



AMERICAN COUNSELING  
ASSOCIATION

[counseling.org](http://counseling.org)

## FROM THE DESK OF RICHARD YEP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Colleague,

As you may know, this past fall we undertook a historic project on behalf of counselors - the first ever Counselor Compensation Study.

Nearly 9,000 counselors from across the nation participated in this survey of the counselor workforce. We asked nearly 50 questions regarding salary and benefits from health care to parental leave. We asked about education, work history, licensure, work setting, and many other factors as well.

Although, these types of surveys exist for other professions such as psychology and social work, nothing of this kind exists for counselors. Our goal is to provide the profession with a comprehensive look at compensation and benefits, broken down by specialty, geography, work setting and many other factors.

We all know that counselors aren't in this profession for the money. But we did find that counselors can be well-compensated in many ways besides salary. Benefits such as health care coverage for counselors exceed the norm for the U.S. Many counselors also have the opportunity to set their own career path through private practice.

I believe the level of participation in this study indicates that counselors are very excited about receiving this information. In addition, the results of this study have spurred us to begin development of new benefits that can aid counselors, particularly those just beginning their careers.

In the meantime, please take a moment to read through the scope of this study, enclosed in this executive summary.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts about this landmark work from ACA!

Sincerely,

Richard Yep, CAE, FASAE  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Counseling Association

STATE OF THE  
PROFESSION

2014 COUNSELOR  
COMPENSATION

The American Counseling Association (ACA) undertook an effort to define the compensation and benefits typical of the counseling profession.

“Typical of the counseling profession” is a phrase that will naturally raise some eyebrows. Counseling is a diverse and varied profession with dozens of specialties and work settings, as well as professional requirements that vary from state to state and specialty to specialty. Because of the diverse nature of counseling, this study attempts to quantify the impacts of certain factors such as specialty and geography, without diluting the study sample to such an extent that no valuable information can be gleaned.

To that end, we defined the initial scope of this study to encompass 4 major specialties:

- Mental Health Counselors
- Rehabilitation Counselors
- School Counselors
- Counselor Educators

With future iterations of this study, we hope to expand the scope so that we may understand more about additional specialties.

The specific objectives of this study included:

- Understanding differences in compensation between major counseling specialties
- Determining how geography impacts compensation
- Understanding the role of advanced education in compensation
- Understanding the impact of other experiential factors such as length of service and work setting
- Drawing a clearer picture of how counselors work through part-time work and private practice
- Defining the benefits typically offered as part of a compensation package to counselors
- Drawing comparisons between counselor compensation and compensation in related fields

## METHODOLOGY

ACA developed and deployed a 46 question web survey for this study.

E-mail invitations were sent to all ACA members, as well as a sample of the four major specialties selected for study from outside of ACA membership. We selected samples from both within and outside of membership in order to ensure that no bias was presented by selecting only ACA members. In addition, certain specialties are under-represented in ACA membership. Sourcing a portion of the sample from outside of ACA membership ensured the sample size would be significant within each specialty selected for study.

The sample sources for each specialty outside of ACA membership included:

- State Licensure Lists
- Self-Identified School Counselors
- Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification List
- Database of Counselor Educators

Some specialties are over- or under-represented in the final sample due to response rates or constraints on the number of messages ACA was allowed to send to each list. Therefore, findings are presented by specialty rather than in aggregate.

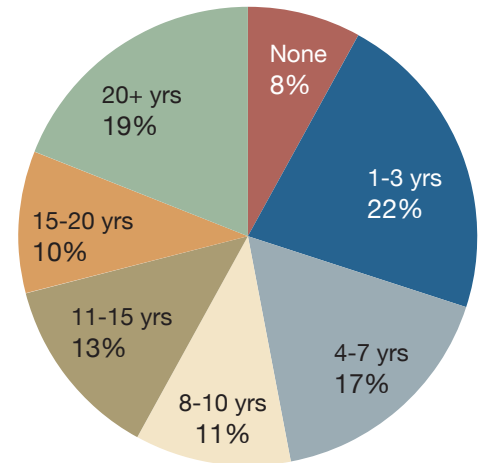
SPECIALTY	RESPONSES	MARGIN OF ERROR
Mental Health	5,045	1.40%
Rehabilitation	581	3.96%
School Counselors	1,663	2.30%
Counselor Educators	576	3.70%
Other	1,084	3.00%

\*Margin of Error is calculated at 95% confidence

## EXPERIENCE

The survey attracted a range of responders based on experience.

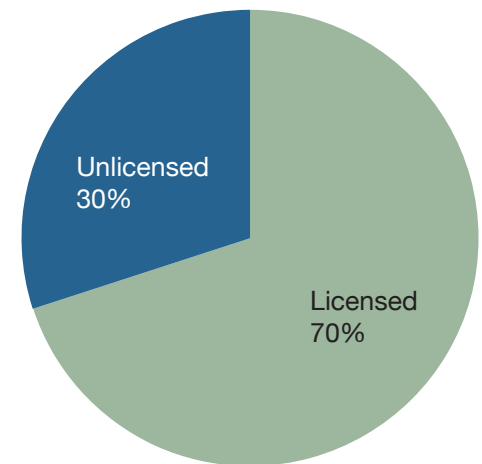
Approximately 8% of respondents indicated that they had no years of experience. Some of these represented newly minted counselors, however a small group of current Master's students responded to the survey. Those who indicated they are currently a Master's student have been removed from the sample in all analyses presented here.



## LICENSURE

Not every counselor must be licensed, and licensure requirements vary by state. ACA wanted to be able to assess the impact of licensure on compensation. Respondents were asked about licensure based upon their answers to questions regarding specialty.

Nearly 30% of mental health counselors are unlicensed.



## WORK SETTING

Counselors work in a variety of settings. Different work settings typically offer different types of compensation packages. Not all work settings are appropriate for all specialties. While Mental Health Counselors work in a wide variety of settings, those settings tend to exclude those which are mainly the domain of more specialized counselors. For instance, nearly 90% of school counselors work in K-12 educational settings, while 45% of rehabilitation counselors work for state or local government.

Work setting and specialty are naturally related, which means that the combined effect of work setting and specialty on pay and compensation should be examined closely.

No Response	0%
Business/Industry - Including private for-profit rehabilitation company	3%
College/University	15%
Correctional Facility	1%
Counseling/Rehabilitation Agency - Private	14%
Government - Federal	2%
Government - State/County/City	6%
Hospital	4%
Insurance Company	1%
K-12 School	19%
Other	13%
Pastoral/Religious	1%
Self-employed/Private Practice	20%

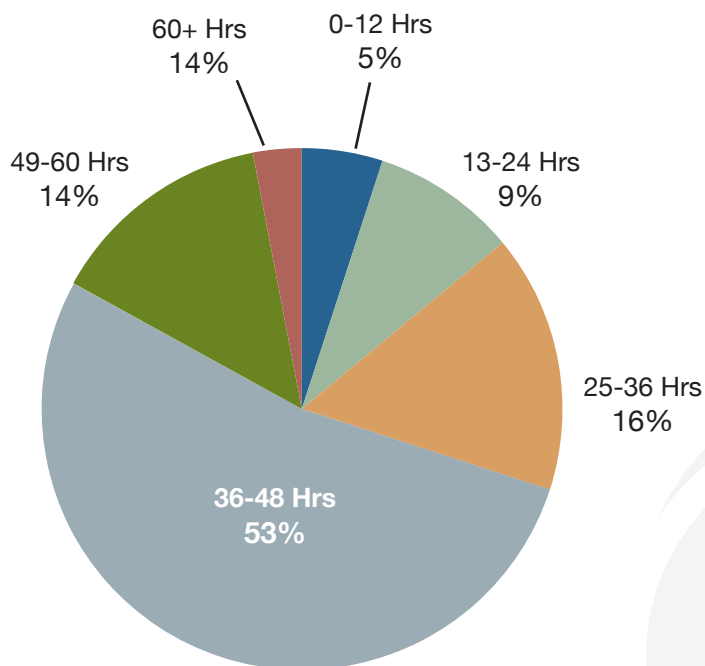
## HOURS WORKED

The survey indicates that many counselors work in more than one position, often pursuing a private practice or other such secondary position in addition to their current position. A significant number of counselors also work a single counseling position part time.

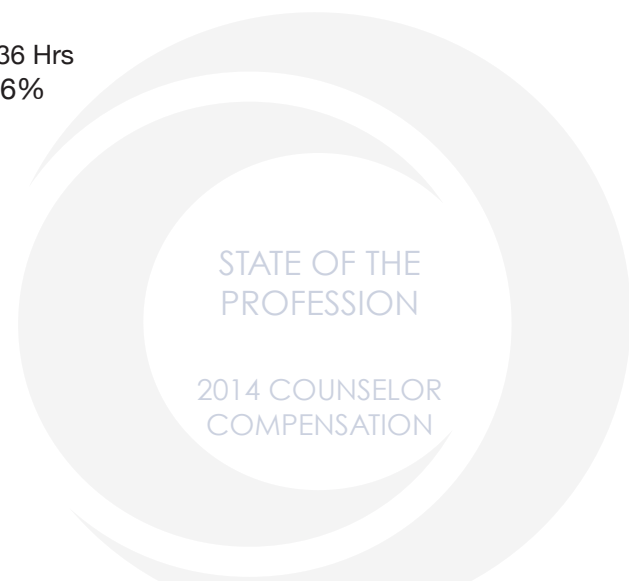
For purposes of this study, we defined a part-time position as less than 25 hours per week. In addition, we asked respondents to answer questions related to compensation and benefits for their primary counseling position only. A second line of questioning related to income was asked of those respondents who indicated they have more than one counseling-related position, such as a private practice or adjunct faculty position in order to understand the impact of second positions on total income.

Only 14% of counselors work part time in their primary counseling position. On average, counselors reported working 37 hours per week.

34% of counselors hold a second position outside of their primary counseling position. Counselor Educators are most likely to hold a secondary position, with over 50% answering affirmatively.



**HOURS WORKED WEEKLY  
IN COUNSELING**



## GEOGRAPHY

All 50 states as well as a small international sample were represented in this study.

Very few individual states recorded large enough samples to analyze individually, so the analyses presented in this report will focus on region.

REGION	RESPONDERS
Alaska	0.5%
California	2.4%
Hawaii	0.4%
Mid-Atlantic	11.3%
Midwest	25.6%
New England	7.3%
Northwest	7.6%
Other	2.2%
Southeast	27.5%
Southwest	8.1%
Texas	7.0%
Canada	0.1%

## COMPENSATION

Many inter-related factors influence salary, among them geography, length of experience, work setting, education, licensure, and job description. The average salary figures below are influenced by all of these factors. There are large variances in salary within each specialty, making it important to understand the impact of the above factors on your earning potential.

SPECIALTY	AVERAGE PRIMARY SALARY
Clinical Mental Health/Mental Health/Community Counseling	\$40,421
Counselor Educator	\$66,405
Rehabilitation Counselor	\$53,561
School Counselor	\$53,299
Other	\$51,074

The minimum salary given for each specialty was zero, or no salary. When we examined these respondents, we were surprised to find that only half of them were current students. Much of the remainder indicated that they were within their first few years of counseling experience. Our assumption is that many of these counselors are working towards licensure or otherwise job-hunting. The numbers of counselors with no salary indicates just how difficult breaking into this profession may be, particularly for mental health counselors.

The full ACA Salary Survey takes a deep look into the factors that influence salaries and earning potential for counselors of all kinds.



## EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Counselors who are not self-employed (i.e. not in private practice) receive excellent benefits on the whole. In most cases, the benefits available to counselors exceed the national standard for all other professions.

The line of questioning regarding benefits was only asked of those who indicated a work setting other than “self-employed.”

% of respondents indicating coverage is available:  
Counselors (n=7,282) 2013 National Coverage\*

BENEFIT	COUNSELORS	NON-COUNSELORS
Employer Sponsored Retirement Plan	73%	68%
Medical Coverage	81%	72%
Dental	58%	47%
Vision	45%	27%
Short Term Disability Coverage	65%	37%
Long Term Disability Coverage	56%	33%

\*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey; Statistics for Civilian Workers Nationwide

The final report includes information on:

- Training, education, and paid supervision hours
- Paid time off
- The special circumstances of private practitioners

*The American Counseling Association (ACA) thanks the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) for its assistance and cooperation in this effort.*

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