t show very well on the debit/credit side. They [counselors] are going to have to market themselves in the things that are the bottom line. (SSA-B)

However, some counselors are resentful at being asked to assess their effectiveness as this counselor explained.

We keep a running tally of students we see, but has it helped? I think it goes in a cycle…once we (counselors) are all gone they will look around and, oh my goodness, we need to take a look at this retention thing…can we make better decisions. (Csl-C)
Student Services Administrator B seemed to echo the frustration.

A lot of your counselors have these good effects on people and then they just go on to another person. I think counselors have to document these things. We always have some clown come in and say, “Now, tell me how many students you saw today” and I think that insults us sometimes.

Although counselors may be insulted at the request and feel they do not have the time to document their countless contacts with students, many are beginning to understand the need to do so. Counselor B1 admitted she was initially opposed to any kind of student tracking and resented being asked to do so. However, as you see, she has experienced the value of documentation:

I know when we first started to do the contact tracking, I was probably the most vocal in saying, “I am not going to do this, I don’t have time to do this.” Then when it came time to use those numbers to justify replacing a counselor, I was so glad that we had those numbers; I was so sorry that I ever doubted the need for them. I really wanted to atone for my past sins forever saying bad things about those hash marks. I had students to see for crying out loud. But it really saved us. We would have never been able to replace our counselor without them.

This counselor believes it is time for counselors to develop their own assessment instrument as a way of keeping administrators informed about our successes.

One of the problems that we deal with is not having the training in research techniques. I am sure there is a way to do that. At some point, if we really want to start proving it, we have to ask for help from a researcher to tell us how to
start doing that. Maybe that is an approach that counselors might take in terms of helping administrators know that we are needed...let them know who we are working with and the approaches we are taking to deal with the complexity of issues. I think that is a part of the problem. The needs our students have and how we play such an important part in all that. (Cs2-C)

Not all administrators viewed documenting the number of student contacts as the most valuable way to show effectiveness at your institution. President B made the following observation:

If the counselor is a person who is part of the team, trying to work toward a solution no matter what, those are valuable people. So to me it is not a numbers thing, that is something you could look at. But if they are part of what you are trying to do as an institution, then that is what makes them more valuable. Being able to work together on a student problem is far more important to me than how many students they saw today...I don't think that has ever been asked. Maybe they keep track but in 18 years I never asked the question. It has never been an issue. In my perception, they have a pretty heavy load.

Student Services Administrator B felt it was time for counselors to take control of their professional destiny and offered this suggestion:

Counselors can take that assessment thing and get themselves involved in attendance tracking and early intervention of people who are not doing well. We have a wonderful success center tutorial program here. Counselors should be on the right arm of that thing and force those kids into those things. I am talking
about how you can improve the institution and how you can keep your job because you make yourself so valuable they cannot get rid of you.

Summary

Even though the four community college cases that were studied have not eliminated counseling services completely, an ever-looming threat seems to remain. All institutions reported student enrollment increases but none have added any counselor positions to assist with the growing student population. Counselors at each institution are being asked to do more with fewer resources. They are being asked to spend more of their time doing outreach, marketing, and assessment while still meeting the needs of an expanding, diverse, and needy student population. Administrators stated they want counselors to be more visible, more diverse in their services, more vocal about their success, and more diligent about documenting those successes.

Research participants helped to illuminate why counselors may not get the respect they desire and recommended methods counselors could implement immediately to improve their visibility and perceived value on campus. Everyone seemed to agree on two main areas community college counselors should target to demonstrate their significance on campus: marketing and assessment of services. Aggressive marketing strategies may conflict with the nature of many counselors, often considered to be passive, gentle, and nurturing. Counselors know their work with students is effective and can resent being asked to “prove it!” Confidentiality is the foundation of ethical practice for counselors. Administrators should provide counselors with the tools and training to assess, evaluate, and document their effectiveness while respecting the boundaries of the confidential nature of their services.
Administrators and counselors should work as a team to find ways to gather the assessment data necessary without compromising student confidentiality and counselor ethical practice.

Chapter IV described the research participants and their respective institutions. Themes that emerged from the data were explored and connected to the literature review in Chapter V. Chapter VI will continue by addressing recommendations for counselors, administrators, and future research, followed by conclusions.
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter begins with an overview of the research study. Following the overview, the research questions that guided this study will be revisited and answered. The action component, critical to this action research project, is intended to give counselors suggestions for best practices and professional action. Finally, recommendations are made for future research and conclusions of the study are presented.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, action-based research study was to understand the perspectives of community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors with respect to the current situation and future challenges facing counselors in Iowa. The study was designed to lead to a more informed understanding of the problem as well as positive change for the participants. This collaborative research study developed a more holistic view of the phenomenon confronting community college counselors.

Four Iowa community colleges were the focus of the study. Data collection, management, and analysis were an ongoing and intersecting process between fall of 2001 and spring 2002. Semi-structured, interactive interviews were conducted with the research participants. Scheduling conflicts required that two participants be interviewed by a brief e-mail survey; all other research participants were interviewed in person on their campuses. Any follow-up questions or data clarification were collected by phone or through e-mail communication. A document analysis of several college web sites, college catalogs, personal
résumés, as well as personal observations during campus visits, supplied supplemental research data.

Research Questions Revisited

This study sought to answer four basic research questions. Each question is presented and answered below utilizing current research, participant viewpoints, and researcher perspectives.

1. How do community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors perceive the need for counseling services on the community college campus?

There appears to be a general consensus that the need and demand for counseling services on college campuses are growing and that today's students are in need of services more than any group of students before (Heitzmann & Nafziger, 2001; Gallagher, 2001; Corazzini, 1997; Bishop, 1995; Stone & Archer, 1990). Research participants agreed that there is a need for counseling in the community college at some level. The president of College D stated, "There will always be a growing need for counseling" (p. 1) and President A explained, "The need for counseling is endless and increasing" (p. 1). President C agreed that due to the issues students are dealing with today, there is a need for community colleges to provide counseling services at some level.

More specifically, most student services administrators and counselors commented about the multiple issues or "emotional baggage" students bring with them to college and how that can drastically interfere with their academic functioning and success. According to
a former colleague and long-time college counselor, college counseling used to deal with adjustment to college, roommate problems, relationship issues, or conflicts with professors. Now counselors must deal with life-threatening or life-altering problems such as domestic violence, suicidal ideation or attempts, self-destructive behaviors, verbal or physical violence, date or acquaintance rape, and the list goes on. Some days it is overwhelming and the need seems never ending (Jacobsen, personal communication, 1995).

Even though much of the data regarding college students' need for counseling are anecdotal or based on counselor perceptions, those insights should not be disregarded. As a college counselor for nine years, I have witnessed many students in four- and two-year institutions facing tremendous personal and developmental barriers to academic success. It is my personal belief, based on experience, that the estimates of student need for counseling may be significantly underestimated. Only a small percentage of students, as is true in the general population, ever seek the counseling help that they need for their emotional problems. Any data we provide would only be based on the students who take the initiative to ask for assistance and would not reflect the full realm of student needs or counselor impact on student success.

Although this study was designed to understand the perceptions of administrators and counselors regarding the counseling function in community colleges, participating counselors were asked to provide the names of a few students I could contact for their views on the need for counseling at their community college. Students were phoned or e-mailed to gain their perspectives. Below are a few of their comments regarding how their counselor impacted their community college experience.
• "My counselor was like a lighthouse guiding my way into the harbor and preventing me from running aground."

• "I would not be where I am today without the help and guidance of _____ and the atmosphere of the community college. I was the first person in my family to go to college so we were pretty ignorant when it came to doing things in college."

• "Meeting with a counselor who helped me decide to change my major was a life-altering decision; a decision I later found out I was destined for."

• "A counselor like _____ can make a world of difference. He guided me and changed my life."

• "Without the help of my counselor, I would have been lost."

• "My counselor believed in me and that was contagious! Her experience and guidance was vital to me as a support system in attaining my degree at the community college."

• "When I was ready to quit, my counselor gave me the encouragement to keep trying. I have finished a bachelor's degree and am now teaching grade school."

• "Having someone to talk to during a personal crisis gave me the peace of mind to be able to continue and finish the semester."

Counselors can provide essential guidance and support for college students, particularly for community college students who often enter college facing multiple barriers to success. Future research should explore in-depth how students perceive the need for counseling or the consequences of not providing such services for students.
2. What factors do community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors perceive as having led to the decrease in counseling positions in Iowa community colleges?

There is no denying that declining budgets are a key when the decision is made to reduce or eliminate any position. Rames (2000) reported that fiscal constraints have a significant effect on reducing student services, particularly in the counseling area. More community colleges are choosing to replace master’s level counselors with associate or bachelor’s level academic advisors with the intention of saving money (Cvancara, 1997; Evelyn, 2002). University counseling center directors are feeling pressured to reduce positions and counselors are being asked to do more career counseling (Gallagher, 2001).

Most administrators in this study pointed first to economic factors as having the greatest influence on their personnel decisions. They also indicated that individual counselor ineffectiveness is another reason the decision to eliminate a position might be made. Most of the counselors with whom I am acquainted are caring, professional people. The “ineffectiveness” reason given by administrators, I hope, is an infrequent one. It is true that a visible “bad apple” can endanger the reputation of all counselors. All the more reason good counselors need to let their voices be heard.

Several administrators acknowledged that counselors are in a “Catch 22” when it comes to documentation. There was agreement that counseling is a function that is one of the most difficult to quantify, but there was concurrence that counselors must find ways to evaluate and document their services while still protecting the confidentiality of their student clients. It is not inevitable that institutional budget cuts dictate a “death sentence” for counseling programs if counselors learn to do a better job of demonstrating how their services fulfill the
mission of their institution. As SSA-B stated, “You need to make yourself so valuable that they can’t get rid of you.” Participants agreed that counselors need to “make more noise” about their training, services, and successes even though they recognized that “tooting their own horn” often goes against the nature of counselors. It is not enough to know that we are providing outstanding services to students; we have to tell others.

3. What meaning is conveyed to counseling professionals when their services are sometimes perceived as expendable or peripheral to the institutional mission?

“Undervalued” is a word I heard often as I interviewed counselors across the state both during my 1999 pilot study as well as during this research project. There was a pervasive feeling among counselors, even those who felt relatively secure in their positions, that there was a lack of understanding on the part of administrators as to what the counseling job encompasses in a comprehensive community college. There was also an undercurrent of feeling disregarded as a professional. One student services administrator agreed that a lack of understanding by administration might lead to misperceptions and defensive feelings:

Whether one likes it or not a lot of the credibility of a department is based on its ability and based on the perceptions of other departments and other people. So if you do not have administrators, by background or by empathetic understanding of what a counseling function is, who understand the confidential nature of counseling, there can be a lot of misunderstanding and lack of support. (SSA-D)

Counselors need to educate the institutions’ decision-makers regarding the level of training and professional competencies that they bring to their institutions. If administrators believe an advisor with a two-year degree can replace the competencies of a master’s level
counselor, they are sadly mistaken and counselors are at fault for not making them aware of their training and abilities. In counseling, there is a saying, “We teach others how we want to be treated.” Counselors must stand up and demand the professional respect they deserve by upholding ethical standards of the profession and ensuring that they are providing timely, high quality, effective services to student.

4. What steps can counselors take to assess and demonstrate their professional value and ensure that their services reflect the mission of their institution?

Three words, “assessment, evaluation, and documentation,” seem to tell the story, based on current literature and participant perspectives. One surprise that surfaced during this study was that the issue regarding the need for assessment is not a new one. Counselors have been encouraged, urged, and warned over the past several decades that assessing the effectiveness of their services was essential to the survival of the counseling profession in colleges. Thurston (1972), in Student Development Programs in the Community Junior College, found the future of counseling to be a prime concern. She suggested counselors could:

Stay as they were, their services generally perceived as of little value. In time, they would probably disappear quietly from the scene, pushed out by new instructional technologies and higher budget priorities. Or they could make meaningful contributions to the lives of students, by their being as well as their actions, and thereby become an indispensable part of the educational process.

(p. 223)
SSA-D agreed that the issue of counselor accountability is not a new one.

It was discussed when I was new back in 1975. I don't think we ever left the issue. A part of it is that it doesn't happen as much as counselors fear it will. At College D, we have no intention now or in the future to do away with counselors. There are a lot of people who understand the profession. I do not see the profession being eliminated from community colleges.

Why, then, have some counselors chosen to ignore the warnings? Several possible explanations are listed below:

- Trends in higher education come in and out of vogue over the years. Perhaps there are those who thought assessment was just another phase in higher education and just waited for the trend to pass.

- Assessment in counseling is not easy and is time consuming for a staff that is already stretched to their limits.

- Some counselors view transmitting any kind of documentation to administration as a breach of student confidentiality and a legal or ethical dilemma.

- Some counselors reported they only want to work with students, what they were trained to do, and resent the demand for assessment and documentation. They may view it as interfering with their time to serve students.

- Some may not feel competent in assessment methods. Most counselor training programs require at least one three-credit educational research course but many counselors still are unsure of just what assessment is and how to perform it adequately.
• Most counselor training programs are geared toward counseling in a community/agency or university setting with little emphasis on or guidance regarding the unique issues counselors face in a community college environment.

• In certain situations, such as in an environment of mistrust, counselors may fear how their administrators will use the data. As we know, data can be manipulated and interpreted to justify divergent missions.

The concerns and fears listed above are legitimate, but the burden still falls on counselors to articulate their needs and to provide administration with the data to support their requests.

It is important to continually assess the needs of students regardless of whether or not they seek counseling and to be able to organize and communicate the information to administration in a meaningful way. One way to accomplish this is the new accreditation process developed and promoted by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. The Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) is based on the Total Quality Management (TQM) movement that has its origins in the business arena. AQIP is designed for institutions of higher education and advocates a continuous quality improvement process in which every individual within the institution continually monitors the needs of their stakeholders, their processes, and their effectiveness. This growing trend in higher education gives all stakeholders, internal as well as external, a voice and requires the institution to take a continual look at "how well we are doing." As with any new process, there are kinks to work out, but AQIP appears to be a promising way for all individuals on campus to assess whether what they are doing is effectively meeting their constituents' needs.
Action Component: Recommendations for Counselors

So what lessons can community college administrators and counselors learn from this research study? Remembering that the primary audience for action research is the participants themselves, action researchers try to improve their own situation or determine whether they can do something more effectively (Sagor, 1993). Stringer (1999) suggested that action research provides the participants the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems. If action research fails to make a difference in a specific way for participants or the evaluator, it has failed to achieve its objective (Stringer, 1999).

In 1968, Matson suggested that “some remodeling—and it may be drastic rebuilding—is in order if our profession is to survive” (p. 20). “In the months and years ahead, the fate of community college counseling will be determined not only by budget retrenchment, but also by the actions of counselors themselves,” stated Thurston and Robbins (1983, p. 2). This statement appears to be as true today as it was when it was written two decades ago. Based on the research data, I will recommend four categories of specific actions counselors could take today to be better advocates for their profession and to improve communication with their administrators.

1. Assess and document your services and effectiveness.

By this point, it should be clear that assessment is not an option but a necessity. Most of us are much more interested in people than accountability data, but by developing a quick documentation system we can empower ourselves with the information necessary to demonstrate the value of counseling to our administrators. Communicate with your
administrators to learn exactly what assessment data they value and will use to determine your effectiveness with students.

Assessment can be as simple as tracking the number of students you serve and the services you provided (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). Tracking the number of students served and general issues addressed in counseling does not compromise the ethical issue of confidentiality. There are also many things we can assess in more depth such as student needs, student satisfaction, counseling outcomes, and program cost effectiveness. If you are not currently tracking your services, you might want to start by recording daily, monthly, and yearly time spent on your various counseling activities.

Heitzmann and Nafziger (2001) suggested, at the very least, counselors document student responses to the following two basic questions:

- Did you feel the counseling you received was helpful in your remaining at [name of institution]? 
- Did you feel the counseling you received was helpful in improving your academic performance?

They believed this simple tool could be an efficient method for assessing counseling effectiveness and tying counseling services to student retention and success. Assessment Practice in Student Affairs: An Applications Manual by Schuh and Upcraft (2001) is an excellent resource that provides specific examples of assessment techniques for all functions within student services.
2. **Be proactive and define your professional identity.**

Who decides the counselor's role? Counselors spend much of their time reacting to the demands of others on campus instead of determining their own priorities for serving students. By being proactive and deciding how we can best use our talents, we might avoid becoming the "catch-all" department on campus for every job no one else can or wants to do.

To meet the needs of today's students, we should take a clear and assertive stance in defining our roles and functions within our campus communities. But we need to be clear about our role before we can share that information with others.

Many administrators seem to view counselors as a resource to be used to meet their own goals, therefore, stealing time away from setting and reaching counseling goals for students. According to Whiston (2002), "One of the strengths of school counselors, their dedication and willingness to 'pitch in' and help, is also a weakness" (p. 149). Because of conflicting expectations from administrators and the complex duties we are trying to manage, some important responsibilities might be neglected. To the extent that we are able, we should avoid being saddled with activities that do not directly facilitate student development.

Student Services Administrator B agreed:

Counselors have to put themselves in a position that they are not the 'catch all,' and two, where the things that they come up with to do are financially and politically not just important, but vital to the survival of the institution. If they don't do that, it is going to continue to be just like it is now.

Advocacy for ourselves, as well as our profession, means believing in our work and understanding that the students we work for are valuable. It is about inspiration and being motivated to take action. We become advocates by making our voices heard.
3. *Improve marketing and collaboration on and off campus.*

We need to articulate a strong and consistent voice, on and off campus, regarding the passion we have for our work and for the students we serve. We need to believe in our work and act constructively on that behalf. Here are a few suggestions, many of which you may already carry out, for marketing your services:

- E-mail your administrators with information regarding programs or activities you have initiated.

- Ask your marketing department to send out a news release about your professional development activities, local outreach programs, publications, or special awards you have received.

- Let people know what you are trained to do and how that training can assist faculty, staff, and administrators to understand and serve students. We need to educate our campus as to the unique training, preparation, knowledge, and expertise we have that makes us indispensable on our college campus. Don’t overlook the need to provide this information and assistance to adjunct faculty.

- Keep a portfolio of your accomplishments. Include any documents you have produced such as pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, or handouts. Gather student narratives about your role in their success and keep cards you have received thanking you for outstanding service.

- Go to selected classes (English 101, Psychology 101, etc.) at the beginning of each new semester to give students a brief introduction to the services available for them.
• Work jointly with other offices on campus to develop programs, workshops, or community outreach whenever possible. Through teamwork and collaboration we can provide outstanding services for all of our constituents.

• If you are not involved already, make sure to get involved in new student orientations.

• Make sure there is an official campus document outlining your training and the services you provide that sets you apart from other divisions of student services.

• Develop, or get assistance to develop, a counseling web page on your campus website.

• Develop alliances with faculty and administrators by addressing Faculty Senate, the President’s Cabinet, or a Division Chair meeting regarding your professional training and the services you offer to students. Being able to highlight evidence of your success would be even better!

We should utilize every opportunity to let our colleagues know about the high-quality work we perform with students. Make sure what you are providing is not just a fragmented collection of services but a comprehensive program of services that addresses the needs of all students. By linking our services with other campus resources, we can genuinely provide a comprehensive counseling program.

4. Actively engage in professional development activities.

Counselors should always seek a high degree of professionalism. Individually and collectively, we should search for ways to become active participants in the enhancement and
growth of the counseling profession, ultimately, to more effectively meet the diverse needs of our students. Here are a few recommendations:

- Get involved with professional affiliations such as ICCSSA, the American Counseling Association (ACA), the National Student Personnel Association (NASPA), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), or the Iowa Student Personnel Association (ISPA), to name a few. Take on leadership responsibilities if personal time allows for that level of involvement.

- Adopt or develop a Standards of Counseling Practice such as the document recently adopted by the counseling staff at Iowa Valley Community College District (see Appendix D) and adhere to it.

- Encourage colleagues who are inactive in professional development activities to get involved.

- Keep counseling skills updated or expand your current skills by attending workshops and professional conferences.

- Make sure your techniques are effective and appropriate for your student population and that you are acting ethically in all of your professional endeavors.

- If you don’t take pride in your profession or if you don’t love working with students, move on to another profession. Incompetent, ineffective, or unethical counselors tarnish the profession. They should be encouraged and supported to “shape up” but if they choose not to do so, should be reported to an administrator who can take the appropriate action.
Recommendations for Administrators

Up to this point I have focused on what counselors can do to become more effective advocates for their profession. I would like to add a brief section on what community college presidents and student services administrators can do to support counseling effectiveness on their campuses.

- If assessment data are needed from counseling staff, be specific with your requests and request data that will provide the appropriate information regarding the counseling function. Make sure the data you request does not require the counselor to breach client confidentiality.

- Provide an Institutional Researcher (IR) to compile and evaluate the data that staff make available. The IR can train and support counselors to become better researchers themselves.

- Evaluate staff according to work experience and job description.

- Vice presidents, deans, and directors can “carry the flag” for your counseling staff and help advertise their successes to your administrative colleagues.

- Remember that your counselors likely chose their profession because they enjoy the human side of the business and are not generally concerned with “the bottom line.” If administrators are the “head” of the institution, then counselors are the “heart and soul.”

- Assess the needs and satisfaction of current and prospective students regularly.

- Implement five-year program reviews for student services areas.

- It is important for senior level staff to be involved with professional development opportunities in order to understand the current counseling issues.
• Utilize the training and talents of your counselors to the fullest. Your counselors, and
the students they assist, will thank you.

Recommendations for Future Research

A “perfect” research study might be able to address every possible question that arises
during the course of the study. In reality, this research uncovered several questions that
neither time, finances, nor patience would allow this researcher to answer in this document.
This study raised the following questions that might lead to future research opportunities.

1. This study did not examine colleges that have completely eliminated counseling
services. A future study may look at colleges who have eliminated or outsourced counseling
services in the past to assess how that decision has impacted students. What were the
consequences at institutions such as City College of Chicago where all counseling was
eliminated? Some research has shown that most colleges who have chosen to outsource
services have come back to in-house counseling. Why did they choose to do so? It would
also be valuable to get the perspective of students who have had to go “off campus” for
counseling services. What was their experience? What were the drawbacks or benefits, in
their opinion?

2. This study also did not focus on the student viewpoint of the need for counseling
services. A more in-depth study of how students view the need for counseling could provide
valuable information for institutions considering position cuts. Was Student Services
Administrator C correct when she stated, “Students might not even know what they were
missing” if counseling was not available for them?
3. Although literature shows that many of the same counseling concerns are found at two- and four-year colleges nationwide, as well as in the K–12 system across the country, it might be valuable to extend the study to community colleges located in other sections of the country to compare results with the Iowa study.

4. Rogerian therapy and counselor training programs came into question during this research study. Rogerian therapy, popular in the 1960s and 1970s, may not be as popular now since many counseling centers are advocating brief or solution focused therapeutic interventions. A closer look at counselor training programs and whether they address the counseling function within community colleges might be in order.

5. The skills required in the counseling profession, like most helping professions, are viewed as skills possessed most often by women. Skills such as nurturing, caretaking, listening, and advocating for those in need are generally acknowledged as women's work. In turn, women's work often is viewed as supplemental and peripheral to the real work being accomplished in society (Smith, 1987). Might this also be true in institutions of higher education? Is it easier to eliminate counseling positions because the majority of these jobs are filled by women? If this were a male dominated profession, would the same phenomenon be taking place?

Summary

Community college presidents, student services administrators, and counselors are all working toward a common goal, student success. Colleges may be able to “run” without counselors, but if our goal is student success, the impact counselors have on the personal and academic success of students cannot be disregarded. Finding a way to provide effective
counseling services in an era of restricted budgets will require creativity, flexibility, and energy on the part of counselors and administrators. A spirit of innovation and cooperation must prevail to survive the rapid changes in our student population, our institutions, and our society. Community college counselors must take action now to assess the effectiveness of their services, sharpen their focus, embrace diversity, and maximize creativity to best serve the needs of today's student population. The current and future challenges facing community college counselors can also be viewed as opportunities for growth and development. We must remain realistic about the present, hopeful for the future, and steadfast to our mission, student success.
APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS
Participant Questions

Interviews were semi-structured using the following general questions to open up dialogue with participants. Other questions emerged from the discussions that are not listed below.

1. What is your educational background?
2. How long have you worked in higher education?
3. What is the function of counselors in your institution?
4. When faced with budget cuts, how do you make the decision as to which areas you will reduce or eliminate?
5. What would the consequences be if counselors were eliminated from community colleges?
6. What measures should counselors take to demonstrate their value to the institution?
7. Do you feel your institution utilizes the skills and training of its counselors to their full potential?
8. How does your institution differentiate between the role of academic advisors and counselors?
9. Do you think there is a growing need for community colleges to provide counseling services for students?
10. Have you seen an increased severity of emotional or personal problems presented by your students?
11. Is there an increased demand for counseling services on your campus?
12. Do you feel valued by your administration? Why or why not?

13. How do you document your effectiveness with students? What documentation would you like to see counselors produce to demonstrate their effectiveness with students?

14. What changes in the counseling profession have you witnessed over your career?

15. Is the problem counselors are experiencing a new one?
APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

Perceptions of Community College Counselors Regarding the Loss of Counseling Positions in Iowa Community Colleges

Linda M. Kennicott
October 2001–March 2001
Iowa State University

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research project undertaken to explore the perceptions of community college counselors regarding changes in their profession over the past several years. Data collection for this Ph.D. dissertation project will take place from October 2001 through March 2002.

You may be asked to participate in individual or small focus group interviews that will be scheduled at your convenience. Interviews will be documented using audiotape and researcher notes and will last approximately 60 minutes. I will also preserve scripts of various on-line or phone conversations conducted during this time period regarding your perceptions related to your personal experiences.

Your participation is confidential and this confidentiality will be maintained through the following methods: data and notes will remain accessible only to the researcher, personally identifiable information from notes and transcripts will be removed, personal and institutional pseudonyms will be used in any written reports and oral presentations of this research.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time or decline to participate in certain portions of this study.

If at any time you have questions about this research or your participation, please contact me:
Linda M. Kennicott
Marshalltown Community College
3700 S. Center Street
Marshalltown, IA 50158
lindak@iavalley.cc.ia.us
(641) 752-7106 ext. 228

Major Professor: Dr. Larry Ebbers
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
515-294-8067
lebbers@iastate.edu

I consent to participate in this research project named and described above.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Researcher Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________
(Design: Dr. Barb Duffelmeyer, ISU)
APPENDIX C. PILOT STUDY SURVEY
Dear Colleagues,

As the ICCSSA Counseling Sub-group Co-chair, I am asking for your assistance with research regarding Iowa Community College Counselors. The information you provide will be compiled, analyzed, and presented at a future ICCSSA conference. The purpose for seeking this information is to better advocate for professional college counselors across the state. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Name of Institution____________________ Job Title____________________

Job Duties (Check all that apply)

| Advising | Workshop Presentations |
| Crisis Counseling | Committee Work |
| Personal Counseling | Campus Tours |
| Career Counseling | Scheduling/Registration |
| Placement | Recruiting |
| Teaching | Housing |
| Drug/Alcohol Prevention | Student Activities |
| Others (please list) |

What is the approximate enrollment at your institution?

How many counselors does your institution employ?

What is the minimum degree requirement for your position?

Has your institution downsized or outsourced any counselor positions within the past five years? If yes, how many?

Has your institution added any counselor positions within the past five years? If yes, how many?

Do you have clerical support for your position?

Is your position classified as Faculty_____ Administration_______ Other_______?

Please list any major projects or assignments required of you. ____________________________
Have you seen an increase in student demand for counseling services in the past five years? If yes, how have you documented these increases?

Have you seen an increase in the severity of student mental health problems in the past five years? If yes, how have you documented this?

What counseling assessment methods do you use? Or, how do you assess your success as a counselor?

Have you worked as a counselor in any other educational setting? If yes, what differences/challenges/opportunities do you see working in a community college setting?

What do you view as the most critical current issues facing community college counselors today and in the near future?

Have you considered leaving the community college setting in the last year?

Do you believe mental health counseling should be available to community college students?

Comments:

Are you a member of your institution’s bargaining unit?

Additional Comments:

Thank you for your responses. Please return survey by Aug. 1st to:

Linda Kennicott
Marshalltown Community College
3700 South Center Street
Marshalltown, IA 50158
515-752-7106 ext. 228; Fax 515-752-8149
lindak@iavalley.cc.ia.us
APPENDIX D. STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE COUNSELORS
Standards of Practice for Community College Counselors
Example

I. Core Functions
   A. Academic Counseling
   B. Career Counseling
   C. Personal Counseling
   D. Crisis Intervention
   E. Multicultural Counseling
   F. Outreach
   G. Consultation and Advocacy
   H. Program Review
   I. Training and Professional Development

II. Ethical Standards
   A. The Counseling Relationship
   B. Confidentiality
   C. Professional Responsibility
   D. Relationship with Other Professionals
   E. Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation
   F. Training and Supervision
   G. Research and Publication
   H. Resolving Ethical Issues

III. Organization and Administration

IV. Human Resources

V. Physical Facilities

VI. New Technologies

References
Introduction

Counseling services have always been a strong component of Iowa Valley Community College District (IVCCD). Striving to continually improve and expand on services delivered, we enhance our skills through professional development activities. We take active roles on committees that impact us at the college and state level, and have a commitment to maintain high and consistent standards. We, the counseling faculty of IVCCD, strive to integrate these factors in our commitments to students, the college, our colleagues and the community.

Specific standards for counseling services have appeared piecemeal as education code sections, accreditation guidelines and ethics statements. This new document is a policy paper, which addresses the issue of standards of practice for the IVCCD counseling program. It was adapted from a document developed by Kirkwood Community College counselors and other faculty through review of national standards for the counseling discipline, current practices, policies and legislation, and projection of needs for future practice. We advocate a set of universal standards of practice for all community college counseling programs in Iowa, regardless of institution, department size or fiscal constraints.

Counseling standards are set out in six areas:

I. Core Functions
II. Ethical Standards
III. Organization and Administration
IV. Human Resources
V. Physical Facilities
VI. New Technologies

I. Core Functions

To accomplish our mission in providing essential support to community college students, the IVCCD counseling program performs a set of core functions through individual and group interactions. These functions are fundamental to the mission of community college counseling and counseling staff should perform all.

A. Academic counseling—in which the student is assisted in assessing, planning, and implementing his or her immediate and long-range academic goals.
B. Career counseling—in which the student is assisted in assessing his or her aptitudes, abilities, and interests, and is advised concerning current and future employment trends.
C. Personal counseling—in which the student is assisted with personal, family, or other social concerns when that assistance is related to the student’s education.
D. Crisis intervention—either directly or through cooperative arrangements with other resources on campus or in the community.
E. Multicultural counseling—in which students are counseled with a respect for their origins and cultural values.

F. Outreach to students and community members—to encourage them to avail themselves of services, focusing on maximizing every person’s potential to benefit from the academic experience.

G. Consultation to the college governance process and liaison to the college community—to make the environment as beneficial to the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of students as possible.

H. Research and review—of the counseling program and services with the goal of improving their effectiveness.

I. Training and professional development—for counseling staff and others in the college community.

A detailed review of each function and its related standards follows. Although the first three core functions—academic, career, and personal counseling—are described within this document as separate and distinct functions, in practice they are often inextricably related. The IVCCD counseling program recognizes the student as a whole and complex human being with concerns and issues that are not completely distinct or separate. Academic issues intertwine with career and personal issues. In any given counseling session, counseling faculty are prepared to provide the combination of services that addresses the student’s particular needs in an integrated fashion.

A. Academic Counseling

1. Counseling services include: assessment of students’ academic abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and disabilities; help in clarifying academic goals and selecting a major; educational planning; referral to other support services; intervention when students’ academic performance is at risk; and follow-up (e.g., academic mentoring, early alert process, and academic probation counseling).

2. Counseling faculty establish strong links with other faculty across the college to ensure they provide effective educational planning services for all students.

3. Counseling services include assisting high school and re-entering adult students in their transition to college.

4. Counseling faculty work closely with faculty advisors, and have access to articulation agreements established between IVCCD and four-year colleges and universities. Counselors regularly attend transfer conferences and workshops.

5. Counseling faculty work closely with IVCCD’s admission staff, especially in the areas of assessment interpretation, orientation programs, and academic counseling and advising.

6. Counseling faculty assist students through the processes of pre- and co-requisite course selection, transcript evaluation, and general education transfer requirements.

B. Career Counseling

1. Counseling faculty help students explore the career development process and the importance of setting and achieving academic and life goals.
2. The career development process is taught as holistic and lifelong. Counseling faculty assist students in examining their lives as a whole—values, interests, aptitudes, and life circumstances. Students are made aware that career skills learned now, such as career exploration and decision-making methods, may be useful throughout a lifetime.

3. Career counseling services are delivered in a variety of ways, including individual and group counseling, workshops, and college courses.

4. Career counseling services include assisting students in clarifying career goals through intake interviews, administration and interpretation of career assessment instruments, instruction in career exploration, and instruction in career goal setting and decision-making.

5. Counseling faculty collaborate with the Career/Placement Center staff to provide a career center that houses up-to-date information on career research, labor market, educational programs, and all aspects of the career development process. Technical assistance is available to help students access this information. Services include assistance with job placement and the job search process, including instruction in resume preparation and interviewing skills.

6. Counseling faculty reach out to assist students who are undecided about their academic and career goals.

7. Counseling faculty establish liaison relationships with private industries and with career-related programs such as JTPA, Work Force Development, Dislocated Worker, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

C. Personal Counseling

1. Personal counseling services are available to students whose personal life issues interfere with their academic success. These include individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, support groups, and courses or workshops on personal life issues (e.g., self-esteem, stress management, and substance abuse). While all counseling faculty are prepared to provide these services, referrals to mental health professionals are made for more serious problems.

2. Counseling faculty should maintain up-to-date information on community resources and refer students to appropriate services as needed.

D. Crisis Intervention

1. Counseling faculty assists students in acute emotional distress, and develops an intervention plan with students in personal crisis who require immediate attention.

2. Counseling faculty work closely with college administration and outside agencies to ensure that the needs of students in crisis are met and that personnel appropriate to such situations are available.

3. Counseling faculty participate in campus-wide crisis intervention teams.

4. Counseling faculty are familiar with the college’s disaster plan, and are prepared to assist students in the event of a disaster on campus.

E. Multicultural Counseling

1. Counseling faculty should become aware of how their own cultural background and experiences form their perceptions, and realize that students from different cultures do not share the same cultural experiences. Therefore, counselors are aware that some students’
decision-making and life-style choices may be in conflict with the counselor's expectations or IVCCD's policies and procedures.

2. Counseling faculty should develop knowledge about how oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping have affected and continue to affect our diverse student population.

3. Counseling faculty continually acquire specific knowledge about the characteristics of diverse student groups. They strive to develop an understanding of how race, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic status affect personality formation, career choices, learning styles, help-seeking behavior, and receptivity to counseling.

4. Counseling faculty actively seek out educational and life experiences that enrich their cross-cultural knowledge, understanding, and skills in order to provide more effective counseling.

F. Outreach

1. Counseling faculty reach out to potential students and to students who may otherwise not avail themselves of needed services.

G. Consultation and Advocacy

1. Consultation regarding students is provided as needed to other faculty and campus staff, within the limits of confidentiality.

2. Consultation with parents, spouses, and agencies that bear some responsibility for particular students is provided within the limits of confidentiality.

3. Counseling faculty take an active role in interpreting and advocating the needs of students to administrators, faculty, and staff.

H. Program Review and Research

1. The counseling faculty will review the IVCCD counseling program a minimum of once per accreditation cycle. This review should document the strengths and concerns of the program. Based on this review, a plan for improvement should be developed by counseling faculty.

2. Other research to improve the program or to further the goals of the counseling profession should be encouraged and supported.

I. Training and Professional Development

1. Counseling faculty has a responsibility to provide competent academic, career, personal, and crisis intervention counseling services to students. Therefore, the college should encourage professional development opportunities.

2. The counseling program provides formal orientation and training for all new counseling faculty, full and part-time, temporary and permanent, to ensure that they possess the essential knowledge to perform their jobs.

3. If the counseling program utilizes student workers, the counseling faculty should explicitly define the competencies expected. Student workers should be trained and closely supervised by the counseling faculty. Student workers should not perform tasks beyond their qualifications and should not be assigned tasks in which they have access to other students' records. Confidentiality of information must be a top priority.
4. Counseling faculty offer training and development opportunities for classified staff to help them improve their skills in providing quality services to students.
5. Counseling faculty provide in-service training to other IVCCD departments upon request.

II. Ethical Standards

Professional ethical practice forms the cornerstone of high-quality counseling services. As ethical and legal issues arise in the course of providing counseling services, it is no easy task to determine the laws that pertain to each situation, to interpret those laws, or operationalize them within a counseling program. Thus, it is important that there be regular communication between counseling faculty, the Student Services Dean, and IVCCD’s legal counsel about these matters.

Counseling faculty should know the laws relevant to their work, and should follow scrupulously the obligations and limitations these laws create. The Student Services Dean, in particular, is responsible to see that the program’s policies and procedures follow both the law and the ethical standards of the profession.

Counseling faculty and staff should maintain strict adherence to the ethical code of the American Counseling Association. The ACA document (adopted in April 1995) lists fifty-one standards in eight areas of practice:

A. The Counseling Relationship
B. Confidentiality
C. Professional Responsibility
D. Relationship with Other Professionals
E. Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation
F. Teaching, Training, and Supervision
G. Research and Publication
H. Resolving Ethical Issues

The following section highlights ACA standards that have particular applicability to community college counseling practice.

A. The Counseling Relationship

One of the great strengths of the community college is the diversity of populations they serve. Counseling faculty should be mindful of the individuality and value of each person who seeks educational services. Counseling faculty should not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and marital or socioeconomic status.
Counseling faculty are mindful of their professional limitations, and the limitations of their counseling program's services. If they determine that they are unable to be of professional service, they should make referrals to alternative resources.

Counseling faculty does not engage in any type of sexual activity with their counselees. They are cognizant of their positions of power over their counselees, and thus should avoid dual relationships, such as business, personal, or familial relationships, that might impair their judgment or increase the risk of harm to their counselees.

B. Confidentiality
Counseling faculty keep confidential any information related to a student's use of counseling services, avoiding unwarranted disclosure of information. However, there are exceptions. The rule of confidentiality does not apply when "disclosure is required to prevent clear and imminent danger to the counselee or others, or when legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed." When possible, students are informed before confidential information is disclosed. Counseling faculty consult with other professionals, the Student Services Dean, and legal counsel when in doubt as to the validity of an exception. Counseling faculty has the obligation to ensure that confidentiality is maintained by all support staff as well. The counseling program's procedures provide for confidentiality in creating, securing, accessing, transferring and disposing of all counseling records.

C. Professional Responsibility
Counseling faculty has the responsibility of maintaining their professional competence by engaging in continuing education activities. Counseling faculty must not use their place of employment in the community college as a means of recruiting clients for their private practice. They must not use their professional positions to seek unjustified personal gain, sexual favor, or unearned goods and services.

D. Relationship With Other Professionals
Counseling faculty establish working agreements with supervisors and colleagues regarding counseling relationships, confidentiality, and adherence to professional standards. Counseling faculty does not engage in practices that are illegal or unethical.

E. Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation
Counseling faculty provide only those assessment services for which they are trained. Counseling faculty apply professional standards in the selection of test instruments, administration of the tests, security of the tests, scoring, and interpretation. Before assessment is conducted, counselees are apprised about its nature, purpose and use of the results. Assessment results are released to the client only after an accurate interpretation has been provided.

F. Training and Supervision
Counseling faculty is knowledgeable about the ethical, legal, regulatory aspects of their profession and are skilled in applying that knowledge in their training of others. They serve as role models of professional behavior.
G. Research and Publication
Counseling faculty seeks consultation and observes stringent safeguards to protect the rights of students and research participants. Information obtained from students or other research participants is kept strictly confidential.

H. Resolving Ethical Issues
Counseling faculty has the responsibility of upholding the standards of their profession. As part of that responsibility, when counseling faculty possess reasonable cause to believe that a fellow counseling faculty member may not be acting in an ethical manner, they should take appropriate action. This may include consultation with the counseling faculty member, with others knowledgeable about ethics, with the Student Services Dean, with legal advisors, or with professional organizations.

III. Organization And Administration
The organization and administration of a counseling program greatly impacts its effectiveness. Therefore, the following should be applied:
1. Specific responsibilities of the counseling program should be clearly delineated, published, and disseminated to the entire college community.
2. Counseling services are defined and structured primarily by the counseling faculty who provide these services, to ensure that those who are most knowledgeable about these issues have the major role in making decisions that directly affect service delivery to students.
3. Counseling program services are organized in a way that provides for direct and ongoing interaction of counseling faculty with other faculty, staff, and administrators.
4. Counseling services should be funded adequately to accommodate the needs of students. Services should be scheduled to meet fluctuations in student demand. Scheduling should also allow counseling faculty to participate in staff development activities.
5. Counseling sessions should be of appropriate length to allow students to fully discuss plans, programs, courses, academic progress, and other subjects related to their educational progress.
6. Counseling services are delivered by a variety of methods including individual sessions, group sessions, workshops, and classes.
7. Adequate and equitable resources should be made available to the counseling program in order to implement quality services.

IV. Human Resources
The quality of a counseling program is dependent upon the level of staffing and the qualifications of the professionals providing services. The college should hire an adequate number of counseling faculty who are trained to handle the wide variety of concerns that affect community college students.
1. Counseling faculty must meet the minimum qualifications in section 282, Chapter 16 of the Iowa Administrative Code. They must have a master's degree in counseling or college student personnel work (with an emphasis in counseling) from an accredited graduate school. Counselors must be certified through the Iowa Department of Education.

2. Sufficient counseling faculty should be available to meet student needs and comply with state mandates. Students should have access to non-emergency counseling services within one week of requesting such services.

3. The counseling program should, whenever possible, ensure that the counseling faculty reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the local community.

4. There should be sufficient numbers of full-time counseling faculty to allow for active participation in college governance and professional development activities, without disruption of services to students.

5. There should be standardized and consistent hiring and training for all counseling faculty, regardless of full or part-time status. Training should include familiarization of counseling faculty with all programs and services, specific campus populations and college policies.

6. Sufficient support staff should be available to maintain student records, organize resource materials, receive students, make appointments, and handle other operational needs. Technical and computer support staff should be available for research, data collection, systems development, and maintenance of electronic equipment and software.

V. Physical Facilities

Counseling services should be readily accessible and visible to all students, including those who are physically challenged. Wherever counseling services are offered, including off-campus centers, these minimum standards should be met:

1. Each full-time faculty member must be provided with a soundproofed office, to assure student confidentiality. Part-time counseling faculty must have access to soundproofed offices when they are counseling students. Each office should have a telephone with messaging capabilities, a computer with access to student records and other pertinent information, and secure file storage. Offices should create an inviting environment for students and a safe and functional work site for counselors.

2. Counseling services should have up-to-date computers, copiers, and other equipment to support record-keeping, research, and publication activities. Technical resources for media presentations should also be available.

3. The reception area should provide a welcoming waiting area for students.

4. Student records should be maintained in a secure environment to ensure confidentiality.

5. The counseling area should have information resources that include professional journals and books.

6. A collection of current occupational and career information should be readily accessible to counseling personnel and students.

7. Counseling faculty should have access to space suitable for group counseling sessions and staff meetings.
VI. New Technologies

It is important that counseling faculty take advantage of new technologies in doing their jobs. Counseling is, by nature, an interpersonal activity rather than an interaction between human and machine. While computers will never replace the skills of a counseling professional, computers have the capacity to dramatically improve access to and accuracy in delivering information. Counseling programs that do not take advantage of emerging technologies eventually will be unable to meet the needs or expectations of students. Therefore, counseling faculty need to take the initiative to develop technology use plans that add to the counseling relationship, rather than detract from it. Counseling faculty should neither simply resist nor blindly accept technology imposed upon them.

Technology use should incorporate the following principles:
1. The counseling program should select only those technologies that enhance the delivery of services to students. Electronic access to student educational plans, articulation information, transcripts, petitions, and the like should be encouraged.
2. The counseling program should use technologies to enhance communication within the counseling department, as well as to the college and the community.
3. Counseling technology plans should be developed with significant input from users of the plans—counseling faculty and personnel, the counseling administrator, and students—in addition to technology experts.
4. Counseling technology plans should be closely integrated with the college’s technology plan.
5. There should be adequate technical support services for maintenance of current technologies and installation of new technologies.
6. Policies and procedures to maximize technology use and access, while ensuring safety of records and confidentiality, should be developed and implemented.
7. As programs begin to incorporate more technologies, adequate time and training for personnel to learn and maintain skills in using these technologies should be provided.
8. Many of the new technologies give college information directly to students (e.g., web home pages, portals). To prevent confusion and misinformation, counseling faculty should be involved in ensuring that the information provided is accurate and up-to-date.
9. All students should have access to counseling faculty when they need counseling, rather than mere information. Access to technology must not replace access to counseling.
10. Students enrolled through distance learning should be afforded the same level of counseling and support services made available to other students. The services made available should adhere to all standards contained in this document.

Review Of Standards

These standards will be revisited periodically to address new developments in the field. Counseling faculty will review these standards at least every five years.
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