

## Building Blocks to Portability: Culmination of the 20/20 Initiative

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The profession of counseling has now endorsed a consensus licensure title and scope of practice for all U.S. states and jurisdictions. This article describes the development of the title and scope of practice through the Building Blocks to Portability Project of the 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative. Outcomes and implications of this final stage of the 20/20 project intended to ease interstate licensure portability are presented.

**Keywords:** portability, licensure title, scope of practice, 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling, Building Blocks to Portability Project

The 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative was a decadelong strategic planning effort by the profession of counseling. The first two outcomes, the Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession and the consensus definition of counseling, are documented by Kaplan and Gladding (2011) and Kaplan, Tarvydas, and Gladding (2014) in the *Journal of Counseling & Development*. This article describes the third and final 20/20 achievement—the development of the consensus licensure title and scope of practice for the profession of counseling through the Building Blocks to Portability Project. Although informal articles and blogs within the counseling profession have been written about the consensus licensure title and scope of practice, this article provides greater detail and archives the 20/20 Building Blocks to Portability Project in the scholarly counseling literature.

### Background

The 20/20 Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession contain seven priority issues for advancing the future of counseling (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011, p. 371). After promulgating the consensus definition of counseling, the delegates from the 31 participating organizations revisited the list and selected the creation of licensure portability as the most important outstanding issue for the counseling profession. The 20/20 delegates chose licensure portability as the focus of the third project because transferring a professional counseling license from one state or U.S. jurisdiction to another is often exceedingly difficult and has become a source of great frustration for many professional counselors. Although it is challenging to determine exact numbers, the

American Counseling Association (ACA) reports weekly communication from professional counselor members—often with many years of experience—who move to another state and experience licensure reciprocity roadblocks. As a result, licensed counselors may feel that they are prisoners in their own state (Kaplan, 2012).

Roadblocks to licensure portability have occurred because state licensing boards developed their rules and regulations independently of one another over a span of more than 30 years, resulting in “little consistency from state to state regarding licensure titles, counselor scope of practice, and education requirements to become a counselor” (Rollins, 2013, p. 66). At the time the 20/20 delegates began the Building Blocks to Portability initiative, there were more than 45 counselor licensure titles, no two scopes of practice were the same, minimum graduate credit hours varied from none stated to 60, and post-master’s supervision requirements had a range of 500 to 4,500 hours (Kaplan, 2012). State counseling boards recognize that these wide variations constitute challenges, which have led to a licensure portability crisis, as characterized by one licensing board chairperson who stated that “I see this [licensure portability] as the most important discussion point in the regulatory process for our profession” (Bray, 2015, p. 35).

### The Building Blocks to Portability Project

The 20/20 Oversight Committee designed the Building Blocks to Portability Project as a vehicle to catalyze licensure reciprocity. To counter the array of existing licensure titles, scopes of practice, and education requirements, the project focused on three goals:

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- Develop a consensus licensure *title* for the profession to recommend to all state counselor licensure boards.
- Develop a consensus licensure *scope of practice* for the profession to recommend to all state counselor licensure boards.
- Develop consensus *education requirements* for the profession to recommend to all state counselor licensure boards.

The assumption behind the Building Blocks to Portability Project was that the transfer of a license from one jurisdiction to another would be facilitated if all state counseling boards used the same title, scope of practice, and set of education requirements. A bonus would be that the profession of counseling would reach agreement and unification on a single approach to licensure, thus promoting the key concepts within the 20/20 Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession of strengthening identity and presenting ourselves as one profession.

### Process

Each of the 31 participating organizations appointed a delegate to the Building Blocks to Portability Project. The organizations had complete autonomy on naming a delegate. Each delegate was then asked to align him- or herself to one of three work groups: One focused on developing the licensure title, a second focused on developing the scope of practice, and a third focused on developing the education requirements. (See the Appendix for a list of the participants and their work groups.) The three work groups worked concurrently and independently of one another. In keeping with the consensus-building success of the 20/20 consensus definition of counseling, the three work groups used a modified Delphi technique for completing their assignment. The Delphi method uses content experts who work together through a process of successive rounds of content analysis until a consensus definition is achieved (see Kaplan et al., 2014, pp. 367–368). A Delphi round starts with each participant providing his or her best solution to the presenting issue. Delegates then rate each proposed solution and identify those that are most highly rated. Each delegate is asked to combine the best parts of the highly rated ideas into a new solution. These new solutions, which begin to merge, are again rated by all participants in a second round. Rounds continue until one solution is clearly rated above others.

*Licensure title.* Developing the consensus licensure title was the easiest and quickest of the three goals to accomplish. The first Delphi round conducted by the Title Work Group resulted in clear support for the title licensed professional counselor (LPC). In a report, the work group chair stated, “Of the nine members of this workgroup, seven members specifically endorsed the LPC title . . . no dissent was expressed from the other two members” (Bertram, 2012, p. 2). This was not a surprising result given that LPC is the most common licensure

title in the United States; 32 states and jurisdictions use this title (American Counseling Association, 2016).

In proposing the endorsement of LPC, members of the Title Work Group prepared the following statement for their fellow delegates:

The licensure title workgroup endorses the title of Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) for licensure portability. This title clearly communicates to the public that it is inclusive of all counselors, and is the most consistent with terms used by most states and jurisdictions. Placing the term “licensed” prior to the word “counselor” designates that there is a clear pathway of specific requirements that must be met by applicants to hold the title. The term “professional” indicates that the counselor is a trained and skilled professional who develops a specialized relationship with clients. This title reflects the scope of practice of counselors and is one that state licensure boards might more easily adopt. (Bertram, 2012, p. 1)

On March 22, 2012, the delegates met at the ACA conference in San Francisco.

A motion was made by the Title Work Group to endorse LPC as the 20/20 consensus licensure title. Twenty-four organizational delegates were in attendance, and the motion was approved by a vote of 22–2. The delegate-approved licensure title was then distributed to all 31 organizations participating in 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling. Twenty-nine of the 31 organizations submitted votes. Of those, 28 (97%) voted to endorse the title.

*Licensure scope of practice.* Members of the Scope of Practice Work Group were presented with an enormous task of winnowing down particular job-related competencies into broad, inclusive categories. The initial Delphi round conducted by the work group reflected the variability of state counseling licensure scopes of practice and generated a large number of potential items ( $N = 154$ ). Adding to the complexity, the work group was unable to identify a cutoff for the second Delphi round because an unwieldy number (100+) of these items were highly rated. To move forward, the chair of the work group requested that the Oversight Committee conduct a content analysis of existing licensure scopes of practice in the United States in order to identify the most commonly used activities. The content analysis was completed by the 20/20 administrative coordinator and identified the following as the most frequently occurring categories and words in state licensing scopes of practice:

- *Populations served:* Individuals, groups, families, couples, and organizations.
- *Direct services:* Counseling, education, career, development, social, emotional, psychotherapy, behavior, prevention, mental disorders, personal, disability, mental health, goals, plans, family, individual, marriage, and wellness.

- *Appraisal*: Diagnose, evaluation, treatment planning, and appraisal.
- *Counseling-related activities*: Consultation, referral, research, supervision, program evaluation, administration, and record keeping.
- *Limitations*: Appropriate training, training and competence, professional preparation, projective testing, and medical problems.

The work group used the content analysis as a proxy for their second Delphi round and crafted the most commonly occurring terms into a five-paragraph draft scope of practice. It must be noted that the National Board for Certified Counselors assisted in this effort by procuring an expert in legislative consultation to edit the scope of practice into a format that would be typically seen in state legislation. The draft scope of practice was then distributed to all delegates for review. On March 21, 2013, the delegates met at the ACA conference in Cincinnati. A motion was made by the Scope of Practice Work Group to endorse its draft. Twenty-eight voting organizational delegates were in attendance, and the motion was approved by a vote of 27–1.

The delegate-approved scope of practice was then sent to the 31 participating organizations with a request for endorsement. In response, some organizations identified and questioned two alterations that had occurred when the legislative consultant formatted the draft. First, the term *counseling treatment plan* had been replaced with *education and mental health treatment plan*. Second, the treatment of physical disorders had been removed from the scope of practice. The Oversight Committee agreed that these two changes were substantive and revised the scope of practice to be faithful to the original intent of the Scope of Practice Work Group. The following scope of practice was then sent to the 20/20 organizations with a request for endorsement:

#### **Scope of Practice for Professional Counseling**

The independent practice of counseling encompasses the provision of professional counseling services to individuals, groups, families, couples and organizations through the application of accepted and established mental health counseling principles, methods, procedures and ethics.

Counseling promotes mental health wellness, which includes the achievement of social, career, and emotional development across the lifespan, as well as preventing and treating mental disorders and providing crisis intervention.

Counseling includes, but is not limited to, psychotherapy, diagnosis, evaluation; administration of assessments, tests and appraisals; referral; and the establishment of counseling plans for the treatment of individuals, couples, groups and families with emotional, mental, addiction and physical disorders.

Counseling encompasses consultation and program evaluation, program administration within and to schools

and organizations, and training and supervision of interns, trainees, and pre-licensed professional counselors through accepted and established principles, methods, procedures, and ethics of counselor supervision.

The practice of counseling does not include functions or practices that are not within the professional's training or education.

Twenty-nine organizations submitted votes, with 28 (97%) voting in favor of endorsement.

*Licensure education requirements.* Delegates assigned to the Education Requirements Work Group were tasked with determining the common educational goals and outcomes for the education of license-eligible counselors. Sixty-five items were generated during the first Delphi round. The highest rated items stood out as standards required by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The items reflected a preference for course work in group theory and practice; counseling theory and practice; cultural diversity; professional and ethical issues; professional orientation; assessment and appraisal; human growth and development; individual, group, and family counseling interventions; career development; psychopathology; and diagnosis and treatment. Two highly rated items specifically mentioned the CACREP Standards as the exemplar for licensure education requirements.

On the basis of the results of the first Delphi round, the Education Requirements Work Group recommended that

1. the education requirements for licensure approved by the delegates include graduation from a CACREP-accredited mental health counseling (MHC) or clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) program;
2. grandparenting language be included that applied to graduates of programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) and to graduates from other CACREP program areas for a limited time period (e.g., 5 years); and
3. reciprocity rules be developed that could be applied to licensees in good standing who graduated prior to CACREP's existence or prior to their program becoming accredited.

The Education Requirements Work Group provided the following rationale for its three recommendations:

- The recommendations were in line with the recent statements/decisions of the Institute of Medicine, the Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Congress for TRICARE.
- The recommendations were in support of the seven principles of 20/20 since their implementation would (a) present a clear professional identity, (b) serve to

unify the profession, and (c) provide clarity to the public.

- The recommendation to include both the CACREP mental health and clinical mental health titles in the model licensure language was to accommodate the title change that occurred (from MHC to CMHC) with the adoption of CACREP's 2009 Standards. Of note was the fact that CACREP had accredited MHC programs since implementation of the 1988 Standards, and these program area standards had always required a 60-semester-hour master's degree.
- The recommendation to develop grandparenting language allowed counseling programs to make necessary changes to become accredited during the specified, but time-limited, transition period.
- The recommendation to develop rules that could be applied to current licensees who needed to transfer licenses, but had not graduated from a CACREP program, allowed for the continued movement of qualified counselors who may have had significant work experiences. (Bobby, 2012, p. 2)

The 20/20 delegates reviewed the recommendations of the Education Requirements Work Group at their meeting in Cincinnati. There was general agreement on the need to focus on an existing educational accrediting body as the basis for consensus educational requirements. However, the delegates could not agree as to whether that body should be CACREP or CORE. The meeting notes stated,

The delegates discussed the [Education Requirements Work Group] proposal. Much of the discussion centered on the challenges presented to the delegates by maintaining two accrediting bodies, CACREP and CORE. The delegates reaffirmed their statement from the San Francisco conference that having a single educational accrediting body would be a clear benefit for the counseling profession but could not come to a consensus on the proposal from the education workgroup. (Kaplan, 2013, p. 6)

### Implementation of Recommendations

In June 2015, a letter was sent to each of the 53 U.S. counselor licensure boards (the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico) requesting adoption of the licensure title and scope of practice promulgated by the 20/20 Building Blocks to Portability Project. The correspondence was signed by the sitting presidents of the two 20/20 cosponsoring organizations: Dr. Susan Hammonds-White for the American Association of State Counseling Boards and Dr. Robert L. Smith for ACA. In part, the letter stated,

On behalf of the counseling profession through *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling*, we request that your

licensing board adopt the licensure title *Licensed Professional Counselor* and the licensure scope of practice as stated previously. We believe that this is a win-win situation for everyone; it will benefit professional counselors by helping to resolve the portability crisis in the United States, and it is in the best interest of the public because it will help address counselor shortages in rural areas, will allow a better migration of counselors who can meet the needs of underserved populations, and will help citizens to have a better understanding of professional counselors. . . .

In closing, this is a historic moment for the profession of counseling. The 20/20 process has spanned over 7 years, has consumed countless hours and efforts of voluntary service by an unbelievably dedicated cohort of delegates and leaders from over 30 counseling organizations, and culminates now with this request. We are honored to have been a part of this process. (Hammonds-White & Smith, 2015, Request for Adoption section, para. 1; Correspondence section, para. 2)

Follow-up to the letter was conducted. Each counselor licensure board was contacted to gauge its interest in implementing the title and scope of practice endorsed by the profession of counseling and to provide any additional information or assistance. As of the writing of this article, a majority of licensing boards have expressed a willingness to explore the adoption of the 20/20 licensure title and scope of practice. Four states have specifically indicated a willingness to initiate the adoption process: Florida, Kentucky, Virginia, and Washington. It should be noted that five states have also declined to pursue the adoption of the 20/20 licensure title and scope of practice: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan, and Vermont. Reasons for declination include the unwillingness to risk legislative change in the current political climate and the legal inability to advocate for licensure change. Ongoing follow-up by the ACA Professional Affairs and Government Affairs Departments continues to occur with licensing boards across the nation.

### Conclusion

The ambitious and overarching goal of 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling was to complement many other initiatives in order to best position a unified profession of counseling for entry into the 3rd decade of the 21st century. Across 20/20's decadelong efforts, three distinct products have emerged: the Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession, a consensus definition of counseling, and the consensus licensure title and scope of practice for the profession of counseling. The Building Blocks to Portability Project succeeded in formulating standards intended to cross jurisdictional lines to ease licensure portability for LPCs in the United States.

Since the ending of the 20/20 consortium, numerous accomplishments to the benefit of the counseling profession

have been achieved, including the merger of CACREP and CORE, the two educational accrediting bodies for the counseling profession in the United States. The 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative played an important role in catalyzing this merger. CACREP (2014) noted in its annual report that “the affiliation agreement was a clear and timely response to the call made by the 20/20 delegates for a unified accreditation process for the counseling profession” (p. 11).

In summary, this article adds to the archive of documentation regarding the development of the profession of counseling. The 20/20 project has allowed the profession of counseling to reach new developmental milestones. Because of the dynamic nature of the profession of counseling’s growth and development, the conclusion of 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling marks only the end of one milestone. Recognizing the enormity of revising state licensure rules and regulations, leaders and members of the profession of counseling eagerly await change and continue to advocate in ways that will ultimately ease the struggles encountered by LPCs moving from one state to another. At the conclusion of the Building Blocks to Portability Project, the profession had achieved both a consensus title and a scope of practice. Since then, the profession has continued to achieve new milestones. Our history is being written; the profession of counseling continues to chart its course. The future of our profession is bright.

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## APPENDIX

## Delegate Work Group Assignments

Work Group and Delegate	Organization
Title Work Group	
Burt Bertram (Chair)	Association for Specialists in Group Work
Ed Cannon/Susan Seem	Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling
Tom Davis	Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
Joseph Dear	American Counseling Association (ACA)
Shane Haberstroh	Association for Creativity in Counseling
Adriana McEachern	ACA Southern Region
Spencer Niles	National Career Development Association
John Parkman	ACA North Atlantic Region
Laura Veach	International Association of Addictions and Offender Counselors
Rosie Woodruff	ACA Western Region
Scope of Practice Work Group	
Kent Butler	Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development
Catherina Chang	Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling
Cindy Chapman	Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification
Tom Clawson	National Board for Certified Counselors
Perry Francis (Chair)	American College Counseling Association
Bret Hendricks	International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors
Jim Korcuska	ACA Midwest Region
Linda Shaw	Council on Rehabilitation Education
Caroline Wilde	American Rehabilitation Counseling Association
Education Requirements Work Group	
Linda Barclay	American Mental Health Counselors Association
Carol Bobby (Chair)	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
Rhonda Bryant	Counselors for Social Justice
Joe Keferl	National Rehabilitation Counseling Association
Cathy Malchiodi	Association for Humanistic Counseling
Barry Mascari	American Association of State Counseling Boards
Chris Moll	Association for Adult Development and Aging
Linda Parker	Association for Counselors and Educators in Government <sup>a</sup>
Mike Robinson	Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling
Tom Sweeney	Chi Sigma Iota

*Note.* Oversight Committee members during the Building Blocks to Portability Project were Leona Bishop, Brad Erford, Marcheta Evans, Samuel Gladding, William Green, Carol Buchanan Jones, David Kaplan (Administrative Coordinator), Kurt Kraus (Facilitator), Don W. Locke, and Cirecie West-Olatunji.

<sup>a</sup>Changed its name to the Military and Government Counseling Association in 2015.