

## Article 4

### **Online Site Supervisor Training in Counselor Education: Using Your Learning Management System Beyond the Classroom to Provide Content for Site Supervisors**

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#### **Abstract**

As counselor educators and field placement coordinators are all too aware, the supervision provided in the field by site supervisors is an essential component of a quality counselor training program. This article describes problem situations in the provision of training to field-based site supervisors housed in multiple locations; a potential solution to this logistical problem; content guidelines for site supervisor training; sample learning management system module content for training; and a summary discussion and call to the profession.

*Keywords:* supervision, counselor education, online training

The logistics of providing quality training to field placement site supervisors can be an ongoing concern to counselor educators and field placement coordinators responsible for planning and executing an effective and ethical supervision plan for counselors-in-training. When site supervisors are not adequately and systemically trained, an undue burden is placed on the faculty members to bridge the gaps between student and

site supervisor expectations. Add to this the extra stress that student counselors may experience when their site supervisors do not view supervision in the same way that their program faculty members view it, and the argument is made that appropriate supervision provided in the field by site supervisors is an essential component of a quality counselor training program. To facilitate a greater commitment to adequate site supervision for counselors-in-training, this article describes some problem situations in the provision of training to field-based site supervisors housed in multiple locations; offers a potential solution to this logistical problem; suggests content guidelines for site supervisor training; outlines sample learning management system module content for training; and concludes with a summary discussion and call to the profession.

### **Description of the Problem**

Every time counseling interns step into the field, they are expecting support and guidance from their site supervisors. Although many site supervisors have the ability to provide excellent learning experiences for counseling interns, the fact remains that many of them have not been formally trained to understand the supervisory responsibility that accompanies the experience of accepting an intern (Barrow & Domingo, 1997; Bjornestad, 2014). The 2014 American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* covers Supervisor Preparation and states, "Prior to offering supervision services, counselors are trained in supervision methods and techniques. Counselors who offer supervision services regularly pursue continuing education activities, including both counseling and supervision topics and skills" (F.2.a.). The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), a founding division of ACA, also incorporates clear parameters for supervisors. In ACES' *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision* (2011), Section 11 clearly states, "The supervisor has formal training in clinical supervision (11.a.iii.). The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) also regards formal supervision training as an essential part of being a competent counselor. The *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2016) states that site supervisors, "Have the education and training to provide clinical supervision. Supervisors regularly pursue continuing education activities on both counseling and supervision topics and skills (D.b.)." Furthermore, the 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards clearly state that site supervisors should have "relevant training in counseling supervision" (3.P.5.); however, many site supervisors have not received any relevant supervisory training and, therefore, may be putting themselves and their students at a disadvantage (Magnuson, Black, & Norem, 2004). Simultaneously, counselor education faculty members depend on site supervisors to take the counselors-in-training into their already busy schedules, knowing that the majority of site supervisors do not have the time to take an entire course on supervision. Given that many site supervisors do not have specific supervision training and do not have the time or resources to take a course in supervision, the responsibility tends to fall on the university faculty supervisor or the counseling department to provide appropriate training to the site supervisors.

The purpose of this article is to share one counselor education department's attempt to bridge the gap via an alternative framework (Rosenfield, 2012; Swank & Tyson, 2012) for providing the missing supervisory training while respecting site

supervisors' busy schedules. We outline the importance of helping site supervisors set up appropriate and professional expectations with their counseling intern students in order to build rapport, which is a key component to successful supervision. We will also open a professional dialogue in the field about the importance of site supervisor training, what that training should incorporate (Erera & Lazar, 1993), and how it will benefit site supervisors, counseling interns and, most importantly, clients.

### **A Potential Solution**

In response to the aforementioned CACREP call for supervisor training, ethical guidelines from ACA and ASCA, and best practices from ACES, something formal must be put in place. In addition, multiple requests for greater support from site supervisors themselves, both anecdotally and through data collection, have required us to evaluate our existing training options to facilitate better site supervisor/student practitioner communication and improve expectations from the supervision process. Just to get a rough idea, during one of our supervision seminars held every semester, when asked how many of our own site supervisors had any sort of formal supervision training, either through a graduate course or a supervision training workshop, less than 10% raised their hands. We saw the need for better trained supervisors and ongoing support of the supervisory relationship. Yet, we have found at our institution (and also heard from colleagues elsewhere) that even the best planned supervisory training workshops are often poorly attended. Our attempted models for supervisor training included all day retreat type training each year, half day breakfast/lunch meetings once per semester, monthly brown bag lunches on special topics, and other face-to-face training variations. But even the best attended training programs were not 100% attended, so in every scenario here, there were site supervisors who had not received training, signing off on counseling intern documents. No matter how well intentioned our current training systems are, the bottom line seems to return to this equation: Busy professionals plus face-to-face training equals scheduling conflicts and low attendance. Our ethical guidelines and desire to provide best practice lead us to seek alternatives that will help us provide supervision training for ALL site supervisors.

At this point in the development of our profession, we are encouraging faculty members involved in the teaching and training of student practitioners who will receive clinical supervision from a field placement site supervisor, to consider multiple modalities for training the site supervisors. As popularity of online teaching increases, we consider the usefulness of online teaching tools and learning management systems for site supervisor training. Vickie Ann McCoy, Chair of the Faculty Field Placement Committee, participated in the required training to receive an Online Educator's Certificate and began designing a system to use these tools to reach site supervisors in their space. Cheryl Neale-McFall used her expertise in clinical supervision to determine best content, and the collaboration has yielded the following model offered here for your consideration.

## **Offering Site Supervisor Training Online**

The following guidelines are offered to those counselor educators considering creating online training modules for site supervisors. First, and foremost, online training must be content driven. It can be enticing when experimenting with programs and apps to let the technology of what can be done drive the design, but as in good teaching, good supervision training demands that we ask ourselves what content needs to be covered before we explore all the high tech bells and whistles. These authors agree that supervisor training must include (at a minimum) the following units or modules: 1) Setting Expectations; 2) The Supervisory Relationship; 3) Defining Supervision (Models & Formats); 4) Information Repository (Procedures/Forms); 5) Space for Discussion and Collaboration; and 6. Optional Topical/Specialty Modules for Continuing Growth and Education.

### **Overview of a Desire to Learn (D2L) Based Online Site Supervisor Training Program**

Our online site supervisor training program is housed in a Desire to Learn (D2L) learning management system. Our technical support representative created a space where users from outside the university community are given access to the content without becoming part of the university D2L announcement system for faculty and students, thereby protecting them from receiving non relevant updates and announcements. New site supervisors will be added each semester, and inactive supervisors will be removed after several semesters without an intern. Our D2L environment provides a system tutorial, distance learning support, and a 24-hour technical support hotline, so even supervisors with no D2L background will be supported in their use of the host environment.

In the program, ALL supervisors must complete the three mandatory modules that lead to a certificate of completion, prior to supervising an intern. These three mandatory training modules include: 1) Setting Expectations, with a supervision contract submitted to the online document dropbox; 2) the Supervisory Relationship, with a reaction to a video vignette submitted to the dropbox; and 3) Defining Supervision, with a content driven multiple choice exam score of 80% or better (participants may retake until successful). Upon successful completion of these three mandatory modules, a certificate of completion for supervision training will be issued and can be submitted to the field placement coordinator as evidence of readiness to begin supervising an intern.

In response to requests for additional support, specific topics, and continuing education to stay abreast of changes in the field, additional modules were designed to allow supervisors to conveniently engage with advanced topics. Modules four through sixteen, offered after the training certificate is earned, include a repository for university- and program-specific information and forms, including the Field Placement Manual; three different “D2L Collaborate” spaces for K–12, Higher Education, and Clinical Mental Health Supervisors; timely topical modules for continued growth; a newsfeed scroll for pinned articles pertaining to supervision; and a news board for reminders and deadlines each semester.

Though each counselor training program will obviously design something different to suit the philosophy, mission, and goals of that faculty, we offer here our training program as a starting point for what can be done, not as an exemplar per se. We have created 16 supervisor training modules:

Module 1 - Setting Expectations

Module 2 - The Supervisory Relationship

Module 3 - Defining Supervision

\*Certificate awarded after successful completion of Modules 1–3\*

Module 4 - Procedures & Forms

Module 5 - Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Module 6 - Higher Ed Counseling/Student Affairs

Module 7 - School Counseling

Module 8 - Ethical Concerns

Module 9 - Clients/Students with Disabilities

Module 10 - Substance Use & Abuse

Module 11 - Crisis/Emergency Management

Module 10 - Groups & Educational Workshops

Module 11 - Evaluating Counseling Skills

Module 12 - Self-Harm & Risk Assessment

Module 13 - Systems & Consultation

Module 14 - Continuing Ed Opportunities

Module 15 - Self-Care/Wellness

Module 16 - Trending Topics

### **Summary Discussion and Call to the Profession**

The time has come for accountability in the verification of site supervisor training. It is clear through the guidelines of ACA, ASCA, ACES, and CACREP that formal training for both university and site supervision is an essential part of being an ethical counselor. Unfortunately, many supervisors do not have any formal training and are often thrown into the role of providing supervision without guidance. Given the busy lives that these volunteers lead, it is not always reasonable to expect them to pay for training and travel to access it. Similarly, we cannot expect the cooperating faculty member to be responsible for training the site supervisor as well as the intern. It is our hope that faculty members involved in the teaching and training of student practitioners, who will receive clinical supervision from a field placement site supervisor, consider multiple modalities for training the site supervisors. We need remote, accessible training options that are free for site supervisors and also provide us with the documentation of

completed training for each site supervisor. We offer our model here in this brief practitioner's article as a call to the profession to develop other alternative training options and to gather the data needed to move supervisor training from "anything goes" to data-supported best practices that are content driven and accessible.

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