Chapter 10
Building Bridges, Not Walls:
Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Gatekeeping in Counselor Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter will explore the critical intersection of cultural competence and trauma-informed gatekeeping and is centered on the recognition that a culturally competent lens is essential for navigating gatekeeping decisions ethically and effectively to support CITs from historically marginalized backgrounds. The chapter will integrate theoretical frameworks of cultural competence and trauma-informed practices with practical applications in counselor education gatekeeping processes. This chapter will then include a case study that presents a scenario that reflects potential challenges counselor educators might face during the gatekeeping process with CITs with diverse backgrounds (e.g., marginalized identities). Lastly, the chapter will explore how culturally competent gatekeeping ensures that counselor educators are equipped to assess CITs holistically, considering their cultural background, experiences, and strengths alongside their academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly diverse society, culturally competent (i.e., culturally responsive and socially just) gatekeeping is an ethical obligation for counselor educators. As defined by the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014), gatekeeping involves the "initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (p. 20). This aligns with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP; 2015) standards, which mandate that counseling program faculty adhere to gatekeeping procedures established by both university policy and the profession's ethical codes. CACREP (2015) emphasizes that it is not only "the ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to monitor and evaluate an individual's knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required by competent professional counselors" but that gatekeepers must also "remediate or prevent those that are lacking in professional competence from becoming counselors" (p. 41). In the most recent CACREP (2024) standards, gatekeeping continues to be a paramount responsibility for counseling graduate programs and professorial counseling at large. Supervisors are expected to actively evaluate students' knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions throughout their training (CACREP, 2024). This includes monitoring students' clinical practice, providing feedback, and addressing areas for improvement. By becoming equipped with the proper tools, counselor educators can work to ensure a future generation of counselors who are prepared to serve diverse clients effectively and ethically.

Traditional gatekeeping practices may inadvertently exclude qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds due to unconscious biases or a lack of understanding of cultural norms. This can have a detrimental impact on the field's ability to serve the evolving needs of the population. Counselor educators who lack cultural competence risk misinterpreting CIT presentations, overlooking important cultural factors, and ultimately failing to provide effective gatekeeping. Furthermore, they may inadvertently perpetuate systemic biases within the counseling profession. As a result, trauma-informed gatekeeping in counselor education aims to balance the ethical responsibility of ensuring counselor competence with creating inclusive pathways for diverse counselors-in-training (CITs). This chapter introduces the concept of cultural competence within the context of counselor education, not just as a desirable quality, but also as an essential element in the development of effective counselors (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014).

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