

## ACES' Position on Educational Standards for Licensure

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**To:** [CESNET-L@listserv.kent.edu](mailto:CESNET-L@listserv.kent.edu)

**Subject:** ACES' Position on Educational Standards for Licensure

*During CACREP Advocacy week, ACES would like to take the opportunity to share our position statement on the educational standards for licensure as a professional counselor. This position statement was developed by the ACES Educational Standards Taskforce. I would like to thank Gerard Lawson and Heather Trepal for their work on the taskforce, as well as the input and support from the ACES Executive Council. We hope this statement provides direction for all interested stakeholders.*

*Robin Lee*

*ACES President, 2013-14*

## *ACES' Position on Educational Standards for Licensure*

*The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) is dedicated to supporting high quality preparation and supervision of counselors, and committed to the advancement of the counseling profession. ACES members and the Executive Council have participated in and observed with interest while the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB) 20/20 Initiative on the Future of the Counseling Profession worked to standardize a definition for professional counseling, a scope of practice for licensed counselors, and recommended a credential title (licensed professional counselor). We commend the delegates and facilitators of the 20/20 process for the remarkable work they have done in reaching consensus on these critically important issues.*

*While the work done by the 20/20 delegates was groundbreaking, one issue not resolved was especially relevant to licensed professional counselors and*

to ACES. That issue is the Educational Standards, which establish a baseline for the training of counselors who hope to become licensed. As the division of ACA that is most clearly charged with addressing the educational and supervision needs of counselors-in-training and in practice, the ACES Executive Council has moved to identify standards and initiate a dialogue to address this area of need. During the 20/20 process, the Educational Working Group proposed educational standards for licensure as a professional counselor, which included graduation from a CACREP accredited program as one of the baseline requirements. That motion was never voted on, and we recognize that part of the reason it did not move forward was because the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) presented reasonable aspects for why CORE's clinical rehabilitation counseling graduates could be considered equivalent to CACREP graduates in clinical tracks.

Recent advances in licensure and professional recognition have reaffirmed the unique contributions counselors have to offer as a compliment to the work done in allied professions, such as psychology and social work. Despite that progress, counselors continue to face barriers at the local, state, and federal levels due to a lack of a unified standard that defines what it means to be a professional counselor. For example, the number of credit hours required for licensure ranges from a low of 42 in one state to a high of 60 credit hours required in 29 states. Similarly, the requirements for curricular experiences are varied. Lastly, the number of hours of practical experience within a graduate training program (e.g., practica and internships) varies considerably, from merely requiring an internship (not prescribing the number of hours) to one state that requires, 1,000 hours of university-sponsored supervised practicum and/or internship experience. With such diverse requirements, it is difficult to advise and prepare students to work in varying jurisdictions. Counselors who relocate to a new jurisdiction are often required to take new coursework, retake examinations, and even enroll in internships (after years of professional service), to comply with state regulations.

Because there is no unified standard for the preparation of licensed professional counselors, clients seeking services cannot easily ascertain what level of training their counselor has undertaken. The current situation is not sustainable and is problematic for consumers, counselors, and counselors-in-training.

ACES charged a taskforce to examine the issues relating to educational standards and to make a recommendation. A compelling development was the Institute of Medicine's recommendation that only LPCs who graduated from CACREP clinical programs should be eligible to serve under TRICARE (and now the Veteran's Administration). Because federal recognition of counselors has been an arduous process, which has been stymied by a lack of a unified standard for the LPC, this was a significant development. More recently, however, CACREP and CORE have entered into an affiliation agreement, which includes a single set of standards for the accreditation of clinical rehabilitation counseling programs. This affiliation provides a unique opportunity to address the educational preparation of clinical counselors.

The ACES Executive Council approved the recommendation for the educational standards for licensed professional counselors. Specifically:

*“Graduation from a clinically-focused counselor preparation program accredited by CACREP (or an approved affiliate of CACREP) that includes a minimum of 60 semester credits (or 90 quarter hour credits) of curricular experiences. Within those 60 semester credits (or 90 quarter hour credits), students must complete a practicum of at least 100 hours and an internship of at least 600 hours.”*

We recommend a liberal grandparenting period, whereby individuals who graduated from equivalent programs can still achieve licensure. However, there needs to be a firm date when the new standard for the education of licensed professional counselors will be in force.

We recognize that this position will create consternation for

some. Frequently, objections have been raised to CACREP, citing the professional identity standards. Those objections are often from individuals trained as counseling psychologists who are LPCs, noting that they would not have been eligible for licensure if graduation from a CACREP program were the standard. We recognize this may feel like a personal affront to those individuals but it is certainly not intended as such. When licensure of counselors was first enacted in Virginia in 1976, some who had been practicing as counselors were excluded from the new standards. During this time, the development of licensure for counselors was not intended to question any individual's potential or contributions, rather standards needed to be established for the good of the public and the profession. In order to move forward in a positive direction, our focus should be on the future of our profession, moving beyond concerns about those who may have been excluded. Our hope is that this focus does not diminish the dedication of the individuals who are already licensed to recognize that changes must be made. And with sufficient advanced notice and a liberal grandparenting period, these changes we propose will be anticipated and expected professional development challenges.

Our current licensure system was developed out of historic difficulties and with respect to individual state rights and needs. For the profession to move forward, we must align with educational standards which are outcome based, require rigorous external review, are recognized by external stakeholders, and are informed by the counseling profession. CACREP meets all of those requirements, and has emerged as the gold standard in counselor preparation. We have assessed what appears the best path toward licensure portability, and believe this position provides much needed clarity for clients, students, and counselors.

ACES has begun to engage CACREP, CORE, American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB), National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), and ACA in an advocacy effort toward establishing this baseline education standard for licensure as a professional counselor. Together we can explore ways to advance licensure portability by promoting a unified

educational standard. This will be a long process, and there will be opportunities for further discussion. More importantly, there will be opportunities for programs to move toward compliance, before any students are at risk of being disadvantaged. NBCC is currently offering grants of up to \$9,000 to help support programs that want to become CACREP accredited and need resources for the accreditation process.

Ultimately, ACES recognizes the challenges that are present in the current licensure environment for clients, counselors, counselors-in-training, and all of our stakeholders. Moving toward a unified standard and licensure portability would represent major growth for the profession. We also recognize that growth often involves loss, and this process may create challenges for individuals and programs as we try to move forward. We are sensitive to that, but also cannot identify a way forward that does not involve significant changes. We believe this path is the most viable option for licensure portability; building on the strengths of the hundreds of CACREP accredited programs, the foundation of the states that already require CACREP accreditation as part of their licensure requirements, and the recognition that CACREP has received from federal stakeholders.

We welcome your feedback, and appreciate all that you do in support of counselors-in-training, those in practice, and for the profession. Please send feedback to [aces.edstandards@gmail.com](mailto:aces.edstandards@gmail.com).

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