Developing Counselor Education Identity in the United Arab Emirates: Evaluation of an Undergraduate Program

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Counseling in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) involves challenges that need to be addressed to promote awareness about the usefulness and application of counseling among scholars, practitioners, and the public. Unlike in many other countries, counselor education in UAE has a short history, dating from 2005. In this investigation, a program evaluation was conducted using SWOT analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the UAE University counselor education program as well as the opportunities and external threats to it. Results yielded several findings with regard to the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Findings are discussed within the context of UAE culture.

Suggested reference:


**Keywords:** Counseling Profession in UAE, SWOT Analysis, Counselor Education Evaluation

Professional literature on appraisal of counselor education programs is rich with program evaluation reports that review and assess different undergraduate as well as graduate programs in counselor education (e.g., Astramovich & Coker, 2007; Brott, 2006; Engels & Wilborn, 1984; Osborne & House, 1995; Sayers, Carroll & Loesch, 1996). These reports often refer to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP] standards (2009) that recommend program evaluation as a continuous activity to assess and improve the effectiveness and impact of counselor education programs. While these reviews have repeatedly underscored the importance of reliable evaluation models, none have identified comprehensive and standardized approaches or models to evaluate counselor education programs. A variety of evaluation methods have been recommended including formal and informal as well as quantitative and qualitative approaches (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 1986; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988; Lombana, 1985; St. Clair, 1989). One method of particular value in this regard has been the SWOT analysis, which has been typically used to evaluate counseling professions (Arulmani, 2007; Leong & Leach, 2007; Watson & Fouche, 2007)
and training programs (Gross, 2005; van Marwijk, 2004) in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

To our knowledge, there have not been any studies to evaluate the counseling profession or training programs in UAE or the Gulf region. This could be partly due to the fact that this discipline is relatively new to the Arab world (Soliman, 1991). Counselor education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has a very short history of development (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005; A-I Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Darmaki & Sulaiman, 2008). It dates from 2005 with the establishment of a comprehensive and professional undergraduate degree in human services and counseling offered by the UAE University. The program has gone through a complex sequence of challenges and struggles (e.g., undefined status of the discipline, resistance and unawareness of the program, overlap with other disciplines), yet it continues to achieve its goals to meet the society’s demands for trained counselors.

These challenges and struggles afflicting the discipline are not unique to UAE cultural context, as counseling professions in many other parts of the world share the same fate of having to maintain or establish and maintain its identity (e.g., Leong & Leach, 2007; Remley, Bachini, & Krieg, 2010). Indeed, the socio-historical and cultural contexts of a particular society can significantly contribute to and shape the development and advancement of the profession.

It becomes quite important to systematically assess and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the services and academic programs that define the profession and discipline. Even as professional counseling services and programs are yet to be formally recognized and embraced as valuable resources for Emirati society’s well-being, it only seems appropriate to turn our attention to the single counselor education program that essentially represents the status of the discipline in the region. A critical evaluation of this counselor education program can further progress the advancement of counselor training programs as well as the profession in the region. With this background, the primary objective of this paper is to present the program evaluation results of the undergraduate Human Services and Counseling (HSC) program at the UAE University.

This program evaluation report is essentially a review of action research recommendations geared towards mending and improving the status of the discipline in the region. It also helps meet the CACREP (2009) standards that require "faculty members to engage in continuous systematic program evaluation indicating how the mission, objectives, and student learning outcomes are measured and met" (Section 1. Evaluation AA. 1-6). Perhaps, what is of greater significance is that it helps meet the increasing demands for program accountability, improved decision making (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995), and the need for quality data for program improvement (Osborne & House, 1995).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and explore the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities influencing the undergraduate HSC program at the UAE University using SWOT analysis method. A thorough comparative analysis utilizing data collected from students and faculty highlights the strong components of the program, areas for improvement as well as opportunities, and threats or challenges that the program faces. The findings of this investigation would have implications for improving the program (i.e., curriculum and training) as well as for advancing the counseling profession in UAE.

Furthermore, a study of this kind can help us identify some of the factors impacting the discipline in UAE and would add to the existing literature on the status of counseling profession around the world.

**UAE Culture and Mental Health**

The UAE, as most of the other Arab countries are, is a collective society with a traditional (Bedouin, tribes) culture being the dominant influence in all aspects of life, including mental health practices and help-seeking behavior of individuals (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Krenawi, Graham, Al-Bedah, Kadri, & Sehwail, 2009; Eapen & Ghubash, 2004; Sayed, 2003). Economic development and globalization have brought in several other cultures which have also influenced mental health concepts or help-seeking behavior of the population.

Religion continues to be more than just a practice of faith. It has formed the basis for individuals’ way of life and values. Sickness and well-being are also conceptualized within the context of religious faith (Sayed, 2003). Healing, of both physical as well as psychological distresses, is embedded within a traditional support system that provided faith based guidance and solutions. In the UAE, the religious equivalent of a traditional modern counselor is a religious figure called “Mutawaa” or “Sheikh”. He/she is often consulted in matters of psychological distress or issues demanding arbitration or judicious decisions (e.g., issues related to marriage/divorce). Healing has often been centered around faith based methods of treatment such as prayers, driving away evil spirits, and expert advice or guidance (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki, Hassane, Ahammed, & Abdullah, 2010; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Eapen & Ghubash, 2004; Sayed, 2003). The term “counseling” does not have a strict equivalent in Arabic. The closest translation is “Irshaad” which means guidance. Counseling is often misinterpreted as guidance or consultation. The culturally derived perspective of a ‘healer’ as a powerful leader, with expertise and knowledge, continues to subtly influence most Emiratis’ perceptions of a counselor or psychotherapist. Indeed, these culturally derived perceptions along with the stigma attached to self-disclosure and seeking psychological help have major implications for the current status of counselor education in the UAE and the Arab world (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Eapen & Ghubash, 2004; Sayed, 2003; Soliman, 1991).

Emiratis’ ways of life and social conditions have gone through major and rapid changes due mostly to the sudden surge in the growth and development of the country. The consequences of this rapid development and the resultant globalization have been diverse. The social, economic, and cultural changes have impacted almost all aspects of an Emirati’s life (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Ministry of Information & Culture, 2006), much like what has happened in the rest of the world (Marsella, 1998; Marsella & Pederson, 2004). Once a homogenous society, the UAE is now a diverse society with people substantially different in their values, ways of life, and culture. With the onset of modernization, the extended family has been replaced by the nuclear family, though most families still try to remain together. Development has been a double edged sword. The

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inevitable negative consequences of development pose a great threat to the once prevailing sense of peace and security in people’s minds. Consequently, social problems have been on the rise. For example, alcoholism and drug addiction seem to threaten the psychological health and well-being of a significant percentage of people as well as the stability of the society. Changing social values appear to contribute to a high rate of divorce and other family problems (Hassane & Abdullah, 2011). Additionally, uncertainty and insecurity are increasing. Societal pressures to excel and succeed conflict with Emiratis’ once-learned roles, values, and way of life they have known for generations. The transition and the impact of globalization bring forth the uneasy question of “identity” or what it truly means to be an Emirati. Certainly, it is the Emiratis’ predicament of having to accommodate two conflicting and paradoxical realities. One of which is the rich cultural heritage that defines them and the other is the new globalized definition of self thrust upon them that results in the simultaneous acceptance and resistance to counseling. What this implies in the context of this paper is the setting of a stage for a comprehensive counselor education program and acceptance of counseling as a recognized and needed profession in an Arab society (Soliman, 1991).

**Status of Counseling Profession in the UAE**

Much like the situation of other psychology based professions such as clinical psychology and school psychology in the UAE (Alghorani, 2006), counseling has a lesser status when compared to professions such as medicine and engineering. The status of the counseling profession is impacted by many factors. Among those factors are the limited support/recognition for the profession in society and the absence of laws for regulating the practice of counseling services in schools and other community settings. These issues are related to the fact that until 2003, there was no professional organization for the field in the UAE, due to the small number of qualified psychologists in the country. The Emirates Psychological Association was established in 2003 and is in the process of development (Alghorani, 2006; Al-Darmaki & Sulaiman, 2008). However, its existence has not been influential in society. Another effort to establish professional organizations to serve the interests of counselors is the work of a mostly non-Emirati group of counselors in the higher education institutions and other counseling-related organizations to establish the “Emirates Association of Counselling and Career Practitioners” through an annual conference called “Counselling Arabia”. While the members of this group have a focus on advancing the discipline and addressing the concerns faced by professionals, they remain largely unaware of the complex underlying issues that impact counselor education in the region. Counselling Arabia seems to be a successful conference that addresses a wide range of issues in counseling in UAE society and is well-attended by professionals from around the world. However, founding a professional organization for counselors has not received much support from agencies licensing such organizations. This could be due to the small number of counselors representing the profession in UAE especially among the Emiratis. Further, counseling services are often provided by paraprofessionals trained in psychology.
or social work who tend to lack the competencies needed to provide counseling services, thus contributing to the low status of the profession.

In addition, the status of the profession is negatively influenced by stigma attached to mental health professions and the almost complete lack of a research infrastructure to explore and address some of these issues. Another challenge to the development of counseling in UAE is the indiscriminate application of a largely western curriculum to address the needs of a predominantly Arab/Muslim society. This curriculum, according to Marsella and Pederson (2004), lacks relevance to many individuals and societies around the globe. In addition, the discipline’s overlap with other related professions such as clinical psychology, psychiatry, and social work as well as the constant predicament of having to justify its identity and existence is also experienced in other cultures such as the United States (Leong & Leach, 2007), South Africa (Watson & Fouche, 2007), and India (Arulmani, 2007). These challenges complicate the task of achieving the goals of counselor education in the region (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009).

Counselor Education Preparation in UAE

Counselor education in UAE is at its early stages of development much like it is in other Arab countries such as Egypt (Soliman, 1991) and non-Arab countries such as China (Cook, Lei, & Chiang, 2010). The development of counselor education in UAE is slow because there are very limited training opportunities for counselors in UAE. At the same time, there has been increasing recognition of counseling as an effective method for the prevention and reduction of problems (e.g., family-related problems, behavioral problems, psychological/emotional problems) experienced by individuals due to the changing social context of UAE, marked by rapid economic growth and increased diversity in the population (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009).

Until 2004, the UAE University undergraduate program in psychology remained the only training program for Emiratis working as psychology “specialists” who were expected to provide guidance and counseling services in schools (Alghorani, 2006) and hospitals (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Darmaki & Sulaiman, 2008). The psychology program, established in 1976-1977, was designed for a bachelor’s degree in general psychology. It does not provide its graduates with hands-on training courses in working with children and youth, assessment and intervention techniques, decision making skills (Alghorani, 2006), or even general helping skills. Psychologists and counselors are trained only at the undergraduate level in the UAE due to factors such as unavailability of graduate counselor education program in the country, and the shortage of counselors in various settings to meet the increased need for counseling services at schools and other community agencies (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005). In UAE, the majority of those who are practicing psychological counseling are females due to the fact that more female students choose psychology as their academic major so that they can work in schools or hospitals. These settings seem to be more desirable working places for women in UAE (Al-Darmaki, 2012). Males, however, tend to pursue other fields of study due in part to the misconception of psychology in UAE.
culture that “psychology is the study of insanity”, and therefore stigmatized and to the low status of positions related to psychology and counseling in UAE (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005).

Seeking further education abroad is not optional for most providers of psychological/counseling services in UAE due to cultural constraints (e.g., many females are not allowed to travel alone even for education). For that reason, counselors only receive continuing education through workshops, conferences, and special diplomas provided locally. Another challenge experienced by the psychology specialists in UAE is that they are responsible for tasks that require at least masters-level training (Alghorani, 2006), despite holding undergraduate degrees. The availability of role models or on-site competent supervision for paraprofessionals in psychology and counseling is also very limited, as those with advanced degrees in counseling and counseling-related fields end up working in academia for higher status and better pay. This issue presents a challenge to the training of counselors because counselors-in-training are not always exposed to proper onsite supervision. During the academic year 2004-2005, UAE University began to offer counselor education through a new department of Human Services and Counseling (HSC) at the undergraduate level to train generalist counselors to serve the need for counselors, especially in schools (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005; United Arab Emirates University, 2009). This HSC program follows a comprehensive curriculum that includes most of the eight common core curricular areas required by CACREP 2009 standards. Some of the courses taught that fit into these areas include, Introduction to HSC, Diversity Issues in HSC, Ethical and Professional Issues in HSC, Program Development and Evaluation, Interpersonal Relations, Theories of Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, and Research Methods. CACREP is an independent agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to accredit graduate degree programs in the United States only. At the time of preparing this paper, the UAE University HSC bachelor’s program was considering an affiliation with the International Registry of Counselor Education Programs (IRCEP) which is a subsidiary program of CACREP to promote excellence, a fundamental goal of the program. HSC program also follows many of the 2005 standards of the Council for Standards of Human Service Education (CSHSE) which is the only national organization accrediting human service education programs in the United States of America.

UAE University is an English-medium institution, although Arabic is the first language for most of its students. The HSC program is no exception, and most coursework is conducted in English. The program consists of 132 credit hours. One of the key features of the curriculum is the inclusion of both theory and practice oriented courses to help students achieve a rational balance of knowledge and skills. Once done with their theoretical coursework, students undertake a semester long supervised field experience (6 credit hours) in two different settings: school and community. The “Field Experience” or “Practicum” which prepares the students to be paraprofessionals or generalist counselors requires the completion of a minimum of 350 clock hours of direct and indirect services under the supervision of experienced professionals from the academic program. The 350 clock hours include weekly group supervision meetings that last one and half hours. This is in line with the 2005 CSHSE standards for a bachelor’s degree in human services.

It is important to mention in this context that, while most other universities regard master's level training as the standard for professional practice of counseling, UAE University considers undergraduate training to be comprehensive enough to prepare students to be paraprofessional or entry level counselors. Although contentious, this approach is critical and is attributed to factors such as the unavailability of graduate level counseling programs in the country (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005). However, this program has its own challenges besides those experienced by psychology program and its graduates. One of the issues faced by the program is the overlap with other programs in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (i.e., psychology and social work) especially with unclear distinction of the role of psychology, counseling, and social work among the administrative staff, the public, and educators (Soliman, 1991). The HSC program was merged with psychology in 2009 under one department called “Psychology and Counseling Department” for the goal of utilizing the resources of both programs to serve students, especially given that HSC has only 4 faculty members educating more than 200 students. Despite the prevailing misconceptions surrounding mental health services and lack of awareness regarding the field of counseling, there have been an increasing number of UAE students showing interest in the program over psychology, even though the faculty of psychology outnumbered the faculty of the counseling. This could be due to the misconception that counseling is less stigmatized than psychology or to its being perceived as an advice-giving and an easy major. This has led to more covert competition between the two programs to recruit students, which seems to have an effect on the amount of support given to the HSC program both at the department and the college levels.

However, such positive trends, implying acceptance and recognition of the field, do not seem to have corresponding reflections in the societal attitudes towards counseling as a profession. The public still perceives counseling as simply giving advice and solving people’s problems, and therefore does not recognize the need for specialized training for counselors. Counseling in the Arab culture is associated with schools which could also explain its popularity as a major among female students, as they tend to gravitate to the field of education. This is because counseling services began in schools (Soliman, 1991) with the goal of helping students with educational/achievement issues through testing and a problem-solving approach. Up to date, there are 191 students graduated from the HSC program. However, data on the employment status of most graduates of this program is not yet documented.

There are limited job opportunities for graduates of HSC program, although this may be changing. Until recently, there have not been any job titles designated for counselors. Those who graduate with HSC degree would most likely be hired as social workers or as psychology specialists or would be hired in positions unrelated to psychological/counseling services. Recently, the Ministry of Education designated positions in schools (school/career counselor) as a part of a new department called “Student Counseling Department” and hired 30 school counselors during the academic year 2010-2011. Some of those hired school counselors were teachers of psychology in schools. The Ministry of Education, in coordination with local universities and training companies, has planned a training program/diploma for the newly hired school counselors to fulfill the

role of counselor in schools (personal communication, March 8, 2011). In addition, the Family Development Foundation in Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE, has established a department for family counseling and consultation and is interested in hiring trained community mental health counselors. This department started in 2010 to offer a consultation program under the title “Shaawir” which means “Consult” in Arabic. Among the consultation services offered through this program are counseling/psychological services. These services are offered by a consultant called “Mostashar” through a contract for part-time services with some professionals working in other organizations in UAE whose educational background is mental health. These opportunities in the labor market may provide support for advancing counselor education in the future.

In the UAE, there are no specific titles for counselors that are consistent with the qualifications or training level of counselors or even specify the scope of practice. For example, these positions are usually advertised for as “school counselor”, college guidance counselor”, “career counselor”, “personal and cultural counselor”, and “student counselor”. The qualifications required for any of these positions are mostly BA in psychology/social work/ education/human resources even though the tasks to be performed seem to require advance training in counseling. The required years of experience (1 to 5 years) seem to contribute to the unemployment problem of the HSC program. Therefore, many of these positions tend to be filled by those who are either Westerners who often lack cultural understanding and proficiency in Arabic or by individuals from other Arab countries. Those who are coming from the neighboring countries (e. g. , Egypt, Oman, Jordan) or who have received training in these universities have rarely been exposed to hands-on experience or received strong training in counseling as counseling and counseling services are underdeveloped in all Arab countries(Soliman, 1991).

Another challenge to counselor education in UAE is that most counselor educators are trained in the West. “Western psychology training of clinical diagnostic, assessment, and therapeutic procedures has minimal cultural and international equivalencies and may well result in victimization of clients” (Marsella, 2000, p. 7). Further, there is paucity of resources (textbooks and references, training materials) developed to fit the cultural context of UAE. Reliance on Western-developed theories and approaches to counseling seems to cause counselor education program to fall short in responding to the need for culturally competent counselors in UAE society. According to Marsella (1998), "Western psychology/counseling is rooted in an ideology of individualism, rationality, and empiricism that has little resonance in many of the more than 5,000 cultures found in today’s world "(Marsella, 1998; Marsella& Pederson, 2004, p. 414). As noted by Cook et al. (2010), Western theories and approaches to counseling tend to focus more on goal-oriented treatment and fostering growth in individuals where as counselors in non-Western cultures such as China are expected to focus on problem-solving and provide guidance to their clients. Similarly, in UAE culture, individuals are not trained to make decisions for their own, or even encouraged to do so. Major decisions such as those related to marriage, career, and choice of treatment are usually made by the family, especially the

male figures (Al-Darmaki, 2011a, 2011b; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Eapen & Ghubash, 2004).

Further, individuals in UAE are not encouraged to disclose their personal/family issues to strangers as disclosing such issues may bring shame to the family and may signify weakness in the individual (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009). Individuals may escape the stigma of mental illness by presenting their issues in the form of physical complaints (Al-Darmaki, 2003; El-Rufaie, Abuzied, Bener, & Al-Sabosy, 1999) or, in the case of a student, in the form of educational/academic problems. Individuals in these cultures are still reluctant to use counseling services preferring instead to rely on family and friends, as counseling services remain unavailable or even inappropriate. Counseling is sought out only when other methods of help have failed (Marsella & Pederson, 2004). In UAE society, most individuals strongly prefer seeking help from family and friends rather than seeking professional help from counselors/psychologists for all types of problems (Al-Darmaki, 2011b). Individuals tend to prefer receiving help in the form of lectures or information rather than individual or group counseling (Al-Darmaki, 2011a). In addition, counseling services are unavailable in most areas in UAE and in areas where these services are available, the utilization of such services are impacted by low confidence in mental health providers and a stigma of seeking professional help (Eapen & Ghubash, 2004; Osman & Afifi, 2010). These cultural factors seem to encourage many individuals in UAE to seek help from religious healers instead of Western-trained psychologists (Osman & Afifi, 2010) or obtain assistance from their social support networks (Al-Darmaki, 2011a, 2011b).

These cultural constraints and their impact on counselor education are not typically addressed in Western textbooks or approaches to counseling. Psychology and counseling textbooks have been criticized by Marsella and Pederson (2004) as they emphasize assumptions that reflect the values and priorities of Western cultural context (p. 417). They indicated that cultures around the globe attempt to reframe these assumptions stated in textbooks to fit their indigenous cultural context (Marsella & Pederson, p. 416). Therefore, counselor education that is based on Western curriculum assumptions, content, and methods is far away from the reality of international student trainees (Marsella & Pederson, 2004). These issues present challenges to counselor education in UAE.

According to Osman and Afifi (2010) there is no mental health system research in UAE and most areas of mental health areas are under-researched. In addition, there are no professional journals in UAE where scholars could exchange research ideas and develop theories or test the utility of Western-developed theories and approaches for Emirati individuals (Al-Darmaki & Sulaiman, 2008). These issues together seem to impact the development of counseling identity and counselor education in UAE.

**Evaluation of Counselor Education Programs**

Several scholars have also echoed this concern and have frequently recommended program evaluation plans as essential for establishing and maintaining effective counseling education programs (Bradley & Fiorini, 1999; Engels & Wilborn, 1984; Osborne & House, 1995; Perusse, Goodnough, & Noel, 2001; Sayers et al., 1996; Vacc & Charkow, 1999).

While the importance of systematic program evaluation in higher education seems to be well supported in scholarly literature (e.g., Astin, 1991; Banta, 1988; Conrad & Wilson, 1985; Ewell, 1987; Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Gray & Diamond, 1989; Sell, 1989), little has been written about the rationale and critical need for evaluating counselor education programs. The significance of evaluating counselor preparation programs becomes all too clear, if we were to reflect on the possible damage caused by counselors haphazardly entering the field without the requisite skills and qualities. However, due to the lack of accepted evaluation models and accountability criteria for counselor preparation programs (Vacc & Charkow, 1999) there has been a paucity of well-designed studies aiming to evaluate counselor training programs. Methodological difficulties, lack of proper assessment instruments, lack of time and necessary resources, and faculty who are preoccupied with the process of education and clinical work are only some of the reasons cited for the lack of research in this line (Sexton, 1999). Understandably, the few evaluation studies reported in literature have used different frameworks to evaluate program quality. These studies have focused on different factors such as quality of faculty and staff, quality of program objectives and curriculum, quality of support services, facilities and resources, academic and professional success of students, and quality of practicum and internship training. Based on the particular objectives and needs of the evaluation, these studies often involved data collection from a variety of sources including students, parents, teachers, administrators, supervisors, graduates, employers, and community members. The methodology and tools used also vary. Evaluators have used attitude surveys, structured reaction questionnaires, focus group interviews, and case study analyses to achieve their goals (Borders & Drury, 1992).

These studies do not prescribe guidelines or standardized measures for program evaluation and appraisal. However, they do lend support for the importance of evaluating the different factors concerning counselor education. Gross (2005) examined students’ perspectives on clinical and counseling psychology practica. In his study, 321 doctoral students were asked to evaluate their graduate experience on various aspects of training. Many students in this study reported that the practicum experiences met their expectations and training needs. However, there was a significant proportion of students who reported discrepancies between what they expected and the actual training experiences in areas ranging from work responsibilities to primary supervision. The study highlights the importance of taking into consideration trainees’ perspective and feedback on training received when assessing the quality and effectiveness of training programs. Another study by van Marwijk (2004) was conducted in the Netherlands with the objective of understanding and improving the component of mental health competency in general practice training. The study used SWOT analysis to look at the current status of the Dutch counselor education program in the United Arab Emirates: Evaluation of an undergraduate program. Journal for International Counselor Education, 4, 1-28. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.library.unlv.edu/jice
General Practice curriculum, with a particular focus on its component of primary mental healthcare. The SWOT results suggested the need for integrated teaching packages and a more hands-on curriculum that is competency oriented, self-directed, and assignment driven to enhance Dutch general practitioners' mental health competence.

Program evaluation studies sponsored by institutions and organizations are often accountability-and outcome-based comprehensive evaluations performed in the interest of strategic improvement of the program. Reports of such institutionally-sponsored evaluations of counselor education programs (Auburn University's Counselor Education programs, 2008-2009; Penn State University's Counselor Education programs, 2010; University of Georgia's Community Counseling program, 2008; Indiana University's Counseling and Counselor Education program, 2008) are frequently published for a wider audience and are of particular mention in this regard. Most of these studies have emphasized a comprehensive evaluation system with information gathered from multiple sources. For example, data were collected from alumni and employer evaluations, student appraisal of the programs, faculty involvement in student research, faculty professional service, and academic, clinical, and intra/interpersonal functioning of students. Other sources of information were evaluations from site and university supervisors in practicum and internship, master's and doctoral portfolios, and master's scores on the counselor preparation comprehensive exam. Favorable results, substantiating the high quality and effectiveness of the programs is a common highlight of these evaluation reports. They also note special recommendations for improvements in areas where least positive evaluations are observed. These reports called for the need for a more theory-driven approach to counseling (Auburn University's Counselor Education program evaluation report) and need for improvements in program areas related to research including training in research skills and focus on research courses (evaluation report of University of Georgia's Community Counseling program and Indiana University's Counseling and Counselor Education program). They also recommended increased training in focused areas such as cyber-bullying, drug and alcohol counseling, and expansion of practicum training for additional counseling experience (Penn State University's Counselor Education program evaluation report).

A careful and more reflective review of these program evaluation reports will reveal that the pursuit is more than just providing evidence for a program's effectiveness. Its inherent value in helping educators to refine as well as to plan and implement effective training strategies and thereby strengthen the professional identity status of the discipline, may not be overlooked. Indeed, given the persistent calls for accountability of counseling training programs, it is a practice that can no longer be ignored by counselor educators who purport to develop and nurture competent counselors for the future.

Much of the foregoing discussion can be summarized as an exploratory attempt to understand the socio-historical and cultural contexts that undergird the development, advancement, and current status of counselor education in the UAE. However, such a general and superficial discussion does not suffice for an understanding, that is factual and thorough enough to address the major concerns and issues that challenge the field of study in the region. In order to propose strategies to counteract the challenges faced by the

discipline in the region and to understand its core strengths, competencies, and opportunities that can be capitalized upon for its optimal success, a SWOT analysis was proposed. The terms ‘strengths’ and ‘weaknesses’ refer to attributes that measure internal capabilities of the program, whereas ‘opportunities’ and ‘threats’ originate from external environments of the program being evaluated. While strengths and weaknesses are manageable to some extent by the resources within the program, opportunities and threats are beyond its control.

The purpose of this analysis was three-fold: to conduct a program evaluation for exploring the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current state of counselor education of the UAE University as perceived by the students and educators, to explore the opportunities and threats external to the program and are beyond its control as perceived by the students and educators, and to evaluate the counselor education program in terms of its three components namely theoretical knowledge, research, and training.

This study investigates the following research questions: a) What are students’ perceptions regarding the strengths and areas of concern inherent in the current state of counselor education of the UAE University and what are their perceptions regarding the opportunities and threats external to the program that are beyond its control? and 2) What are the educators’ perceptions regarding the program in terms of its strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats, based on their experience with the program students?

To meet the objectives of this study and answer the above questions, SWOT analysis waste chosen method, as it helps identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats towards the evaluation of a program. Previous studies that have evaluated counseling programs in varying contexts have also frequently used this as a reliable method. The results from this study may pave the way for the formulation of hypotheses for future studies regarding the different aspects of the program.

Method

Participants

Twenty seven students majoring in Human Services and Counseling participated in the study. Participants were recruited from practicum and capstone courses as the researchers were interested in obtaining the perceptions of those who had completed most of their course work and were in the final year of the program. All participants were women because there were no men students currently enrolled in the program. In addition, fifteen faculty members from other disciplines (e. g., psychology, social work) who were involved in teaching the program’s students were invited to participate in the study. Fifty three percent of the faculty participants returned the survey. The other faculty participants decided not to fill out the survey because they had limited knowledge of the program and its students.

Questionnaires

Two separate surveys were constructed for the purpose of collecting data in this investigation. The first survey consisted of ten items (two of them were quantitative in nature) assessing students’ perceptions of their program, practicum experience, supervision received, and chances for employment after graduation. Examples of these items are “What are five strengths of the counseling program in UAE University?” and “What are five challenges that you might face after graduating from the university?” An example of the quantitative questions is “On a scale from 1 (unlikely) to 5 (very likely), how would you rate your chances to be hired as soon as you graduate from the university?”

The second survey consisted of seven items assessing the educators’ perceptions of the counseling program students based on their performance in classes and other activities. Examples of these items are “What are some of the strengths you see in their training and knowledge, as a reflection of their counselor education?” and “What are some of your perceptions regarding how well (or not so well), the component of research is represented in their training and knowledge?” One question was quantitative: “Overall, how would you rate counseling students’ performance in your classes, as compared to students from other programs?” Respondents were to rate the performance of our students on a scale ranged from excellent to below average.

Procedure

The students ‘perception survey was distributed to students of practicum and Integrated Capstone course (an accumulative course) during their class time in the spring semester of 2010. Those who agreed to participate were instructed to fill it out and return it to their instructors. The educators’ perception survey was sent via email to identified faculty members who have taught counseling students or have interacted with them in other activities. They were encouraged to participate in the study by filling out the survey and emailing it back to the researchers.

Data Analysis

Considering the potentials of a SWOT analysis for a thorough evaluation and a strategic planning towards identifying priorities for action (Ansoff, 1965, cited in Iles & Sutherland, 2001), this analysis was used to evaluate and explore positive aspects of the program, areas for improvement, opportunities, and threats or challenges influencing the undergraduate counseling program in UAE. First, the frequencies of the responses received from participants were listed. Then, the frequencies were analyzed and grouped under themes. In the final step, these themes were examined to decide if they can be considered strengths of the program or weaknesses, opportunities or threats.

Results

The SWOT analysis conducted in this investigation has yielded several findings with regard to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to counselor education program in UAE University (see Tables 1 & 2).

Student Perceptions

The analysis of students’ responses suggested that the strength of the counseling program lies in the strong faculty-student relationship, effective/competent faculty, a strong theoretical foundation, applied aspects of the program, as well as professional skills and attitudes acquired for successful career in counseling. Participants reported experiencing a supportive and positive relationship with the program faculty who they were considered effective and valuable resources. Students perceived that the program is built on a strong and reliable theoretical foundation and believed that the presence of applied courses and practicum in the curriculum are positive aspects of the program. The direct client contact in practicum, too, provides them with the necessary experience and capability to be effective entry level counselors when they graduate. In addition, equal emphasis on both personal as well as professional development of the students was identified as program’s strength as this would prepare them for a successful career in counseling. On the other hand, students identified some areas for improvement. These are the inadequate number of faculty members, lack of a master’s program, lack of appropriate resources, short duration of practicum, lack of training programs (e.g., workshops) prior to practicum, and overdependence on western models and theories in the curriculum. As far as opportunities are concerned, areas for revision and transformation of the program curriculum were identified by respondents in order to make the program more meaningful to the society and develop to its fullest potential. The UAE University directives that demand an employability-oriented curriculum should be seriously considered so that the program graduates could take advantage of the existing opportunities in the labor market. Furthermore, the respondents recommended that there should be a campaign to increase recognition of the need for counselors in the nation and enhance acknowledgement of counseling as a profession from authorities. Finally, increasing awareness of the discipline among the general public and potential employers was also identified as an opportunity.

With regard to threats, the respondents identified some concerns as threats or challenges that need to be overcome during practicum and after graduation. Those concerns are the dismal status of counseling in the UAE, shortage of professional counselors in the field to supervise practicum students, ambiguity in roles and responsibilities of a school counselor, and insufficient practicum supervision. Cultural constraints that impede all cross-gender (e.g., counselor-client dyad, counseling sessions) interactions, resistance from related disciplines to acknowledge and accept counseling as a profession, and limited employment opportunities for graduating students were also identified. In addition, participants indicated other challenges such as imbalance between theory and practice courses in the curriculum, and university stipulations that necessitate
English as a medium of instruction. Respondents reported that community's limited knowledge of and ignorance about counseling as a profession, society's misconceptions and stigma regarding counseling, and lack of sufficient models and theories that can be relied upon to suit a nonwestern counseling context are some of the issues that represent threats to the counselor education in UAE. Counseling as a profession received less recognition and support by decision makers in counseling-related agencies, which, in turn, resulted in placing counseling graduates in positions that are unrelated to their field of study.

With regard to students rating of their practicum supervision, 13 out of 24 who responded to this item indicated that their practicum supervision experience was helpful, whereas 9 students indicated that it was extremely helpful, 1 student reported it was somewhat helpful, and only one student reported that it was somewhat unhelpful. With regard to students rating of their chances to be hired as soon as they graduate from the university, 17 out of 26 who responded to this item revealed that it is likely whereas 5 indicated it is moderately likely, 2 indicated it is very likely, and only 2 indicated it is less likely. These results seem to suggest that the supervision provided to student trainees was mainly helpful and that the majority of students participated in this study are confident that they have good chances to be hired upon graduation.

**Faculty Perceptions**

The SWOT analysis of faculty perceptions revealed that the strength of the program lies in students’ enthusiasm to learn, motivation to help others, interest in their specialization, and possessing adequate English proficiency skills compared to their counterparts from other specializations in the college of Humanities and Social Sciences. Data from faculty participants indicated some aspects of the program that need improvement. These areas are fewer training hours, insufficient research knowledge and skills, inadequate psychological knowledge, limited training, and lack of role models. Other areas pointed out for future consideration are students’ limited knowledge of the scope of the counseling field, low proficiency in English, low ability to apply counseling skills, and lack of motivation to learn among some of the students.

Regarding opportunities, students in this program have an opportunity to experience real interaction with the community and training in relevant institutions. Students could also use the available resources in the psychology laboratory, and make use of the available training CD/DVDs and the internet as resources for their studies. In addition, they could use counseling centers in the country as well as that in the UAE University for training. Other opportunities for students are to work with faculty members in their research, and to work or volunteer during the summer in several human service organizations, including women’s organizations, to gain field experiences.

Challenges identified by instructors fall into three broad categories: Student academic preparation, inculcating counseling skills, and increasing societal acceptance. Student academic preparation includes emphasis on English skills, report-writing skills, analytical skills, and intellectual curiosity. Inculcating counseling skills includes providing workshops, training students on counseling skills before practicum, encouraging...
psychological knowledge, and providing role models. Increasing societal acceptance includes the need for developing certification criteria, creating job opportunities/classification, and introducing counseling into a conservative society.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation to identify strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities and threats impacting the undergraduate counselor education program at UAE University. Overall, the results have provided answers to the research questions mentioned earlier in the study. Both students’ and faculty members’ perceptions suggested that the program has strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities, as well as threats/challenges. Strong faculty-student relationship, supportive and effective/competent faculty, strong theoretical foundation, skills training, good practicum experience, and enhancement of positive attitude towards the practice of counseling are some of the assets that students perceived for the program. Other strengths students identified include receiving personal and professional development as part of their education of becoming entry-level counselors. Instructors perceived the strengths of the program as students’ enthusiasm to learn, motivation to help others, interest in their specialization, good practicum experience, faculty support, and a relatively high level of English proficiency compared to students in other programs. These strengths have contributed immensely to the success of the program as represented in its enrollment.

Students also noted some areas for improvement in the program. These are the inadequate number of faculty members, lack of a master’s program, lack of appropriate resources, short duration of practicum, inadequate pre-practicum training programs (e.g. workshops), and overdependence on western models and theories in the curriculum. The latter is also noted in the Arab world (Soliman, 1991) and in India (Arulmani, 2007). Faculty participants thought that students’ limited knowledge of the scope of their field and of psychology, low proficiency in English, inability to apply counseling skills are areas of concern that needed to be addressed. Other areas pointed out as concerns regarding students were insufficient research knowledge and skills, and lack of motivation to learn among some of them. Faculty also perceived less training hours, lack of some important elements in the curriculum, and lack of role models in the community as areas to be addressed in the counselor education in future. However, some of these faculty perceptions contradict with the strengths they perceived regarding students (e.g., English proficiency, motivation to learn). This contradiction may be due to student’s different responses rendered to different factors such as course contents and teaching philosophies.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings provide the program with a new set of opportunities that can be capitalized on to make improvements. For example, both students and faculty recommended that the program curriculum should be revised to emphasize skills training and a practicum period that would equip students with the necessary skills to practice after they graduate. Students also saw an opportunity in increasing public awareness and recognition of the counseling profession while faculty indicated that students can take advantage of the resources such as the psychology
laboratory and the counseling center available to them on campus and mental health agencies in the community. These opportunities, if taken into consideration, will strengthen the program and consequently improve the quality of graduates and enhance the development of the counseling profession in the UAE.

The program continues to experience external factors that are considered threats to its existence and counseling in general in the region. Some of these threats perceived by both students and faculty area lack of official recognition of counseling as a professional field, lack of certification or licensure criteria for mental health practitioners, shortage of qualified on site supervisors in the community, society’s misconceptions and stigma, cultural constraints, and overlap with other disciplines. These findings are similar to those reported in other cultures (e.g., Leong & Leach, 2007) and on the status of counseling in the Arab world (Al-Darmaki & Sayed 2009; Soliman, 1991). The other threats are insufficient culturally appropriate models in the curriculum, lack of public awareness of the counseling profession, and insufficient job opportunities for graduates. This is similar to what was reported in other cultures (e.g., Watson & Fouche, 2007).

In conclusion, the program evaluation carried out in this study clearly achieved its objectives in which the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the counselor education program at UAEU were identified and discussed in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of the program. Both students and educators have identified challenging issues that deserve considerable attention for the future of counselors’ training program and the counseling profession in general in this country, as discussed in the implications section of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has insightful findings, it has a number of limitations to be noted. While the study contributes important information to the stakeholders of counseling and counselor education programs in the region, the generalizability of its findings has to be viewed with caution. The very fact that the study utilizes a considerably small sample to represent a specific population (Emirati female students) in a specific university in the region, substantially limits its possibilities to draw any far reaching generalizations. The unique contextual factors characteristic of any university’s classroom environment and campus, the particular socio-cultural realities that influence the academic functioning and student (e.g., teacher relationships) are only some of the factors that may have influenced the perspectives of the participants in unique ways. Only senior students were invited to participate in the study, due to the study’s particular emphasis on evaluating the practicum component of counselor education. Perhaps the views of the other students might be fruitful in gathering the information needed. Another limitation was that almost all the faculty who participated in the study had limited knowledge of the counseling profession as well as the program. Many of them had the students in only one of their classes. This perhaps explains their limited responses to the questionnaire items. A better knowledge of the counseling profession as well as the program might make faculty perceptions broader and could have encouraged more participation from other faculty members.
Given the time and access constraints, the study has focused only on current students and faculty members and has largely relied on an adapted version of the SWOT analysis to arrive at its findings. This method was chosen due to its potential for identifying defects and facilitating strategic planning. However, over-reliance on a single method and limited sources of information may have led to biased conclusions in this study. Future research may avoid such a pitfall by applying multi-method approaches that allow for a more comprehensive program evaluation. The source of information also has an important impact on the conclusions generated in the study. As with other more comprehensive program evaluations reviewed in this study, a number of data sources such as alumni, employers, practicum supervisors as well as students’ and counselor educators’ academic accomplishments and research involvements may all be considered in future studies for more reliable program evaluations. Nevertheless, this study and the findings that it brings forth responds to a critical need to evaluate counselor education in the region that has long been overdue and provides valuable insights for future studies attempting to critically understand counselor education in the region.

Implications

The findings of this analysis have vital implications for the future of counseling as a profession in the UAE. Counseling is a relatively new profession in the UAE (Al-Darmaki, 2004, 2005; Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Al-Darmaki & Sulaiman, 2008); therefore, its professional identity and role in the society are yet to be defined. This necessitates a carefully planned strategy to enhance public awareness of the profession and recognition by governmental and non-governmental institutions, and to help remove the stigma associated with it. The importance of counseling must be communicated in a way that reflects the cultural values of the UAE, while acknowledging what can be learned from the experiences of other cultures. Professional associations, educational institutions, faculty, and students need to take up the responsibility to raise awareness of the profession to open up more job opportunities for the graduates of the program. At the same time, more counselor education programs are needed to meet the growing needs of the society. The strategic plan will also have to include a clear statement of the counselor education’s mission. Licensure and certification policies will have to be developed and implemented to ensure that counseling practitioners have the appropriate qualifications and credentials.

Following faculty recommendations, the program will have to revise the curriculum, and include broader coverage of social problems, more analytical and counseling skills, in-depth knowledge of counseling-related disciplines, and more emphasis on report writing skills. Such revisions will enhance the program’s effectiveness as well as the quality of its graduates. In the long run, this will contribute to the development of the counseling profession in the UAE. When revising the curriculum, attention should be given to the cultural context, solid theoretical foundation, skills-oriented and research-oriented courses, graduate employability, and intensive supervised training to meet certification and licensure requirements. This requires competent onsite supervisors and mentors during practicum period who will guide students throughout their training.

This can be furthered by providing supervision for on-site supervisors to ensure that trainees of the program are receiving competent supervision and training. Another way of dealing with this issue is to provide intensive counseling training to on-site supervisors and encourage them to consult with experienced counselors as they work with trainees. The counselor education faculty at UAE University should also provide some resources (e.g., online resources, DVDs) to help both trainees and supervisors advance their counseling and supervision competencies. School and community mental health agencies should be encouraged to hire competent counselors not only to ensure the quality of supervision our students will receive, but also to ensure the quality of counseling services provided to the community. This would contribute to developing trust and public confidence in the counseling profession.

Future research will need to take into consideration areas that will help establish more counselor education programs in the region and improve the quality of the existing one at UAE University. A master’s program is inevitable in this regard and developing licensure and certification policies is critical. The graduate program will encourage more research on various social problems and interventions appropriate to the UAE setting. Periodic assessment of counseling needs nation-wide and counselor education programs is needed to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the programs. Finally, counselor educators should increase their efforts to enhance public awareness of counseling and its benefits to the society as well as to correcting any misconceptions about its roles and nature. This could be done through lectures on television channels or workshops in public places such as schools, hospitals, and community buildings. Furthermore, employment opportunities for graduates of this program could be expanded by creating counselor positions in hospitals, private schools in the country, etc. This will motivate more students to register in the program as well as it will provide the profession its due recognition in the society. Finally, based on the present findings more comprehensive program evaluation studies using different methods will be invaluable for the advancement of counseling in the UAE.

**Conclusion**

Having discussed the challenges the relatively new counseling profession is facing in both school and community settings in the UAE, it is noteworthy to mention that the UAE University Human Services and Counseling program is taking on a pioneering role in professionalizing counseling. The measures being taken include:

1. Developing and enhancing public awareness of the counseling profession through the clarification of the meaning of counseling and the roles and responsibilities of professional counselors. This includes clearly defining the identity of the profession and de-stigmatizing it as advice giving only and/or a profession that deals with only insane people.
2. Soliciting support and recognition from government and non-governmental agencies and other potential employers to create job opportunities for counselors by demonstrating the need for more counselors in schools and community settings

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to meet the needs of the rapidly changing society. This requires advocating for more counselor education advanced programs in the country and the designation of proper/appropriate job titles for graduates.

3. Improving the quality of the only existing undergraduate counselor education program at UAE University through evaluation and curriculum revision to ensure culturally appropriate training practices and proper supervision as well as developing and implementing a graduate program to meet the need for well-qualified practitioners.

4. Training school teachers and other paraprofessionals in counseling knowledge and skills to be better equipped to serve in the school and community settings.

5. Increasing research activities in the areas of school and mental health counseling related and appropriate to the UAE society to identify the counseling needs of the people and develop culturally appropriate interventions to respond to these needs and challenges. This is very critical as the way in which counselors’ responses to the changing society, its needs and concerns, will shape the profession and its identity in the future (Marsella & Pederson, 2004).

6. Helping to develop a professional counseling association and a regulatory body to design and implement a code of ethics and standards of practice as well as certification and licensure policies for counseling professionals in the UAE.

References


Table 1
SWOT Analysis of Students’ Perceptions of the UAE University Human Services and Counseling Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-faculty relationship</td>
<td>Positive student-faculty relationships</td>
<td>Inadequate number of faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective and valuable faculty members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>A program build on strong and reliable theoretical foundations</td>
<td>Overdependence on western models/theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of applied courses and practicum component gives students practical exposure</td>
<td>Lack of diverse training, needs for pre-practicum programs/workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal emphasis on both personal/professional development of students</td>
<td>The program is culturally irrelevant, inappropriate for an Emirati context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple opportunite ties for professional development</td>
<td>Lack of appropriate and needed resources to help students practice and develop helping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum</td>
<td>A comprehensive practicum that equips students with needed skills, knowledge, and attitudes to prepare them for a successful career as human service providers</td>
<td>Lack of a master’s program in counseling in the department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Threats/Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>A call for change and transformation of the curriculum, unanimously agreed upon by all stakeholders</td>
<td>University stipulation that necessitate English as a medium of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University directives that demand an employability oriented/specialty oriented curriculum</td>
<td>Imbalance between theory and practice courses in the curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A total lack of sufficient models and theories that can be relied upon to suit a nonwestern counseling context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 continues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats/Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shortage of professional counselors in the field to supervise practicum students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of counseling Profession in</td>
<td>Increasing recognition of the need for counselors in the nation</td>
<td>Insufficient practicum supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>Increasing acknowledgement of counseling as a profession from authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing awareness of the discipline among the general public and potential employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling careers</td>
<td></td>
<td>The dismal status of counseling in UAE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community’s limited knowledge and counseling as a profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance from related disciplines to acknowledge and accept counseling as a profession</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Declining appreciation of the discipline due to graduating students’ predicament of having to work in positions unrelated to counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Counseling as a profession unauthorized and unacknowledged by related authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited employment for graduating students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural constraints that impede all cross-gender (counselor-client dyad)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>counseling session interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Society’s misconceptions and stigma regarding counselors/counseling practice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguity in roles and responsibilities of a school counselor</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE Culture</td>
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</table>

Table 2
SWOT Analysis of Faculty Perceptions Towards The UAE University Human Services and Counseling Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Are motivated to learn and work as helpers</td>
<td>Many students have low motivation to learn statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are motivated to help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have better English skills compared to peers from other programs</td>
<td>Have limited ability to apply counseling skills in other courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of motivation to learn about other areas apart from counseling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have low English proficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of proper research skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have limited knowledge of the scope of counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Practicum experience and supervision</td>
<td>The program has put more emphasis on human services and counseling than other disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of strong base of psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Faculty support students</td>
<td>Need to revise the program curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Use of technology in training</td>
<td>Need for more case studies and report writing skills training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have training in relevant institutions</td>
<td>Need more basic and applied courses such as abnormal psychology, testing, diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use counseling centers in the country for training</td>
<td>Need for qualified supervisors during practicum, need for counseling lab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 2 continues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats/Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with community</td>
<td>Real interaction with the community</td>
<td>Develop counseling awareness in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAE University community can be useful for training purposes</td>
<td>Establishing a community center for students to get supervised counseling experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student professional development</td>
<td>Opportunities for students to work in several human service organizations such as woman organizations</td>
<td>Need for broader knowledge of social problems, need more research experience and skills, need to improve English skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Profession</td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for certification criteria and licensure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for code of ethics and standards for practice relevant to UAE culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling careers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for reliable job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>How to deal with cultural constrains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>