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## A Comparison and Exploration of Arkansas Professional School Counselor Activities Across Poverty

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A Comparison and Exploration of Arkansas Professional School Counselor  
Activities Across Poverty

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an exploration of the actual and preferred practices of Arkansas K-12 school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty schools using the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005), follow-up questionnaires, and interviews. The qualitative component of this study brings to light the contextual factors that prevent school counselors from providing direct and indirect services to students outlined in the ASCA National Model. This research study examines the hidden dynamics of the counselor/principal relationship and how this relationship has a pivotal role in the realization of a fully comprehensive developmental school counseling program. This study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of administrators, school officials, school counselors, counselor educators, and government officials concerning the role and function of the school counselor. The goal of this research is to promote change in policy and organizational infrastructure in order to give school counselors the authority to advocate, lead, and direct their own school counseling programs in order to provide appropriate and timely services for all students

*Keywords:* role of school counselors, school counselor activities, counselor/principal relationship, social justice, school counselor perceptions

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving family and friends. The support of my family, church family, and friends has meant so much to me during this chapter in my life. You have been my greatest cheerleaders. Most of all, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, children, and husband. I would like to thank my parents, Shirl and Nancy, for teaching me the meaning of hard work and perseverance. You have been a source of great love and strength in my life that has guided me in everything I do. I would also like to extend my love and appreciation to my children, Adam and Emily, for encouraging me to further my education and to do what I love. Words cannot express how much joy you bring me each and everyday. Finally, I could not have done this without the love and support of my husband, Mark. You have been my rock throughout this amazing journey. I could not have asked for a better husband and friend. I love and appreciate you and everyone who made this dream a reality.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction to the Study

The professional competencies of school counselors outlined in the American Counseling Association's National Model of school counseling revolve around specific principles of ethical behavior to maintain high standards of integrity, leadership, and professionalism (ASCA, 2012). The role of the school counselor is to participate as a member of the educational team and use leadership skills, advocacy, and collaboration to strengthen relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators (ASCA, 2012). However, professional school counselors are still experiencing role ambiguity, assigned non-counseling duties, and lack support in providing the services students need (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the ASCA National Model, school counselors should be spending 80% of their day in direct and indirect services to students (ASCA, 2005; Bowers & Hatch, 2005). Furthermore, school counselors are to provide culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that promote academic, career, and personal/social development for all students (Lee, 2001). However, studies show that school counselor duties assigned by their respective administrators continues to be incongruent with national standards (Perusse, et al., 2004).

Even though there are many studies in the literature about the role of the school counselor and the benefits of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling model, there are few studies supporting successful implementation of the ASCA National Model and the role of the school counselor in high-poverty schools (Clemens, Carey, & Harrington, 2010; Ford, 2014; Jonson, Milltello, Kosine, 2008; Lapan, Gysbers, Bragg, & Pierce, 2013; Sutton & Fall, 1995). The research found in the literature supporting the ASCA National Model are based

primarily on school districts with predominately Caucasian students with middle to above socioeconomic status (Buckard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2013; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2013; McGannon, Carey, & Dimmitt, 2005; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013). In a comprehensive review of the literature, *The Current Status of Outcome Research*, the authors noted a need for more thorough research involving student minorities, school environment, and other psychological factors on student academic, career, and personal development (McGannon et al., 2005).

In a recent Rhode Island study (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013) the authors found data that supports the need for more research with underprivileged children. The researchers determined that schools with more minority students and students qualifying for free and reduced lunch were less likely to receive professional school counseling services. Data from this same Rhode Island study showed that schools with higher percentages of minority students and students eligible for free or reduced lunch had significantly lower per-pupil expenditures, and less personal and social counseling services provided by their school counselors than in more financially affluent schools (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013; Lapan, 2013).

This research study is interested in examining the frequency of actual and preferred activities of school counselors in high-poverty schools in comparison to low and mid-poverty schools. Furthermore, this study is interested in exploring counselor perceptions on the contextual factors that hinder counselors from providing direct/indirect services for students, and the dynamics of the counselor/principal relationship and how this relationship may have a pivotal role in the realization of a fully comprehensive developmental school counseling program (Carnes-Holt, Range, & Cisler, 2012).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to assess the performance of actual and preferred activities of practicing school counselors in Arkansas school districts across poverty levels. Since Arkansas was recognized as having a statewide established school counseling model, the focus of this study was to evaluate specific day to day activities of counselors rather than the presence of general components of a comprehensive school counseling model (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009). This research looked closely at external factors that effect the implementation of a fully comprehensive developmental school counseling program, such as organizational structure, counselor leadership, as well as student demographics (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Hopefully, the results of this study will influence those in authority to consider the impact school counselors have on student outcomes (Dimmit, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005).

Based on previous school counseling experience and accounts of other professional school counselors, it was determined that this study would best serve Arkansas school counselors and students by concentrating on specific counseling activities that counselors are or are not doing and how it affects the school counseling program. To measure counselor activity, this study incorporated surveys, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with school counselors to examine the interpersonal and systemic issues involved in establishing and maintaining a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, particularly components of the ASCA National Model involving direct/indirect services to students (DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The framework used in the design of this study is based on social justice. Social justice is the belief that people are of equal value, are deserving of respect, and should be given equal

opportunities to succeed (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). In order for schools to provide an equitable education for all students, professional school counselors need to operate from a social justice framework (Crethar, 2010; Lee, 1995). This means school counselors need to examine external factors along with internal factors to student mental health, develop a cross-cultural awareness approach, and take a leadership role in advocating for students by addressing systemic injustices that discriminate against race/ethnicity, gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation. (Cox & Lee, 2007; Lee, 2007; Pederson & Carey, 2003). According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), social justice advocacy is considered the most important advocacy for the professional school counselor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When school counselors use a social justice framework and incorporate the advocacy competencies endorsed by the ACA Governing Council, they are better equipped to advocate for their students against social injustices and promote access and equity in education. School counselors must use interventions not only directly with students but also indirectly on behalf of students by looking at all aspects of injustice, whether it be in the classroom, in the community, or in the public (ACA, 2014). Using a social justice framework is crucial in closing the gap in student achievement. School counselors are encouraged to contribute to educational equity by incorporating activities using social justice principals in six key functions: counseling, consulting, coordinating services, connecting schools to families and communities, collecting and analyzing data, and challenging bias in the school system (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it explores a multitude of variables affecting the time spent by school counselors on direct and indirect services to students and addresses the perceptions of school counselors on the reasons behind the inordinate amount of time spent on



non-counseling duties. Many researchers have studied the actual and preferred practices of school counselors. Previous studies have examined various factors such as program implementation, principal-counselor relationships, student to counselor ratios, ethnicity, school climate, and organizational culture (Clemens et al., 2010; Ford, 2014; Jonson et al., 2008; Lapan et al., 2013; Sutton & Fall, 1995). In addition, studies have examined discrepancies in counselor activities by looking at possible predictors such as school counselor ethnicity, education, experience, professional membership, self-efficacy, advocacy skills, and leadership skills (Shimoni & Greenberger, 2015; Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

Past studies have used primarily qualitative or quantitative designs. However, this study has moved the examination of school counselor intervention practices into a different direction by using a mixed-methods design with a social justice framework. Its distinctive approach takes into consideration the influence of impoverished communities on the delivery of student services and on the working relationship of counselors and administrators. This study is one of the few mixed-methods research designs exploring the topic of school counselor activities and the factors that influence the discrepancies between actual and preferred practice. Furthermore, it utilizes multiple measurement instruments, which allows for a more multi-dimensional interpretation on the discrepancies in school counselor activities. The location of this study is ideal because it was conducted in a state that serves a large population of minority and impoverished students who live mostly in rural communities, making the study results comparable to numerous school districts across the U.S. (NCES, 2013). This study is significant because it has the potential to bring new knowledge concerning the influence of external factors, including organizational and administrative constructs that create barriers to providing direct and indirect services to students, particularly in impoverished school districts. The information gleaned from this study will

inform administrators, school board members, stakeholders, counselor educators, and state leaders on key policy and systemic changes needed for school counselors to provide a fully comprehensive developmental counseling program that meets the academic, career, and personal/social development needs of all students.

### **Assumptions**

This study incorporates various measurement instruments such as the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) designed by Janna Scarborough (2005), a follow-up questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. Information provided by Scarborough on the development of the SCARS survey, including the tests used to check for reliability and validity, as well as other studies using the SCARS, has shown that it is a valid and reliable instrument that accurately measures the frequency of school counselor activities. Previous studies using the SCARS has consistently shown that school counselors do not practice the way they would prefer and many of the activities they do perform is not considered appropriate counseling practice (Scarborough, 2002, 2005, Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

It is assumed that the adaptations made to the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005), follow-up questions, and semi-structured interview developed for this current study is consistent with results from other studies. It is also assumed that participants' answers truthfully and accurately reflected their own perceptions concerning their working relationship with administrators, the barriers they experience when providing student services, and personal thoughts and attitudes about counseling directors and supervisors.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were developed from the extant literature, counseling professionals, and personal experience. Although these questions are not necessarily

new, their combination within one study adds multiple contextual factors to previous questions and studies. The research questions for this study are as follows:

- Question 1: Are there differences in the frequency of reported counselor activities between school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty areas in Arkansas?
- Question 2: Which factors influence the discrepancy of actual and preferred activities of school counselors most?
- Question 3: What do school counselors perceive as the primary barrier to providing direct/indirect services to students as suggested by the ASCA National Model?
- Question 4: What perceptions do counselors have concerning the common practice of using principals as directors of school counseling programs rather than certified counselor directors?

### **Definition of Terms**

Several key terms were utilized in this dissertation that have come directly from the research literature on school counseling. Terminology constructs will be briefly defined for reader clarification.

*Professional School Counselor* was defined by ASCA as a state credentialed educator with a master's degree in school counseling. They are trained professionals who meet developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program by addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students (ASCA, 2005).

*Comprehensive school counseling program* was defined as a developmentally appropriate counseling program involving preventions and interventions through a multiple delivery system based on the ASCA National Model that promotes academic, career, personal and social growth for all students (ASCA, 2005).

*Principal/school counselor relationship* was defined by previous research as the principal and school counselor working relationship and their agreement or disagreement in regards to the role of the school counselor and appropriate activities and responsibilities of the school counselor.

*Role ambiguity* was defined by the differing opinions of school counselors, principals, teachers, students, and stakeholders on what a school counselor does (Dollarhide, Smith, Lemberger, & 2007; Jonson et al., 2008; DeKruyf et al., 2013).

*Counselor activities* was defined as the activities a school counselor performs in the attempt to implement a comprehensive developmental school counseling program in the areas of curriculum, coordination, consultation, counseling, and “other” activities unrelated to counseling.

*Student Poverty Level* was defined as the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classification for school district poverty levels based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (NCES, 2013).

### **Overview of the Study**

A mixed-methods design was considered an appropriate approach to explore school counselors’ activities and perceived barriers in providing student services as suggested by the ASCA National Model. Using a mixed-methods design will help to bring relevant information about the barriers that prevent school counselors from implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling model that integrates culturally relevant preventions and interventions (Lee, 1995). Furthermore, it will help to reveal differences in the frequency of school counselor activities involving curriculum, coordination, collaboration, consultation, and “other” duties between school districts with low, mid, and high poverty levels.

### **Delimitations**

To prevent limitation problems, delimitations were put in place. For instance, the first

participants randomly chosen to participate in the survey were divided evenly by poverty level, location in the state, and grade levels to keep samples closely resembling state school counselor population. Unfortunately, efforts to have a stratified random sampling was thwarted by the number of participants who did not respond to the first request. For this reason, all school counselors listed in the state had to be included in order to get enough participants to strengthen the study. Additionally, because it was the end of the school year and a busy time for most schools counselors, email interviews were an added option for counselors who did not have time for a telephone interview.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered the research problem, the purpose of the study, definition of terms, research questions, theoretical framework, significance of the study, and assumptions. The second chapter will cover the research literature and historical background concerning the role of the school counselor. It will also discuss the mental health of students, the mental health of children living in poverty, and the organizational problems that create barriers to providing direct and indirect services to students.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

The role of the professional school counselor has been a source of debate since the 1950s (Wrenn, 1957). Questions have consistently revolved around the focus of school counseling programs, function and responsibilities of school counselors, and acceptable titles for schools counselors (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Erford, 2003; Gysbers, 2001; Gysbers, 2010; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). Even though many beneficial reform initiatives and training programs have helped to mold the school counseling profession into what it is today, there still seems to be a sense of contention among education professionals as well as school counseling professionals concerning activities that should or should not be performed by school counselors and which school counselor activities actually help to improve student outcomes (Dimmit & Carey, 2013; Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008).

#### **History of School Counseling**

The diverse history of school counseling programs in relation to the changing societal and educational demands has profoundly impacted the professional identity of school counselors. From the early beginnings of school counseling, various theories and approaches have developed in order to meet the changing needs of students. Economics, politics, and societal issues have all been a constant pressure on educational reform, which has in turn, influenced the role and functions of school counselors (Erford, 2003).

To better understand the school counseling profession today, one must look at its past. School counseling developed out of necessity in public schools to help students transition to the work force in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. School counseling was created in response to the convergence of political and societal issues such as immigration, child exploitation, and the

industrial revolution. During this time, school counseling was focused on vocational guidance and educational reform. The main premise of school counseling was to provide a quality education, freedom of choice, and dignity for children and adolescents. One of the most important key players in the development of school counseling programs was Frank Parsons. He was instrumental in creating a unique approach to counseling students. This unique approach, later called “trait and factor” theory, revolved around understanding one’s self, the world of work, and the combination of the two (Erford, 2003).

In the 1920s and 1930s, school counseling began relying on psychological theories such as psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and social learning. It was also influenced by psychological testing used by industry, military, and colleges to identify a person’s skills, aptitudes, personality, and intelligence. This movement made school counselors more essential to the student learning process (Myrick, 1993).

By the 1950s the term “mental health” was beginning to be used. The rapidly changing society from the 1940s created a need for more mental health counseling services to assist clients and students with crime, divorce, stress, career opportunities, and challenges that threatened traditional societal values. By that time, school counselors were expected to use information to solve students’ problems, particularly in vocational and interpersonal adjustment. It was a directive approach that emphasized teaching, modeling, and behavioral training. This directive approach was criticized for being too problem-focused and narrow in scope.

Then, Carl Rogers wrote two books, *New Concepts in Practice* (1942) and *Client-centered therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (1951), that changed the direction of counseling forever. Roger’s theory was a more non-directive, person-centered approach concerned with the therapeutic alliance rather than a solution-focused approach most

commonly used by school counselors (Schmidt, 2003). Client-centered counseling, by Rogers, became the principal mode of delivery in clinical mental health and ultimately school counseling (Muro & Kottman, 1995). Conversely, not everyone was pleased with the theoretical shift from solution-focused counseling. Many school counselors felt the client-centered approach was overly emphasized and took away from other important activities such as prevention and developmental interventions needed in the school setting.

Then, a political crisis happened and more education initiatives ensued. This political crisis was the 1957 launching of Sputnik I. This great achievement caused many Americans and politicians to worry. It was not long before the public became concerned with the quality of education in U. S. schools in comparison to other countries, especially Russia (Myrick, 1993). It was then, that educational and political leaders recognized the importance of school counseling in schools, and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed to provide the funds for various programs, including school counseling. Title V funds were set aside for school counseling programs, educational institutions, and counselor training programs (Myrick, 1993; Schmidt, 2003). Funding increases through government programs allowed for more counseling, special programs, and programs designed to help low-income families. Before NDEA was passed, very few schools had elementary school counselors. School counselors were primarily employed as secondary counselors for guidance and vocational purposes (Schmidt, 2003). After NDEA, the goal of school counseling was to develop, expand, and clarify the role of the school counselor. It was not until the early 1960s that elementary school counselors began to appear on the scene. Then, in 1966, the Joint Committee on Elementary School Counseling issued a report that outlined the role and functions of school counselors in the provision of counseling, consulting, and coordinating services for students (Muro & Kottman, 1995). This movement



brought clarity to the role of the school counselor and established school counseling as an essential, developmental component in meeting the needs of the whole child (Schmidt, 2003).

By the 1970s and 1980s, the emphasis moved from holistic guidance counseling to accountability in schools and in the counseling program. However, it was the school counseling profession that drew attention to the need for accountability. Then, *A Nation At Risk* report (1983) by the National Commission of Excellence in Education was written to reveal the decline in student achievement across the United States. This report led to numerous reform initiatives in public schools. Even though school counselors were not included in the recommendations, they were urged to develop assessment methods to show how counselors spend their time and how counseling programs contributed to student outcomes (Schmidt, 2003).

From the late 1800s to the 1990s, various approaches to guidance and counseling by school counselors were developed. Four of the most prominent approaches to school counseling involved crisis, remedial, preventative, and developmental methods (Myrick, 1993). There were numerous changes in counseling focus as well, such as, vocational, educational, clinical counseling, programmatic, developmental, and comprehensive developmental counseling. Along the changes in program focus and approaches, came changes in the titles of school counseling professionals, such as vocational guidance counselor, guidance counselor, school counselor, and professional school counselor. These changes created confusion about the purpose of school counseling and the role of the school counselor, which contributed to the lack of knowledge and understanding about the importance of school counseling to student outcomes, prompting numerous financial cuts for school counseling programs by school officials and political leaders (Schmidt, 2003).

One of the most important turning points resulting from the accountability movement was the development of the National Standards for School Counseling Programs by the American School Counseling Association (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The ASCA national standards brought clarity to the role of the school counselor and the significance of school counseling in education. The ASCA report outlined the importance of facilitating student academic, career, and personal/social development by using research to support its influence on positive student outcomes. The ASCA national standards addressed the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students should obtain as a result of their school counseling programs (Erford, 2003). Later, *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (ASCA, 2003) provided more specific professional and student competencies. Because of the standards laid out by ASCA, school counselors now focus on a more holistic and results-driven program that is comprehensive, preventative, and developmentally designed. The goal of professional school counselor competencies today is to bring leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change to their school counseling programs to help students overcome barriers to learning through interventions involving curriculum, coordination, counseling, and collaboration (ASCA, 2012).

### **ASCA National Model for School Counseling**

The ASCA National Model for school counseling programs was designed to produce observable benefits for students in their academic, career, and personal/social development, and expand the knowledge of counselors, administrators, and stakeholders concerning the integral role of school counseling programs on student achievement. The development of the ASCA National Model moved school counseling from a deficit, reactionary, and crisis-oriented program to a more outcome-based, comprehensive, and developmental program (Stevens & Wilkerson,

2010). More balanced and fully developmental comprehensive school counseling programs correlate to better student academic outcomes, student perceptions about career and college options, improve school climate, create better relationships with teachers, aid in students' emotional and social development, and greater satisfaction with school (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013).

### **Role of the School Counselor**

The American School Counseling Association promoted uniformity in school counseling programs and counselor interventions. ASCA developed school counselor guidelines to inform administrators about their role in the school. According to ASCA, the role of the school counselor was to create a comprehensive developmental school counseling program in four domains: foundation, management, delivery and accountability (ASCA, 2005).

#### **Foundation**

Foundation domain functions involve creating a vision and mission statement for school counseling programs that are founded on program goals and counselor beliefs that compliment state and local education standards. Once goals and objectives are outlined in the counseling vision and mission statement, school counselors are to enhance student learning by focusing on student outcomes and competencies in academic, career, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2012).

#### **Management**

School counselors manage their programs by gaining administrative approval, creating an advisory council, developing curriculum, establishing small-groups, developing “closing the gap” action plans, and constructing appropriate measurement tools to evaluate counselor and program effectiveness. School counselors are encouraged to keep an up to date annual and

weekly calendar to help inform students, parents, teachers, and administrators about counseling activities scheduled throughout the school year. Additionally, school counselors are to use data to measure program effectiveness and systemic changes within the school in order to help students become college and career ready (ASCA, 2012).

### **Delivery**

Most importantly, school counselors are to provide services to students, parents, school staff, and the community by direct and indirect delivery methods. ASCA suggested that school counselors devote 80% of their time to direct and indirect services to students. Direct service methods are delivered through school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive activities. School counseling core curriculum involves providing structured lessons to help students reach desired competencies, knowledge, attitudes, and skills appropriate for their developmental level. Individual student planning involves producing systemic activities the counselor can use to assist students in developing personal goals and future plans. Also, direct service methods include responsive activities that are designed to meet immediate student needs through individual, group, small-group, and crisis interventions. Indirect service methods are services provided on behalf of students through interaction with other service providers in and outside of the school setting by making referrals, consulting, and collaborating with teachers, other education staff, and community organizations (ASCA, 2012). School counselors use their own competencies and ethical behavior to not only develop comprehensive programs, but also provide advocacy for students, promote a safe learning environment, and address the needs of all students through applicable prevention and intervention programs (ASCA 2012).

### **Accountability**

Lastly, counselors use data results to illustrate the impact the school counseling program

has on student outcomes such as attendance, academic achievement, and behavior.

Accountability incorporates program evaluations to determine if future changes are needed in the school counseling program in order to improve student outcomes. It also includes the evaluation of school counselor effectiveness (ASCA, 2012).

### **School Counseling Program Implementation**

Since the inception of the ASCA National Model, many researchers have conducted studies to examine the implementation of the model in school counseling programs across the nation. In 2009, a study using a mixed-methods design was created by three researchers to measure whether states were fully implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling model. The researchers found 17 states with fully “established” counseling models. The 17 states were Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, and Wisconsin. To be considered an established comprehensive counseling program, states had to show evidence of a written model endorsed by policy makers and legislators, contemporary model features, professional development for implementation, school counseling leadership, career planning alignment, licensure and accreditation, and evaluation of program outcomes (Martin et al., 2009). The 2009 national study, along with other such studies on program implementation has contributed greatly to the research literature in regards to implementation of fully comprehensive school counseling models and identification of program weaknesses in school counseling programs.

Studies concerning the implementation of comprehensive developmental school counseling programs suggested that school counseling program weaknesses consistently fall in the area of direct/indirect services to students. Furthermore, research has shown that providing

direct services to students and their families, using data to plan and improve services, and spending more time in guidance curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services correlate to improved student outcomes. This knowledge has helped with the professions overall understanding of best practices (Carey & Dimmit, 2013).

Conversely, little research has been conducted on school counselor activities in impoverished school districts. There were no studies found in the research literature involving the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) survey using a combination of rural, impoverished, and diverse student populations. Arkansas was considered an ideal location for this study because it possesses all three demographic characteristics (NCES, 2013).

In order to develop a relevant research study that meets the needs of Arkansas school counselors, attendees of the 2014 Arkansas Counseling Association Annual Conference were asked what components they felt most needed improving in their own school counseling programs. The majority of school counselors felt their school counseling program's weakest area was in providing the suggested 80% direct/indirect services to students. The school counselors attributed this problem to the assignment of non-counseling duties rather than counselor/student ratios (Harless, 2014). Their response was in keeping with the literature citing that school counselors are not spending adequate time on student services because of the assignment of non-counseling duties. The assignment of non-counseling duties and administrators' misconceptions about the role of the school counselor are mentioned in the research literature more often than caseload, paperwork, or years of experience, including school counselor to student ratios (Scarborough, 2005).

## **Role Ambiguity**

It appears that determining the role and function of the school counselor is still a pervasive and chronic problem in schools across the U.S. Research on school counselors' perceptions of administrators revealed that school counselors feel there is a lack of respect and trust in the school counselor's expertise as a professional who is knowledgeable in child development and mental health concerns. Many school counselors describe feeling left out of the decision making process. Some counselors have even admitted to taking on non-counseling duties for fear of losing their job (Perusse et al., 2004). Past studies have shown that counselors have an overwhelming amount of responsibilities because their respective administrator relies heavily upon their assistance, which goes against their education and expertise (Zepada & Langenbach, 1999). Some possible reasons for the continued role confusion and assignment of non-counseling duties may be due to the overemphasis on academic achievement tests, lack of support for counseling programs, and knowledge of administrators, school boards, and state and national leaders about the role of the school counselor (DeKruyf, et al., 2013). Some studies have attributed this confusion to the lack of leadership skills of school counselors.

Some studies have suggested that school counselors take on a leadership role by informing their principals and other school leaders about the role of the school counselor and advocating for their school counseling programs (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). However, becoming a leader in the school system is not an easy task, especially for counselors who are new to counseling or new to the district, or working in an unsupportive environment. Research on counselor leadership skills has shown that counselors with more years of experience are more likely to advocate for their counseling programs and practice preferred interventions than less experienced school counselors (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

It seems that administrators, as well as teachers, are often not aware of the training school counselors receive in meeting students' mental health needs. Many counselor education programs require the same coursework for both school counselor and licensed counselor degrees. Various factors contribute to administrators' misconceptions about school counselors. For instance, some principals' admit their preconceived ideas about school counselors stem from tradition, previous experiences with school counselors, or poor training from graduate education programs (Dollarhide et al., 2007).

During the early development of the ASCA National Model, The Education Trust and ASCA made a collaborative effort to define the role of the school counselor. It was determined that school counselors should serve as program leader. School counselors were to be viewed as leaders and advocates for systemic change. Unfortunately, this vision has not come to fruition in most schools (ASCA, 2005; The Education Trust, 2002). In fact, administrators are usually the designated director of school counseling programs on their campus, they have the authority to assign duties, evaluate the effectiveness of school counseling programs, and assess school counselor performance. Principals charged with supervising counselors are typically concerned with employee work behaviors such as attendance, punctuality, and staff relations. Whereas, clinical supervisors are more concerned with fostering professional development and ensuring the welfare of students. In order for counseling programs to be effective, principals need to have a better understanding of the school counselor's role and be willing to communicate their role to stakeholders (DeKruyf, et al., 2013).

In 2004, a study was conducted to compare perceptions of principals and counselors on activities considered most important to the counseling program. The researchers of the study found that many principals believed non-counseling duties such as clerical duties, student



monitoring, scheduling, and testing were the school counselor's responsibility (Perusse, et al., 2004). Even when the principal and counselor agreed that clerical and administrative tasks are less important, principals believed these tasks took up less of the counselors' time than they actually did. Other studies on principal perceptions have found that even when administrators are thoroughly informed about the role of the school counselor and agree to statements of counselor best practice, they will still assign non-counseling duties regardless of their knowledge and understanding (Fitch, Newby, Ballesterro, & Marshall, 2001; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). A good example of this thinking was subsumed in a discussion section from a research study conducted by Grace Kirchner and Margaret Setchfield (2005), the authors concluded by saying:

We should not be too optimistic about our ability to change perceptions in the absence of corresponding experiences in the field. It may not be principals' lack of understanding of counselor roles that leads to poor allocation of counselors' time, but the real demands of the work settings that impinge on both roles (p. 9).

Principals do not knowingly try to thwart the efforts of the school counselor. Principals simply have dissimilar educational background, training, and approaches for improving student outcomes in comparison to counselors (Schoffner & Williamson, 2000). Principals also face numerous responsibilities with little administrative assistance, which leaves them feeling overwhelmed and pressured to delegate their responsibilities to other staff members who work closely with them, such as school counselors (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). When school principals do this, they unknowingly devalue the mission of the school counseling program and the counselor (Ross & Herrington, 2005). It is imperative that principals and counselors reach an agreement on the role and responsibilities of the school counselor in order to build a more collaborative working relationship. Principals can promote this collaboration by being open to

learning more about the role of the school counselor and supporting the vision and mission of the school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model. When school counselors and principals develop a collaborative relationship based on mutual knowledge and trust, their efforts ultimately lead to improved student academic, career, and personal/social development (Lambert, 2002; Zalaquett, 2005).

### **Students and Mental Health**

The number of students needing mental health services is growing exponentially. Schools, parents, and communities are seeing first hand the detrimental effects of children suffering from mental health disorders. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 13-20% of children will struggle with a mental health disorder each year (CDC, 2013). It is estimated that one in five children, ages 9-17, have a diagnosable mental health disorder that causes minimal impairment; one in twenty children has a diagnosable mental health disorder causing extreme impairment (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). More than half of these children live in poverty (Stagman & Cooper, 2010). Disruptive behavior disorders, mood disorders, and adjustment disorders are the most common diagnosis among children (Pottick, 2002). Students with mental health issues are more likely to have poor social relationships, low academic performance, become addicted to drugs and alcohol, and ultimately dropout of school (Auger, 2013). According to the National Center on Education Statistics more students dropout because of a mental health issue than a learning or intellectual disability. The percentage of students dropping out of school because of a mental health issue is an astounding 80%; 56% from mental illness and 24% from serious emotional disturbance (NCES, 1995). The 2001-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) determined that 50% of children do not receive mental health services (Merikangas et al., 2010).

Other research has estimated this number to be around 75% (Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells, 2002).

The main culprit for the lack of access to mental health services is decreased funding for community services (Griffin & Farris, 2010; Kaffenberger & O’Rourke-Trigiani, 2013).

Unfortunately, the few services that are available are rarely coordinated or integrated (Collins & Collins, 1994). For this reason, parents often seek mental health services for their children at school (Bernett-Zeiglar & Lyons, 2010; Carlson & Kees, 2013; Perfect & Morris, 2011).

Therefore, it is important that school leaders understand that school counselors are ethically responsible and adequately trained to provide therapeutic techniques for students not requiring long-term intensive therapy, and that easy access to mental health services for students equates to increased academic achievement for all students (Carlson & Kees, 2013).

### **High-Poverty Schools**

The increase in the number of children who are suffering from mental health issues today are mostly likely due to the growing number of children living at or below the poverty level. In a report on “closing the black-white achievement gap”, Richard Rothstein (2004), stated that the economic status of students is a stronger predictor of academic achievement than race. If this is true, then the estimated 45% of children living at or below the poverty level are probably falling behind in school. Most impoverished children come from single parent minority homes where parents are financially strapped and are forced to work long hours that prevent them from providing the support their child needs to succeed in school (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2014; NCES, 2012). Single parents often do not have the money to get their child medical care, adequate housing, enriching childcare, tutors, extra-curricular activities, transportation to school, school supplies, or attend parent teacher conferences or meetings.

Schools in the United States have a pervasive and chronic problem of inequity in

educational achievement and opportunity for minority and low-socioeconomic students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Minority students and low-socioeconomic students typically have lower scores on standardized achievement tests, are less likely to participate in Advanced Placement courses, have higher dropout rates, and seldom attend or complete college. The American School Counseling Association encourages school counselors to use a social justice framework by using systemic and collaborative efforts to help reduce the “achievement gap” by building bridges between mental health counseling and academic achievement (Crethar, 2010). Sadly, the children most likely to develop a mental health disorder are children living in poverty (Cooper, Banghart, & Aratani, 2010; Stagman & Cooper, 2010). They are also least likely to receive mental health counseling services (Starr, Campbell, & Herrick, 2002). Even when a comprehensive developmental school counseling program is established in a school, minority and impoverished students with mental health disorders are less likely to receive personal and social counseling services from their school counselors. These children usually attend schools with a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. These high-poverty schools usually have significantly lower per-pupil expenditures (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013; McCoy-Holcomb, 2007), higher student to counselor ratios, and school counselors inundated with non-counseling duties (Carlson & Kees, 2013; Lapan, 2013).

According to School counselors need to look beyond the ASCA National Model to prevent students from falling through the cracks (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In the book, *Counseling for Diversity: A Guide for School Counselors and Related Professionals*, Courtland Lee (1995) stated that students’ psychosocial development is influenced by various factors such as racism, economic disadvantage, and acculturation. These social environmental factors impact key developmental stages throughout childhood and adolescence. For this reason, it is

imperative that school counselors understand and incorporate activities that promote self-understanding, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving/decision-making skills related to educational, personal/social, and career development for students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Lee, 1995). If schools are going to meet the academic, career, and emotional needs of marginalized students, they need to consider the contextual factors that are external to the school environment (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Furthermore, schools need to allow professional school counselors to devote an acceptable amount of time for the delivery of direct and indirect services that benefit all students (Carey & Dimmit, 2013).

### **School Counselors Providing Mental Health Services**

Student mental health is gaining attention by professionals as being a vital role on student academic success (Carlson & Kees, 2013). For students to develop academically, they need to also develop emotionally and socially. This can only be possible through the provision of direct and indirect services. According to ASCA, the primary responsibility of professional school counselors is to provide 80% of direct/indirect services to students (ASCA, 2012).

Professional school counselors provide direct and indirect services by assisting in the development and implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), which includes a Response to Intervention (RTI) and Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CR PBIS) in order to improve student achievement and behavior. Part of the professional school counselor's role in implementing MTSS is to collaborate with administrators, other school professionals, community agencies, and families. School counselors are to evaluate student progress, identify struggling students, and refer them when necessary to other service providers (ASCA, 2014). One way that school counselors address student mental health concerns is by building partnerships with mental health professionals in and outside of the school

building. Another way is to refer students to community mental health agencies. Unfortunately, many children with a mental health disorder will not receive mental health services because they were undiagnosed, not referred to outside mental health resources, have parents or guardians that choose to not follow through, lack the funds to get treatment, or cannot travel out of town for treatment. Even when mental health services are provided from outside sources, children may be dropped because a parent requested it, or because of Medicaid and third party insurance regulations (Auger, 2013). The 2003 President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Report called for school counselors to become more instrumental in attending to students' mental health needs (Mills et al., 2006).

School counselors are in a unique position to identify and address the mental health needs of students. School counselors are acutely aware of the relationship between students' mental health and academic success (Brown, Dahlbeck, & Sparkman-Barnes, 2006). Unfortunately, the knowledge and skills that school counselor's possess are being underutilized by the school systems in which they work. One important reason is because school counselors are in constant demand to take on roles unrelated to counseling (Gruman, 2013). Because professional school counselors are onsite it makes access to mental health services more available for all students and their families who would not have been able or willing to use outside services (DeKruyf, et al., 2013). When schools do not value the knowledge and skills of the school counselor and rely primarily on outside mental health professionals, it creates gaps in services for students (Weist, Lowie, Flaherty, & Pruitt, 2001).

### **Roadblocks to Providing Mental Health Services**

In a 2013 article on school counselor professional identity, the authors discussed several potential roadblocks in establishing school counselors as mental health professionals. According

to the article, one of the main barriers to school counselor identity has to do with the perception that school counselors are educational leaders and not mental health professionals. It was suggested that school counselors embrace a dual role of educational leader and mental health professional in order to meet the mental health counseling needs of the students they serve (DeKruyf, et al., 2013). In a survey of school counselors, the researchers found that 75% of school counselors saw themselves as both educational leaders and mental health providers (Brown, et al., 2006). A study exploring school counselors' beliefs and attitudes on providing mental health counseling to students found that school counselors feel qualified in providing mental health services but the school environment prevents them from doing so (Carlson, & Kees, 2013). For example, school counselors get an influx of students who come in for immediate mental health concerns that may not necessarily need intensive therapy, but because of the school environment and the way school counseling programs are geared toward academic achievement, they are often turned away and referred to outside mental health professionals. When students are referred to sources outside of the school system, they often wait weeks or months for an outside licensed professional counselor to address their concerns. This practice is both unethical and impractical; students could have their mental health concerns addressed sooner by a school counselor, who is trained in the same therapeutic theory, methods, and techniques as licensed professional counselors (Brown, et al., 2006).

### **Summary**

School counseling programs in relation to societal and educational demands has profoundly impacted the professional identity of school counselors from the very beginning of the profession. Economics, politics, and societal issues have all influenced education and counseling professionals but the role and function of the school counselor seems to be more

ambiguous than any other role in the public school system (Erford, 2003). There still seems to be a sense of contention among education professionals as well as school counseling professionals concerning activities that should or should not be performed by school counselors (Dimmit & Carey, 2013). This chapter has covered several aspects that have affected the role and function of the school counselor since the beginning of the profession. Chapter III will discuss the research design, methods, theoretical framework, and instruments used to explore the activities of school counselors.



## Chapter III

### Methodology

In this chapter, the methods and procedures used to conduct the study are explained in more detail. As mentioned in Chapter I, the overall purpose of this current study was to explore the frequency of Arkansas school counselor activities across poverty level. This chapter includes the research design, research questions, population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

#### **Research Design**

Because of the complexity involved with school counselor and principal working relationships and the school infrastructure, a mixed-methods design was chosen to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). A mixed-methods design was determined to be the best method to support the theoretical perspective and conceptual framework for this study (Creswell, Clark, & Hanson, 2008). This mixed-methods study involved the use of an explanatory sequential approach to best answer the research questions. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach is designed to bring in-depth qualitative understanding to the quantitative results by connecting the two through sequential steps that builds upon one another (Creswell, 2014).

The basic approach implemented in this mixed-methods study involved the use of descriptive and inferential quantitative data using a cross-sectional survey, and a generic qualitative inquiry in the form of a semi-structured interview based on grounded theory. This research study was interested in knowing what activities school counselors were doing and why certain activities were or were not being done. Using a mixed-methods approach helped in answering the “what” and the “why” concerning school counselor activities. (Houser, 2009).

The quantitative assessment tool used in this study was a self-report, cross-sectional survey called the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale developed by Janna Scarborough (2005) with a follow-up questionnaire to add richness to the SCARS results. A self-report allows participants to give their own personal perceptions and cross-sectional surveys collect data on an entire population or its subset at a single point in time (Biemer & Lyberg, 2003). A cross-sectional survey design is used when a researcher's goal is to describe and better understand relationships around a number of variables. This methodology helps researchers to examine the differences between subjects and how those differences impact the dependent variables (Houser, 2009). A request was made and approval given from the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission was granted to use the SCARS by Janna Scarborough (see Appendix A and B to see the approval letters).

The qualitative component of this study involved a semi-structured interview composed of open-ended questions. The qualitative component was created for this research study to explore school counselor perceptions about contributing factors in scheduling time for student services, counselor's perception on counselor/principal roles, and perceived barriers in providing 80% direct/indirect student services (Scarborough, 2005).

### **Population and Sample**

The participants in this study included 300 Arkansas elementary, middle, and secondary public school counselors. Participants were identified through the Arkansas State Department of Education and Arkansas School Counseling Association. Participants were randomly but purposefully chosen to be in one of three groups, school counselors from low-poverty, mid-poverty, and high poverty school districts. The participants in this study were selected using stratified sampling methods. Stratified sampling involves selecting individuals who represent

subgroups of interest. The subgroups of interest for this study are school counselors from schools categorized by school district poverty level. Schools were identified and divided by poverty level, low, mid, and high using an Excel list of school districts in 75 counties compiled by the Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Unit (ADE, 2014) with percentages of students on free and reduced lunch. There were 235 schools in the low-poverty group, 517 in the mid-poverty group, and 311 in the high-poverty group. To ensure an equal representation of school counselors across the state, participants were also divided by school location and grade level. There were three school groupings for school grade level, elementary, middle, and secondary. There were five groupings for location from ArSCA regions, northwest, northeast, central, north central, southwest, and southeast. Then, school counselor names were randomly drawn until 100 school counselor participant slots were filled for each poverty level. The criteria used for classifying school poverty level groups were based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013).

Arkansas is a good population to study on school counselor activity and poverty level because it ranks third in the nation for the number of children at or below poverty level and has 61% of children qualifying for free and reduced lunch (ADE, 2014). The national average is 48% (NCES, 2012). The NCES's classification for school district poverty levels is as follows: high-poverty schools are those with at least 75% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, mid-poverty schools are those with 50% to 75%, mid-low poverty 25.1 to 50%, and low-poverty schools are those with 25% or less (NCES, 2013). For this study, there were three categories: (a) low-poverty are schools with less than 50%, (b) mid-poverty are schools with 50% to 74%, and (c) high-poverty are schools with 75% or more qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The Dillman Total Design Method was chosen to collect data for this study. This design involved using a mixed-mode of data collection (Dillman, 2000). First, invitation emails (see Appendix C) were sent to all participants chosen for the study. School Counselor contact information was requested and provided by the Arkansas Department of Education Guidance/Counseling Unit. The invitations asked school counselors to participate in the study primarily to benefit Arkansas school counselors. A \$50 gift certificate of their choosing was also added as an incentive. The invitations briefly explained the purpose and possible benefits of the study, and informed participants when to expect to receive the email surveys (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

Two days later, participants were sent an email cover letter with an attached participant acceptance form and directions on how to use the online survey system, Qualtrics Research Suite from the University of Arkansas, with a link provided. The cover letter (See Appendix D) gave a detailed explanation of the study and participant procedures, along with survey options to participate online or by email. School counselors were encouraged to use the online survey for faster results. The letter also included contact information for further questions about the study (Dillman, et. al., 2009).

Seven days later, participants were sent a “thank you” (See Appendix E) email for volunteering to participate in the study. The “thank you” card also served as a reminder for those who had not completed their survey. A second reminder was sent by email five days later. Seven days later participants were sent a final thank you email.

Three days later, 30 interview requests were sent to schools counselors who entered a “yes” and provided contact information. The 30 interviewees were divided into three poverty

level groups. These counselors were chosen because of their knowledge about school counseling practices in their demographic area, for their leadership in education and counseling organizations. Snowballing methods were also used to create a list of potential interviewees. Interviewees were given the choice to participate in either a 15 to 20-minute telephone interview or email interview. The interview was used to bring conceptual density and reliability to the survey results (Schram, 2006).

## **Instrumentation**

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

Before beginning the SCARS survey (Scarborough, 2005), participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D). The questionnaire was useful in explaining the characteristics of the counselor and school setting, as well as the student population being served. The demographic questionnaire asked participants to answer questions concerning gender, ethnicity, grade level (elementary, middle, or high school), number of years as a school counselor, counselor certification, association memberships, leadership, and demographics of the school, such as, ethnicity and socio-economic status of students (low, mid, or high-poverty), student to counselor ratios, and school location (city, suburban, town, rural) (NCES, 2013).

### **School Counselor Activity Rating Scale**

The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) was the quantitative research instrument chosen for the present study. It was constructed and piloted by Janna Scarborough and used by other researchers since its inception (Scarborough, 2002, 2005). The SCARS survey is founded on the ASCA National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; as cited in Scarborough, 2002) and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003). The SCARS was designed to measure performance of actual and preferred job duties being performed by active school counselors.

Preferred activities refers to preferred practice recommended by ASCA's (2003) National Model, such as consultation, coordination, counseling, and curriculum interventions (Scarborough, 2005). According to Scarborough, the main purpose for developing the SCARS was to create a valid, reliable and practical instrument to measure the frequency in actual and preferred job duties of school counselors (Scarborough, 2005).

Scarborough developed the SCARS instrument in two phases. The first phase of the instrument design involved creating a list of activities based on interventions described by the American School Counseling Association National Model (2003), including other activities commonly reported by school counselors. These activities were labeled as (a) counseling, (b) consultation, (c) curriculum, (d) coordination, and (e) "other". The activity label "other" represented activities that are considered non-counseling or necessary for school functionality or fair-share duties. Items were selected and reviewed for appropriate instrument design and measurement of activity frequency. A verbal frequency scale was developed to measure "how often" a task is done (Scarborough, 2005). This researcher adapted the SCARS to include more activities under the label "other" in order to examine activities being conducted by counselors today. Professional school counselors and counselor educators reviewed the additional items added to the "other" category of the SCARS. The items added to the "other" subset are as follows:

- Calculate GPAs and/or print out grade reports
- Enter student data into school management system
- Participate in IEP & 504 paperwork and meetings
- Attend school functions (e.g., ballgames, special events, performances, award ceremonies, field trips)

- Assist and/or perform administrative duties

The SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) is a comprehensive and user-friendly survey instrument using a two-dimensional frequency scale that measures both the actual performance of an activity and the preferred performance of an activity. The actual performance dimension is measured using a 5-point verbal frequency rating scale ranging from “1-never do this,” “2-rarely do this,” “3-occasionally do this,” “4-frequently do this,” or “5-routinely do this.” The preferred performance dimension is measured similarly, by using a rating scale ranging from “1-would prefer to never do this,” “2-would prefer to rarely do this,” “3-would prefer to occasionally do this,” “4-would prefer to frequently do this,” or “5-would prefer to routinely do this.” Each item is answered two-dimensionally before continuing to the next item (Scarborough, 2005).

The second phase in developing the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) was conducted to assess for mistakes in production, construction of statement and scale, and for readability and understanding by participants. This was done in two steps where Scarborough had individuals participate in a “think-aloud” interview and a retrospective interview to check for interpretation and intent of survey items, including general survey design and reactions to the survey. Secondly, the survey was reviewed by counseling professionals knowledgeable in school counseling, mental health counseling, counselor education, and research methodology (Scarborough, 2005).

Construct validity was checked using principal components factor analysis with an orthogonal transformation using the varimax rotation, which forces the factors to be independent from one another. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test were used to evaluate the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Scarborough, 2005; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987). Factor analysis was conducted on the 40 final selected items

representing four categories for each scale and on the additional 10 items labeled under “other” activities. A minimum factor loading of .4 was used for more meaningful analysis. The choice to retain factors was influenced by the results of a scree test, explained variances, eigenvalues, and compensability. Factor analysis results determined the subscales. Scarborough found internal consistency reliability with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from .75 to .93.

Additionally, the construct validity was further assessed by examining group differences using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and by correlational studies between subscale results and demographic variables. The results showed that all factors met Kaiser’s criterion with eigenvalues greater than 1. The explained variance of the four factors was 47.27%, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .91 and the Bartlett’s test was significant (Scarborough, 2005).

Further assessment of the construct validity of the SCARS by Scarborough involved the examination of group differences among grade levels on the “actual” subscales. The Bonferroni procedure was used along with the ANOVA to account for the large sample size and balanced group numbers. The Bonferroni corrected alpha level was  $.05/7 = .007$  and the analysis revealed a statistically significant effect on all seven SCARS subscales. Scheffe’s post hoc tests revealed significant differences among all grade levels on Curriculum, Coordination, and Counseling scales (Scarborough, 2005).

### **Follow-up Questionnaire**

Eleven follow-up questions were added after the survey questions to bring clarity to counselor perceptions. Although the questions are basically closed-ended, participants were encouraged to explain their thoughts and opinions. The following questions were:

- What percent of your time is devoted to direct/indirect services for students?



- What percent of your time is spent on non-counseling duties?
- What services are requested the most by or on behalf of your students?
- Do you have a district or campus school counseling director, if so, is it an administrator, certified school counselor, or licensed mental health counselor?
- Do you feel supported by the school faculty, staff, administrators, and school board? Explain.
- Do you have a collaborative relationship with your principal? In other words, does your principal value your opinion and act on it as well? Explain.
- Do you feel your principal has faith in your knowledge and skills in using basic therapeutic techniques?
- Have you ever informed your principal or school officials about the role of the school counselor based on the ASCA National Model? Were any changes made as a result?
- Have you ever asked your director or principal to reduce non-counseling duties in order to perform more appropriate counseling activities? Were changes made as a result?
- Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone or email interview to share your own unique experience in working with diverse and or impoverished student populations? If so, please provide a contact number and the best time to reach you.
- Please name some professional school counselors you believe would be willing and able to provide in-depth knowledge concerning issues preventing Arkansas school counselors from performing preferred activities in low, mid, and high

poverty schools. Please provide contact information for each.

### **Semi-structured Interview**

The qualitative component for the present study was based on grounded theory. It was used to examine the counselor's perspective on contributing factors to the frequency of counseling activities and to explore the principal/counselor relationship. The purpose for adding the qualitative component was to create a complete picture of the obstacles counselors face when trying to devote more time to ASCA's suggested counselor activities, the counselor/principal relationship, and feelings about common practices concerning director/supervisors (Schram, 2006).

The semi-structured interview developed by this researcher was reviewed by professionals in counseling, education, counselor education, and research who are knowledgeable in school counseling, mental health counseling, and research measurement. The semi-structured interview questions were:

- "What are the most common barriers for you in providing direct/indirect services for students?"
- "What do you think should happen to alleviate this problem?"
- "What are your thoughts about the common practice of using principals as director/supervisors over school counseling programs rather than a certified school counselors or licensed mental health counselors?"
- "Do you have a district certified school counselor as director? If not, how would you feel about having a certified counseling director for the district?"

- “Do you think school counseling programs should be a separate entity apart from administrative control with various counselors who are in charge of curriculum, coordination, consultation, and counseling?”
- “How would you feel about having LPCs as permanent on-site therapeutic counselors as part of this type of program?”

Interview responses were sorted by themes and coded using Atlas.ti software (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were sent their results by email to correct any errors or provide additional information (Dillman et al., 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

The primary research question, “Are there differences in the frequency of reported counselor activities between school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty areas in Arkansas?” was measured using the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005). Each participant was given a code number and all information was kept confidential and secure. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to report the mean and standard deviations. The alpha level was set at .05 with a confidence interval of 95%. The data from the SCARS survey were analyzed using a general linear model, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS). The independent variables were high, mid, and low-poverty schools. The dependent variables were counselor’s actual and preferred activities measured by SCARS (Kirk, 2013).

The second research question, “Which factors influence the discrepancy of actual and preferred activities of school counselors most?” was answered by the demographic questionnaire included with the survey.

The third research question “What do school counselors perceive as barriers to providing services to students as suggested by the ASCA National Model?” and fourth research question, “What perceptions do counselors have concerning the common practice of using principal directors of school counseling programs rather than certified counselor directors?” were measured using a semi-structured interview developed by the researcher addressing the participant’s perceptions concerning perceived barriers to implementing more appropriate activities, perceptions on the relationship and roles of principals and counselors, and thoughts about certified school counselor directors (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each participant’s answers were coded and kept confidential in a secure location. Interview responses were coded and sorted by themes using Atlas.ti software to record and retrieve data in the transcriptions. Participants were sent their results through email to correct any errors. Results from the semi-structured interview were also coded for themes (Saldana, 2013).

### **Summary**

This chapter has covered such areas as the statement of the problem, research questions, methodology, analytical framework, participant population, research design, and data analysis. The following chapter will discuss the results found from this study.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the activities performed by practicing school counselors in Arkansas school districts and determine the main factors contributing to discrepancies between actual and preferred practice. The goal was to bring to light the difficulties that school counselors face when trying to provide student services or interventions, particularly in high-poverty areas, and to explore contextual influences on school counselors activities (Dimmitt et al., 2005).

The participants of this study were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E), School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) (Appendix F), follow-up questionnaire (Appendix G), and semi-structured interview (Appendix H). Analysis of the demographic variables, instrument data, interview results, and statistical analysis used to answer the research questions are discussed. The quantitative results from the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) and demographic predictor variables will be presented first. The qualitative results of the follow-up questionnaire and interviews will be presented immediately after to bring clarification and richness to the quantitative data.

#### **Data Analysis**

The participants of this study were practicing elementary, middle, and high school professional school counselors from low, mid, and high-poverty schools in Arkansas. There were 300 school counselors (100 low-poverty, 100 mid-poverty, and 100 high-poverty) selected to participate in the survey. Qualtrics software was used to distribute, collect, and report data from the demographic questionnaire, SCARS (Scarborough, 2005), and follow-up responses. Out of 300 survey requests sent by email, 51 school counselors responded. Because of the low

number of responses, an additional 1,004 requests were sent in order to reach all school counselors in Arkansas. Out of 1,304 survey requests, 18 were undeliverable. According to the final Qualtrics report, the number of surveys started was 344, 26% of total requests. The total number participants to take the survey were 288. After adding a “completed” filter to the Qualtrics report, 274 surveys were left. The percentage of usable surveys was 95% ( $N=274$ ). The number of surveys completed by participants in low-poverty (<50%), mid-poverty (50%-74%), and high-poverty level (75% and above) were also examined. Table 1 shows the survey return rate by poverty level.

Table 1

*Completed Surveys by Poverty Level*

Variable	<i>N</i>	Percent
Low-Poverty	37	14%
Mid-Poverty	139	51%
High-Poverty	95	35%
All	274	100%

**Demographics**

The participants of this study answered various questions pertaining to demographic variables. Certain demographic information was chosen as most important for comparison based on previous research and for its potential to explain school counselor activity discrepancies. The information selected involved school counselor factors, professional factors, school factors, and school organizational factors. The items from the demographic questionnaire are presented in four separate sections: school counselor, professional, school, and organizational. The specific demographic variables that are of interest to this research study are poverty, number of minority students, and student/counselor ratio. Professional and organization factors such as school counselor director/supervisor and counselor experience are also examined.

## School Counselor Factors

The data collected for the demographic questionnaire for school counselors are in agreement with previous studies, showing that the majority of school counselors are Caucasian (86%) and female (92%) (Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan, & Rahill, 2002; Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). School counselor demographic results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

### *School Counselor Demographics*

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	22	8%
Female	252	92%
Ethnicity		
African-American	30	11%
Asian	0	0%
Caucasian	236	86%
Hispanic	3	1%
Other	5	2%
Grade Level		
Elementary	128	47%
Middle	42	15%
Secondary	104	38%

## Professional Factors

Participants were asked to report their years as a school counselor, counselor certification, membership in professional organizations, and participation in leadership and advocacy. Results of the demographic questionnaire were contrary to research studies in the literature involving professional leadership and certification concerning school counselor activities (Leuwerke, 2009, Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Most professional school counselors in Arkansas are certified by the state (98%) and are members of a professional organization (85%). More than half of the participants in this study participated in some kind of

leadership or advocacy role within the past year (62%). All demographic information regarding professional factors is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Professional Demographics*

Variable	Number	Percent
Years as a Counselor	13.3	
Counselor Certification		
Yes	268	98%
No	6	2%
Membership		
Yes	232	85%
No	41	15%
Leadership/Advocacy		
Yes	170	62%
No	104	38%

**School Factors**

The school and student environmental factors include the number of minority students, poverty level, and location, such as rural, city, town, urban, and suburban. However, school poverty level, number of minority students, and student to counselor ratios are of particular interest since much of the extant literature shows a correlation between these three factors to school counselor practice (Lapan, 2013; Lapan, et al., 2013).

Table 4 presents number and percent for school demographic variables.

Table 4

*School Demographics*

Variable	Number	Percent
Minority Students		
0 - 25%	122	45%
26% - 50%	67	25%
51% - 75%	45	16%
76% - 100%	38	14%



Variable	Number	Percent
School Poverty Level		
Low-Poverty	37	14%
Mid-Poverty	139	51%
High-Poverty	95	35%
School Location		
City	68	25%
Suburban	23	8%
Town	77	28%
Rural	106	39%

### **School Organizational Factors**

Participants were asked various questions about their school organizational structure. Organizational factors included information about student to counselor ratios and director supervisors. Student to counselor ratios and certified school counselor directors have been reported as predictors in school counselor activities. Student to counselor ratios has been noted as having significant relationship to school counselor activities and continues to be a topic of discussion in the school counseling profession (Lapan, et al., 2013). The type of director/supervisor was also added as a factors based on research explaining best practice correlated to having certified counselors as directors/supervisors (DeKruyf, et al., 2013). The two factors showed to be somewhat influential in the results, particularly certified school counselors as director/supervisors, which will be discussed later on the examination of all predictor variables. Demographic information regarding school organizational factors is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*School Organizational Demographics*

Variable	Number	Percentage
Student/Counselor Ratio		
Less than 250	25	9%
250-450	205	72%
More than 450	55	19%
Director/Supervisor		
Administrator	111	41%
Certified School Counselor	145	53%
Other Counseling Related	3	1%
No Director	14	5%

**Factors by Poverty Level****Minority Students**

According to research, minority students and students living in poverty typically do not receive school counseling interventions as frequently as Caucasian students from more affluent schools (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013; McCoy-Holcomb, 2007). The results of the demographics questionnaire showed that the number of minority students in high-poverty schools was consistent with research data concerning ethnicity and poverty (Jiang et al., 2014). These two factors are examined in a cross tabulation in Table 6.

Table 6

*Minority Student Population by Poverty Level*

Variable	Minority Students			
	0%-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%
Low-Poverty	62.2%	18.9%	8.1%	10.8%
Mid-Poverty	48.2%	35.3%	14.4%	2.2%
High-Poverty	31.6%	11.6%	23.2%	32.6%
Total	44.5%	24.5%	16.4%	13.9%

## Location

Careful examination of the descriptive statistics and cross tabulation revealed an area of interest not often researched. Many research studies have examined the effects of urban locations but little attention has been give to other locations such as town and city. In Arkansas, the majority of low-poverty schools in Arkansas are located in cities and towns, whereas, mid-poverty schools and high-poverty are located in rural areas. Location and poverty level are presented in a cross tabulation in Table 7.

Table 7

### *School Location by Poverty Level*

Variable	Location			
	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
Low-Poverty	29.7%	13.5%	29.7%	27.0%
Mid-Poverty	20.1%	9.4%	27.3%	43.2%
High-Poverty	29.5%	5.3%	28.4%	36.8%
Total	24.8%	8.4%	28.1%	38.7%

## Student Counselor Ratios

Because student counselor ratios have been discussed in the literature as being crucial to student outcome in schools serving economically disadvantaged students, it was pertinent to explore this factor as well (Lapan, et al., 2013). Most schools, regardless of poverty level have a student to counselor ratio in the range of 250-450. Arkansas schools on the most part are following the state requirement ratio maximum of 450. However, the state maximum requirement of 450 is 200 points above the American School Counseling Associations recommended student to counselor ratio of 250/1 (ASCA, 2005). Studies have shown that student to counselor ratios, particularly in high-poverty areas, should be smaller due to the greater need of counseling services by students living in poverty (Lapan, et al., 2013). Table 8

shows the average student to counselor ratios for each school.

Table 8

*Student to Counselor Ratios by Poverty Level*

Variability	Student to Counselor Ratios					
	<250		250-450		>450	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
School Poverty						
Low-Poverty	2	5.4%	29	78.4%	6	16.2%
Mid-Poverty	10	7.2%	97	69.8%	32	23.0%
High-Poverty	10	10.5%	70	73.7%	15	15.8%
Total	22	8.0%	198	72.3%	54	19.7%

*Note.* Arkansas ratio guidelines: 1/450, ARSCA ratio guidelines: 1/250

**School Counselor Directors/Supervisors**

Schools having a certified school counselor or licensed professional counselor serving as director/supervisor have been more recognized in recent years as being an important factor in the frequency of school counseling activities (Kaffenberger, 2006). Table 9 shows the number and percentage of schools with administrators, certified or licensed school counselors, and other licensed professionals in a related field as director/supervisors for each school poverty-level group. It appears that the majority of school counselors in the state have a counseling director (53%). However, low-poverty schools have almost twice as many directors who hold a school counseling certification in comparison to mid-poverty and high-poverty schools.

Table 9

*Counseling Directors by Poverty Level*

Variable	Director/Supervisors			
	Administrator	Counselor	Other	None
Low-Poverty	18.9%	81.1%	0%	0%
Mid-Poverty	44.6%	48.2%	0.7%	6.5%
High-Poverty	42.1%	49.5%	2.1%	5.3%
Total	40.5%	52.9%	1.1%	5.1%

## **School Counselor Activity Rating Scale**

The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) along with the demographic questionnaire and follow-up were analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The scores for the subscales curriculum, coordination, consultation, counseling, and other were computed for each participant using Qualtrics and Excel. Absolute values representing the differences between “actual” and “prefer” scores are the criterion variables used in this study. Missing data were eliminated list-wise and case-by-case. Participants missing scores for a subset were also excluded which resulted in the sample size decreasing from  $N = 288$  to  $N = 252$ . The subscale score range was figured by multiplying the number of items per subscale by lowest (1) and highest (5) possible scores. The range of scores for each subscale includes: Curriculum (8-40), Coordination (8-40), Consultation (6-30), Counseling (12-60), and Other (15-75). The means and standard deviations were computed for each subscale. Total frequency differences for each subset were summed in order to have one absolute value for the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005). Subsets were divided and examined for all participants, by grade level, and by poverty level. Since poverty level is part of the first question, many comparisons were made across poverty level. A visual examination of the differences between each participant by poverty level shows the significant differences between actual and preferred activities for each group. A high mean score represents more time spent in an actual or preferred activity. The results of the SCARS, revealed that school counselors from each poverty level show high actual scores in counseling and high prefer scores in coordination. However, the mean differences between actual and preferred activities showed the discrepancies in what school counselors are actually doing in comparison to what they would prefer. The number, means, and standard deviations for each school counselor are presented by school poverty level

in Table 10.

Table 10

*SCARS Subsets by Poverty Level*

Variables	Low-Poverty			Mid-Poverty			High-Poverty		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Coun Actual	34	35.88	7.02	132	33.31	6.93	83	33.31	7.08
Coun Prefer	34	41.41	5.80	132	42.89	6.85	83	42.51	6.95
Cons Actual	34	24.88	5.28	132	24.90	5.33	83	24.40	5.32
Cons Prefer	34	28.82	6.02	132	30.45	5.57	83	30.22	5.86
Curr Actual	34	26.97	10.95	132	27.96	10.26	83	28.60	10.30
Curr Prefer	34	32.62	8.44	132	35.88	7.40	83	36.20	7.55
CoorActual	34	33.09	7.95	132	31.13	7.36	83	31.25	7.55
Coor Prefer	34	42.15	6.08	132	43.61	7.27	83	43.11	7.22
Other Actual	34	27.62	5.32	132	29.14	5.85	83	29.71	5.77
Other Prefer	34	23.21	5.31	132	22.19	4.71	83	23.47	5.27

Since previous studies using the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) has shown grade level to be one of the most influential factors on the differences in frequency of school counselor activities, it was necessary to examine SCARS scores by grade levels as well (Scarborough, 2005, Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). The higher scores for each grade level are similar to the poverty levels but the mean differences between actual and preferred activities will show the discrepancies. The number, mean, and standard deviation for each grade level are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

*SCARS Subsets by Grade Level*

Variables	Elementary			Middle			High School		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Coun Actual	116	35.66	6.22	38	34.16	7.04	98	31.10	7.31
Coun Prefer	116	42.46	7.03	38	43.32	5.62	98	42.46	7.37
Cons Actual	116	26.06	4.66	38	25.13	5.95	98	23.15	5.42
Cons Prefer	116	30.74	5.65	38	30.13	5.17	98	29.49	6.33
Curr Actual	116	35.33	7.09	38	26.29	8.62	98	20.09	7.62
Curr Prefer	116	38.58	5.57	38	34.47	7.64	98	32.42	8.19
CoorActual	116	33.49	6.88	38	31.47	7.97	98	29.01	7.49
Coor Prefer	116	43.72	6.58	38	43.21	7.36	98	42.69	7.88
Other Actual	116	27.94	5.66	38	30.50	5.63	98	29.95	5.74
Other Prefer	116	22.13	5.34	38	23.18	5.06	98	23.43	5.23

**Primary Research Question**

The first and primary research question was “Are there differences in the frequency of reported counselor activities between school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty areas in Arkansas?” This question was answered by the analysis of covariance on the total absolute mean differences between actual and preferred activities of all participants on the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005). Sample sizes for each group were not equal but were normal and homogeneous in variance. Alpha was set at .05 with a confidence interval of 95%. Normality of variance is presented in Table 12.

Table 12

*Tests of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Counseling	.147	252	.001	.906	252	.001
Consultation	.161	252	.001	.873	252	.001
Curriculum	.172	252	.001	.860	252	.001
Coordination	.107	252	.001	.950	252	.001
Other	.137	252	.001	.912	252	.001
SCARS	.086	252	.001	.951	252	.001

Note. a. Lillifors Significance Correction

**Quantitative Results**

The results of the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) were calculated by subtracting the preferred score from the actual score for each item. A negative value indicates that a school counselor is spending less time than preferred in an activity and a positive value indicates that school counselors are spending more time than preferred in an activity. A larger value indicates a larger difference in frequency between actual activities and preferred activities. For example, if a participant had a 2, rarely, on the *actual* score and 4, routinely, on the *prefer* score for question one, “Counsel with students regarding personal and family concerns”, the difference would be -2 (2 – 4) meaning they are spending less time than preferred in that particular activity. If a participant’s actual score for question one had been 5, the difference would be a positive 1 (5 – 4), meaning they are spending more time than preferred. The total and subset scores on the SCARS were calculated in the same way. For instance, if a score for the counseling subset was 8483 for the actual score and 10744 for the prefer score. The total subset difference would be -2262 (8483 – 10744), meaning all school counselors in the state spent less time on counseling than they would prefer.

When examining the mean differences for activities involved in a comprehensive school



counseling program such as counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination in comparison to other, non-school counseling activities, results showed that school counselors in Arkansas are spending more time on non-counseling duties and less time on counseling interventions as suggested by the American School Counseling Association. The American School Counseling Association recommends school counselors spend 80% of their time on direct and indirect interventions that involve counseling, curriculum, coordination, and consultation (ASCA, 2012). The subscale results of all participants showed that school counselors are spending less time than they would prefer on coordination and more time than they would prefer on other activities. Furthermore, results indicated that school counselors would most like to increase coordinating with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school counseling program needs. Overall, the activity school counselors would most like to reduce is coordinating the standardized testing program. School counselors in low-poverty, mid-poverty, and high-poverty groups differed in the activities they would most like to increase and decrease. School counselors from low-poverty and high-poverty actually spend less time than they would prefer on coordinating a peer facilitation/peer mediation program. School counselors in mid-poverty schools actually spend less time than they would prefer on coordinating with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school counseling program needs. School counselors from all three poverty levels scores were in agreement concerning coordinating the standardized testing program was the activity they spend more time doing than they would prefer. The school counselors spending the least amount of time on a comprehensive developmental counseling program as suggested by the ASCA National Model are school counselors from mid-poverty school districts. High-poverty school counselors were not far behind mid-poverty. Low-poverty school counselors spend time on activities closer to their preference level than mid-poverty and

high-poverty groups.

School counselors in mid-poverty and high-poverty schools are spending an adequate amount of time participating on committees within the school. The activity closest to their preference level involved participating on committees within the school is the closest to school counselor preference. Low-poverty counselors reported spending time as they prefer on organizing outreach to low-income families. Overall, participant scores showed a large discrepancy between the time school counselors actually spend in comparison to how they would prefer to spend their time in school counseling activities.

### **Secondary Research Question**

The secondary research question asked, “Which factors influence the discrepancy of actual and preferred activities of school counselors most?” In order to answer the secondary question, mean comparisons from descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, and ANOVA linearity tables were used to find significance and correlations. The results of these comparisons are discussed.

There are a myriad of research studies showing that impact various factors have on the frequency of school counselor activities. Many of the same variables were included in this study to further explain the differences in school counselor activities in the state and to confirm earlier findings in the research literature regarding school counselor best practice. The demographic variables included in the present research study encompassed school factors and organizational factors.

### **Criterion Variables**

The criterion variables for this study are the differences between actual and preferred time spent on school counselor activities. To determine the score for each criterion variable,

each subscale score was computed by subtracting the prefer subscale score from the *actual* subscale score. For instance, the subscale “coordination” *prefer* score would be subtracted from the coordination’s *actual* score (coordination actual – coordination prefer). Absolute values were used to represent each score. The absolute value for each subscale represent the criterion variables.

### **Predictor Variables**

The predictor variables were in school and organizational factors rather than professional factors. Based on previous research and the nature of this study certain school counselor information was not included as predictors, such as, school counselor gender and ethnicity. After careful examination of descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, mean, standard deviations, and ANOVA linearity, one out of four possible predictor variables were included in the final analysis of the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005). Some predictor variables were not incorporated because of the large percentage of participants who identified as having met the specific standard, particularly in professional areas and because the predictor variable did not show significance on mean comparisons. For instance, 98% of school counselors possessed a school counselor certification, 85% were members of a professional organization, 62% had participated in leadership/advocacy activities in the past year, and many had several years of experience as a counselor (13 years). Gender and ethnicity were considered as descriptors of the school counselors in Arkansas and were comparable to other studies where the majority of counselors are female and Caucasian, and therefore, were not used as predictors in this study (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2002; Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). The possible predictor variables are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

*Predictor Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Locale	2.83	1.194	248
Ratio	2.12	.507	248
Poverty	2.20	.659	248
Minority	1.99	1.085	248

**Correlations**

Correlations were found between predictor variables and the criterion variable.

Reliability statistics including correlations were first examined and determined to be somewhat reliable with Cronbach's  $\alpha = .032$  and Cronbach's  $\alpha = .028$ , based on standardized items, and  $N = 4$ . The results found in the Pearson correlation matrix indicated statistically significant correlations between predictor variables at a significance level of .01 for minority, locale, and poverty, and ratio at .04 for a 2-tailed test on the ANOVA linearity table. Correlations between the predictor variables are presented in Table 14. The correlations showed a relationship between all significant predictors to minority student populations. This relationship is understandable considering that schools in each poverty level have minority student populations, especially in mid-poverty and high-poverty schools. Furthermore, Arkansas schools have 55% of schools with minority student populations of 25-75%. Another factor, student to counselor ratios, showed 83% of schools as having ratios at or below 450. To explore this factor would be difficult, since the majority of schools have essentially the same student counselor ratios. Also, each poverty group had overlapping locations, so, the location factor was removed as well. Additionally, certain locations within the state have higher or lower levels of poverty that are influenced by various extrinsic variables such as business and politics. Poverty level was determined to be the primary factor. The decision to explore poverty level further was based on

prior interest and on discrepancy results between actual and preferred activities among school counselors in the state. In order to analyze poverty level further, homogeneity of slope using ANOVA was utilized. The homogeneity of slope test checked for homogeneity of variances and for an interaction effect with the covariate, grade.

Table 14

*Predictor Correlations*

Variable		Minority	Poverty	Locale	Ratio
Minority	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>.335*</b>	-.011	<b>-.369*</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.862	.001
	Sum of Squares/	293.94	59.39	-1.52	-119.67
	Cross-Products	1.176	.239	-.006	-.479
Poverty	Covariance				
	Pearson Correlation	<b>.335*</b>	1	-.093	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.142	.720
	Sum of Squares/	59.39	107.36	-7.71	4.46
Ratio	Covariance				
	Pearson Correlation	-.011	-.093	1	<b>-.182*</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.862	.142		.004
	Sum of Squares/	-1.52	-7.71	64.43	-27.76
Locale	Covariance				
	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.369*</b>	.023	<b>-.182*</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.720	.004	
	Sum of Squares/	-119.67	4.46	-27.76	360.32
	Cross-Products	-.479	.018	-.111	1.44

Note. \*. Correlation is significant at .01 (2-tailed).

**Analysis Procedures**

The primary question, “Are there differences in the frequency of reported counselor activities between school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty areas in Arkansas?” was answered in ANCOVA procedures used in examining discrepancies between all school counselors. The covariate chosen for the ANCOVA was grade level. The decision to use grade

level as the covariate was based on reports from earlier studies and the descriptive statistics on school counselor activities by grade level for this study.

## **ANCOVA**

A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The independent variable, poverty, included three levels: low-poverty, mid-poverty, and high-poverty. The sum of the differences between actual and prefer subsets on the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) was the dependent variable. The covariance chosen for this study was grade level. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity-of-slopes assumption indicated that the relationship between the covariate, and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variable,  $F(2,243) = .124$ ,  $MSE = 733.49$ ,  $p = .88$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . The ANCOVA was significant,  $F(2, 245) = 4.60$ ,  $MSE = 728.25$ ,  $p < .05$ . The strength of relationship between the poverty factor and the dependent variable was strong, as assessed by a partial  $\eta^2$ , with the poverty factor accounting for 36% of the variance of the dependent variable, holding grade level constant.

The means of the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) adjusted for initial differences showed differences across poverty levels. The mid-poverty group had the largest adjusted mean ( $M = 44.72$ ), the high-poverty group had a smaller adjusted mean ( $M = 44.37$ ), and the low-poverty group had the smallest adjusted mean ( $M = 29.47$ ). Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among these adjusted means. Based on the Bonferroni procedure, the adjusted means for both mid-poverty and high-poverty groups differed significantly from the low-poverty group, but the adjusted means for mid-poverty and high-poverty did not differ significantly. The results revealed a significant difference between the low-poverty group in comparison to the mid-poverty and high-poverty groups, meaning, school

counselors in low-poverty areas are practicing closer to their preference, whereas, mid and high-poverty school counselors are not. The Pairwise comparisons are presented in Table 15.

Table 15

*Pairwise Comparisons*

(I) Poverty	(J) Poverty	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low-Poverty	Mid-Poverty	-15.254*	5.193	.011	-27.772	-2.735
	High-Poverty	-14.899*	5.503	.022	-28.165	-1.634
Mid-Poverty	Low-Poverty	15.254*	5.193	.011	2.735	27.772
	High-Poverty	.354	3.782	1.000	-8.763	9.472
High-Poverty	Low-Poverty	-14.889*	5.503	.022	1.634	28.165
	Mid-Poverty	-.354	3.782	1.000	-9.472	8.763

*Note.* Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at .01

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

**Additional Questions**

Items 51-55 were not part of the original SCARS (Scarborough, 2005). However, the items were added to the *other* category in order gain a better understanding concerning the experience of school counselors today. Since these questions were not tested for reliability and validity, they were not part of the analysis of the SCARS. However, the results may expand the understanding concerning the everyday activities of school counselors and maybe useful in future SCARS assessments. These questions covered additional clerical and administrative activities based on research and previous experience of the researcher. Table 16 shows the mean, number, and standard deviation for each additional item under the category labeled *other*. These results of the additional questions were not used in the analysis of the SCARS or subsets of the SCARS.

Table 16

*Additional Questions by All*

Questions 51-55	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Calculate GPAs-Actual	2.80	252	1.778
Calculate GPAs-Prefer	2.24	252	1.515
Enter student data-Actual	2.66	252	1.750
Enter student data-Prefer	1.92	252	1.308
Participate in IEP & 504-Actual	3.95	252	1.137
Participate in IEP & 504 Prefer	2.99	252	1.158
Attend school functions-Actual	3.64	252	.949
Attend school functions-Prefer	3.86	252	.927
Administrative duties-Actual	2.96	252	1.268
Administrative duties-Prefer	1.94	252	.918

Comparisons were made between poverty level on the mean differences between actual and preferred activities on the additional questions from the subset other. The results showed that all three poverty groups spend less time than they would prefer in attending school functions. The low-poverty group spends more time than they would prefer participating in IEP and 504 paperwork and meetings. The mid and high-poverty groups spend more time than they would prefer assisting and or performing administrative duties. Mean differences were examined and compared by poverty level. Raw scores on actual and preferred activities were averaged and the actual score subtracted from the prefer scored to find the mean differences in discrepancies between actual and preferred activities. Comparisons were made between each poverty group. The mean differences for actual and prefer scores are presented in Table 17.



Table 17

*Additional Questions by Poverty Level*

Questions 51-55	Low-Pov	Mid-Pov	High-Pov	All
Calculate GPAs	0.26	0.82	0.61	1.01
Enter student data	0.38	1.13	0.72	1.37
Participate in IEP & 504	0.97	1.11	0.80	1.68
Attend school functions	-0.29	-0.22	-0.16	-1.25
Administrative duties	0.71	1.27	1.07	1.04
Total	2.03	4.11	3.05	2.79

### Qualitative Results

Question three asked, “What do school counselors perceive as the primary barrier to providing direct/indirect services to students as suggested by the ASCA National Model?”

Question four asked, “What perceptions do counselors have concerning the common practice of using principals as directors of school counseling programs rather than certified counselor directors?” Questions three and four were answered in follow-up questions and interviews.

#### Follow-up Questionnaire

Follow-up questions were included with the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) survey on Qualtrics. These questions were added to bring in-depth knowledge of the experiences of school counselors and to support the results of the SCARS. The follow-up questionnaire was both quantitative and qualitative in its format. The questions were designed to have yes or no answers for quantitative analysis but included an optional explanation after some questions in order to bring depth to participant responses. There were 12 questions with 9 closed-response, one open-response, and 5 optional text boxes to add comments to answers. There were 274 total responses that ranged from 151 to 260 responses per item. These questions were focused on organizational constructs within the school system and the perceptions school counselors have about them.

Overall, school counselors are spending less than 80% of their time on direct and indirect services for students and more than 50% of their time on non-counseling related activities, which goes against best practice. The ASCA National Model recommends school counselors spend 80% of their time on direct and indirect services to students. School counselors also reported having a collaborative relationship with their school principals. The highest percentage of yes answers fell under principal faith in counselor therapeutic abilities (92%) and informing their administrator about the role of the school counselor (72%). The follow-up questions for all participants are presented in Table 18.

Table 18

*Follow-up Questionnaire Responses by All*

Follow-up Questions	Number	Percent
80% direct/indirect services		
Yes	109	42%
No	150	58%
More than 50% non-counseling duties		
Yes	133	51%
No	126	49%
Feel supported by school		
Most of the time	160	61%
Sometimes	80	31%
Rarely	21	8%
Collaborative relationship with principal		
Most of the time	186	71%
Sometimes	56	22%
Rarely	18	7%
Principal has faith in counseling abilities		
Yes	240	92%
No	21	8%

(Cont.)

Follow-up Questions	Number	Percent
Informed administrator of counselor's role		
Yes	188	72%
No	73	28%
Changes made as a result		
Yes	66	35%
No	120	65%
Asked to reduce non-counseling duties		
Yes	152	58%
No	109	42%
Changes made as a result		
Yes	61	40%
No	90	60%

### Follow-up by Poverty Level

The responses of the follow-up questionnaire were also divided into poverty level groups for comparison and are presented in Table 19. Results from the follow-up questions showed that low-poverty and high-poverty school counselors' experience is more positive than mid-poverty school counselors, which reinforces the results of the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005). More than half of school counselors in each poverty level are spending less than 80% of time on direct/indirect services. Mid-poverty school counselors are spending more than 50% on non-counseling duties, with low and high not far behind. Arkansas school counselors from each poverty level had a collaborative relationship with their principals and believed their principal had faith in their therapeutic abilities. All school counselors reported informing their principals about the role of the counselor with no changes as a result. Interestingly, mid and high-poverty school counselors asked to reduce non-counseling duties, but low-poverty counselors did not. High-poverty counselors stated that changes were made as a result but mid-poverty counselors

stated no changes were made. On the open-response question, “What services do you feel are most needed in your school?” School counselors in Arkansas said their students need more academic, career, and emotional support, individual and group counseling, and parent/community outreach. School counselors also shared their feelings in other areas. For instance, the school counselors expressed feeling supported by their campus faculty and staff but believed they did not have a clear understanding about the role of the counselor. Some reported their principal, superintendent, and school board lacked concern for the counseling program, while others believed they had a collaborative relationship with their principal and that the principal had faith in their knowledge and skills to perform basic therapeutic techniques. Almost all school counselors said their principal had faith in their ability to perform basic therapeutic techniques but were expected to correct student problem behaviors quickly. All the answers examined from the follow-up questionnaire further solidified the SCARS results and brought to light the thoughts and concerns behind the discrepancies of actual and preferred practice.

Table 19

*Follow-up by Poverty Level*

Follow-up Questions	Low-Poverty	Mid-Poverty	High-Poverty
80% direct/indirect services			
Yes	38%	38%	50%
No	62%	62%	50%
More than 50% non-counseling duties			
Yes	47%	55%	48%
No	53%	45%	52%
Feel supported by school			
Most of the time	62%	58%	69%
Sometimes	35%	33%	25%
Rarely	3%	9%	6%

(Cont.)

Collaborative relationship with principal			
Most of the time	76%	71%	71%
Sometimes	21%	21%	22%
Rarely	3%	8%	7%
Principal has faith in counseling abilities			
Yes	94%	89%	98%
No	6%	11%	2%
Informed administrator of counselor's role			
Yes	53%	75%	76%
No	47%	25%	24%
Changes made as a result			
Yes	39%	32%	38%
No	61%	68%	62%
Asked to reduce non-counseling duties			
Yes	44%	63%	57%
No	56%	37%	43%
Changes made as a result			
Yes	40%	34%	55%
No	60%	66%	45%

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

An interview was requested from participants at the end of the follow-up questionnaire. There were 109 participants who signed-up for an interview. Interview requests were sent out to 30 candidates randomly assigned to each poverty groups. There were 15 total interviews scheduled and conducted (5 low, 5 mid, 5 high). These participants were drawn from a pool of potential candidates known for their expertise in the field of school counseling and years of experience as a school counselor. Responses from the interview participants were analyzed and coded by themes using Atlas.ti software. The themes that developed from the coding of responses resulted in evidence that further supports the quantitative results and previous research on school counselor activities. Interviewees shared their thoughts and opinions on perceived

barriers to providing direct/indirect services to students, ways to alleviate the problem, directors and supervisors, organizational constructs in the public school system, and on fulltime on-site LPCs. The results were almost unanimous on every question. The most perceived barrier was in agreement with the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) results and follow-up questions. Overall, school counselors mentioned testing coordination as a top barrier. The next highest barrier mentioned was non-counseling duties such as coordination of other programs such as 504, gifted and talented, and clerical duties. Student counselor ratios were also mentioned. Nearly all schools counselors agreed that having a licensed school counselor as a director was preferable. School counselors felt certified school counselors in a directory role was preferable because they understand the purpose of the school counseling program and the role of the school counselor. Not all school counselors were completely against having principals as directors as long as they were required to take a course on counseling as part of their degree program and training for those who already degree. Many school counselors would rather have a certified school counselor as a supervisor to get advice and support for problems that an administrator would not know about. Some mentioned having a certified school counselor as a director and how helpful it was for them and their school's counseling program. A couple of counselors were able to share their own personal experience and the experience of another counselor who worked with principals who were former school counselors and how the principal advocated for their program. Most spoke positively about their principals but felt their principals simply had differing agendas. Nearly all school counselors were supportive of having LPC's and saw the value in having a therapist who could work with students who require more intensive therapy but some were concerned that they would end up doing all paperwork and no counseling with student. Inductively developed thematic category results are presented in Table 20.

Table 20

*Inductively Developed Thematic Categories*

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
Q 1. What are the most common barriers to providing direct/indirect services for students?"			
Barriers			
A 1 Coordinating Testing	Non-counseling duties	Administrators	The school district administrators and testing directors assign the responsibility of test coordination to counselors.
A 2 Participating in other non-counseling duties as assigned.	Non-counseling duties	Administrators	Being 504 coordinator, scheduling, registrar duties, and administrator duties.
A 3 Lack of clerical support.	Clerical	School District	School district will not hire clerical support for large amounts of data entry and paperwork.
A4 Student counselor/ ratios of 450 and above.	Student counselor ratios	State student/counselor ratio requirements in comparison to ASCA's suggested 250/1.	Some schools are having counselors work with more the 450 students. Those who are working with 450 are still overwhelmed and cannot meet the needs of the student.
A 5 Time limitations on classroom guidance lessons.	Curriculum	Administrative Rules	School counselors are limited on the amount of time they can take from classroom instruction per week because of pressure to improve student performance on standardized tests. Sometimes students are not getting guidance lessons on a regular basis because of school or counseling conflicts in scheduling.

(Cont.)

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
A 6 Time limits on letting students leave the classroom to see the counselor.	Student Services	Administrative Rules	Teachers and administrators are more concerned about student academic performance and do not realize that students will not be engaged in the learning, due to behavior problems, and will not improve their academic, social and emotional problems.
Q 2. "What do you think should happen to alleviate this problem?"			
Alleviate			
B1 Remove testing coordination from the counselors job requirements.	Non-counseling duties	Administrators/School Board	Administrators and district directors of testing should not have school counselors take on a complete other job such as test coordination.
B 2 Have the state legislature create a law that restricts schools from adding duties that are incongruent with counseling.	Non-counseling duties	State Legislative Support	The state needs to back counselors so they can better meet the mental health needs of students, which, ultimately benefits student's academic performance. They need to make regulations that allow counselors to do their job effectively.
B 3 Remove other non-counseling duties.	Other Duties Assigned	Administrators/School Board	Assigning duties when "nobody else" is available or when, substitute teaching, quasi-administrative duties, 504, ESL, student discipline & monitoring, GT coordinator and other such titles.
B 4 Hire clerical staff to take care of paperwork and record keeping.	Clerical	Administrators/School Board	School districts refuse to hire another person to do clerical jobs, to do such things as registration, scheduling classes, recording keeping, manually entering student data into state system, providing student transcripts to colleges, etc.

(Cont.)



Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
B 5 Hire another counselor.	Student/Counselor Ratios	State Legislature	School counselors are not able to counsel 450 students. Children today have more emotional, social, and family issues and the state is not addressing the problem.
B 6 Teachers and Administrators need to be trained about the role of the school counselor.	Training	Education/Training Practices	Degree programs should require that future administrators take a full semester course on counseling. Those already working as teachers and administrators need training on the role of the school counselor.
Q3. "What are your thoughts about the common practice of using principals as director/supervisors over school counseling programs rather than a certified school counselors or licensed mental health counselors?"			
C 1 Counselors would prefer to have a certified school counselor instead of administrator.	Director/Supervisor	Administrators/Directors	Most counselors would rather have a director/supervisor who is knowledgeable about the role of the school counselor and what is best for students, emotional, social, and academic needs. If a principal is going to be a director over counseling, they should be required by their academic degree to take a course on counseling and be trained on what counselors do.

(Cont.)

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
C 2 A Having a certified school counselor as a supervisor would make it possible for counselors to get advice and support from someone who knows how to do the job well.	Director/Supervisor	Administrator/Directors	If principals are going to continue to direct, supervise, and evaluate school counselors, they need proper knowledge and training to do so. It would also help to work with someone who understands the connection of mental health to academic performance.
<p>Q 4. "Do you have a district certified school counselor as director? If not, how would you feel about having a director of counseling services for the district?"  Certified Director 12/87% - No, 3/ - Yes</p>			
C 3 It would be great to have a director with a school counseling background. School counselor directors would advocate for the district school counseling programs and be able to align the counseling program across grade levels.	Director/Supervisor	School District	Certified school counselors are more equipped to provide adequate supervision and are willing to listen to counselors concerns and be an advocate for them.
C 4 School counselors know how to navigate the school system better than administrators and LPCs.	Director/Supervisor	School District	LPC's would be fine but they need to have some kind of training in order to know how to navigate the school system. Most school counselors have found that administrators lack the knowledge and understanding about the purpose for school counselors and school counseling programs. If they are to continue being directors they should be required to take a course in order to get their degree and get training afterwards.

(Cont.)

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
C 5 Only a few school counselors are fine with having administrators as their directors simply because they have not had a problem with their principal.	Director/Supervisors	School Districts	I don't have a problem with having an administrator as my director but it would be nice if the principal had some kind of training on how to work with and supervise their counselors.
C 6 There is no need in creating a new administrative position. It would be too costly for many school districts and could cause power struggles.	Director/Supervisors	School Districts	Creating another position is not feasible for small districts, it would be too costly for most schools, and there could be power struggles among counselors and with administrators.
C 7 It would be fine as long as the director takes part in counseling students as well (like a lead counselor).	Director/Supervisors	School Districts	As long as the director and assist with counseling.
Q 5. "Do you think school counseling programs should be a separate entity apart from administrative control with various counselors who are in charge of curriculum, coordination, consultation, and counseling?" No – 2%, Yes – 67%, I don't Know or It depends – 13%			
D 1 It would be nice to have school counselors over their own program.	Separate Entity	School Districts	I think it would be great but not sure how it would work exactly. It is hard juggling it all and it would be nice to be over one area. It could get confusing for students though.
D 2 It would be good as long as there is proper communication and planning.	Separate Entity	School Districts	It would need to be very organized with good communication across grades levels, and school counselors would need to be trained in administration.

(Cont.)

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms	Characteristic
Q 6. "How would you feel about having LPCs as permanent on-site therapeutic counselors as part of this type of program?"			
LPC No – 27%, Yes – 11 73%			
E 1 It would be great to have someone onsite everyday to work with children needing more intensive therapy.	Onsite LPCs	School Districts	We use school-based therapist and it helps to have someone who can work with children who have more difficult problems than what a school counselor is able to address.
E 2 It would take away what little counseling that school counselors get to do.	Onsite LPCs	School Districts	School counselors rarely get to counsel and it would take what little is left away and then all a school counselor would be is a glorified secretary.
E 3 I am against it. That would take away in control school counselors have over the program and take away any counseling we do.	Onsite LPCs	School Districts	It would take away any flexibility school counselors have over their program but if school counselors were given the time to counsel, we wouldn't need other people.

### Summary

The distribution and collection procedures and the number of participants have been covered. All pertinent information and test results for each research question was examined concerning the descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, homogeneity slope tests, and the ANCOVA for this study. The next chapter will be an overview of the literature review, purpose of the study, results, and limitations, and future research suggestions will be discussed.

## Chapter V

### Summary of the Study

The role of the school counselor has been a source of contention for decades. School counselors have tried to establish their roles in the schools only to have them change without warning in order to fit state and federal academic goals and organizational structure of the school districts where they work (Erford, 2003). Professional competencies of school counselors outlined in the American Counseling Association's National Model (ASCA, 2012) of school counseling established specific school counselor principles of ethical behavior to maintain high standards of integrity, leadership and professionalism. According to ASCA, the role of the school counselor is to participate as a member of the educational team and use leadership skills, advocacy, and collaboration to strengthen relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators (ASCA, 2012). Nevertheless, professional school counselors are still experiencing role ambiguity, being assigned non-counseling duties, and not getting administrative and school board support in order to provide the services students need (Perusse et al., & Jones, 2004; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

According to the ASCA National Model, school counselors should be spending 80% of their day in direct and indirect services to students by providing culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that promote academic, career, and personal/social development for all students (ASCA, 2005; Bowers & Hatch, 2005; Lee, 2001). Unfortunately school counselor duties assigned by their respective administrators continues to be incongruent with national standards (Perusse, et al., 2004).

Even though there have been many studies in the literature about the role of the school counselor and the benefits of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling

model, few studies explore school counselor activities in high-poverty schools (Clemens et al., 2010; Ford, 2014; Jonson, et al., 2008; Lapan et al., 2013; Sutton & Fall, 1995). Past research has primarily been on school districts with predominately Caucasian students with middle to above socioeconomic status (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013; Buckard et al., 2013; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2013; McGannon et al., 2005). It was suggested by the authors of *The Current Status of Outcome Research* suggested that more research studies need to investigate minority students, school environment, and other psychological factors on students' academic, career, and personal development (McGannon et al., 2005). The few studies investigating minority and impoverished student populations minorities found that schools with higher percentages of minority students and students eligible for free or reduced lunch had significantly lower per-pupil expenditures, and received less personal and social counseling services in comparison to students from more financially affluent schools (Lapan, 2013; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2013).

### **Overview**

This research study examined and compared the frequency of actual and preferred activities of practicing Arkansas school counselors across poverty levels. The goal was to explore counselor perceptions on the contextual factors that hinder counselors from providing direct/indirect services for students, and to uncover the dynamics of the counselor/principal relationship and how this relationship may influence the establishment and maintenance of a fully comprehensive development school counseling model as suggested by ASCA (Carnes-Holt, Range & Cisler, 2012).

## **Sample and Data Collection**

The Dillman Total Design Method was chosen to collect data. It is a data collection method that involves using a mixed-mode of data collection (Dillman, 2000). Invitation emails, reminder emails, and thank you emails were sent. The first invitations were sent to the initial, 300 randomly selected participants. Because of the low response rate, additional invitations were sent to the remaining school counselors in the state.

After the surveys and follow-up questions were completed, 30 interview requests were sent to schools counselors knowledgeable about school counseling practices in their demographic area, for their leadership in education and counseling organizations. Interviewees were given the choice to participate in either a 15 to 20-minute telephone interview or email interview. The interview was used to bring conceptual density and reliability to the survey results (Schram, 2006). Fifteen school counselors, 5 low-poverty, 5 mid-poverty, and 5 high-poverty, participated in the interview.

The purpose of this study was to assess the performance of actual and preferred activities of practicing school counselors in Arkansas school districts across poverty levels. This research study used a social justice lens (Ratts et al., 2007) to look closely at external factors that effect the implementation of a fully comprehensive developmental school counseling program, such as organizational infrastructure, counselor leadership, as well as student demographics in hopes to make a difference in how political leaders, administrators, school boards, and school faculty perceive and support the professional school counselor and the services they are able to provide (Sutton & Fall, 1995).

The present research study is significant because it takes into consideration the influence of impoverished communities with schools functioning on low student expenditures. It also

addresses concerns about the amount of time spend on the delivery of student services and on the working relationship of counselors and administrators. This study is one of the few mixed-methods research designs exploring the topic of school counselor activities and the factors that influence the discrepancies between actual and preferred practice. Furthermore, it utilizes multiple measurement instruments, which allows for a more multi-dimensional interpretation on the discrepancies.

The research questions for this study were based on previous experience in school counseling, communication with other school counselors, and earlier research exploring school counselor roles and activities. Although these thoughts are not necessarily new, there combination within one study adds a multi-dimensional level to the discrepancies of school counselor practice. The research questions are as follows:

- Question 1: Are there differences in the frequency of reported counselor activities between school counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty areas in Arkansas?
- Question 2: Which factors influence the discrepancy of actual and preferred activities of school counselors most?
- Question 3: What do school counselors perceive as the primary barrier to providing direct/indirect services to students as suggested by the ASCA National Model?
- Question 4: What perceptions do counselors have concerning the common practice of using principals as directors of school counseling programs rather than certified counselor directors?

### **Analysis Instruments and Procedures**

To measure counselor activity, this study incorporated surveys, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to examine the interpersonal and systemic issues involved in establishing



and maintaining a comprehensive developmental school counseling program (DeKruyf, Auger & Trice-Black, 2013). The primary and secondary research questions were answered with a quantitative instrument, the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005). The third and fourth research questions were answered with a follow-up questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The main instrument used to examine discrepancies of school counselor activities was the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale developed by Janna Scarborough (Scarborough, 2002, 2005.) The SCARS is a valid and reliable self-reported cross-sectional survey instrument designed to measure performance of actual and preferred activities being performed by active school counselors. These activities were labeled as (a) counseling, (b) consultation, (c) curriculum, (d) coordination, and (e) “other”. The activity labeled “other” is indicative of activities considered to be non-counseling or necessary for school functionality or fair-share duties. Items in each subset were measured using a 5-point frequency scale developed to measure “how often” a task is done (Scarborough, 2005). Additional activities under the label “other” to were used to bring in newer concerns discussed by counselors in Arkansas since the SCARS was first created and reviewed by other professionals in the field of school counseling and counselor education for accuracy.

### **Factors Related to School Counselor Practice**

A demographic questionnaire was created to help explain characteristics of school counselors, school settings, and student populations. The demographic questionnaire asked participants questions concerning gender, ethnicity, grade level (elementary, middle, or high school), number of years as a school counselor, counselor certification, association memberships, leadership, and demographics of the school, such as, ethnicity and socio-economic status of

students (low, mid, or high-poverty), student to counselor ratios, and school location (city, suburban, town, rural) (NCES, 2013). Demographic questions were based on factors documented in previous research as having a predictive influence on school counselor activities. The factors revolved around professional aspects, school environment, and organizational constructs. Eight factors, professional membership, certification, experience, school counselor directors, student/counselor ratios, minority populations, poverty, and location were investigated by comparing means and cross tabulations. The eight factors were narrowed down to four factors: minority, poverty, locale, and ratio, and compared in a Pearson correlation matrix. After examination of the descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, and correlations, two specific factors were considered the most influential on school counselor activities, location and poverty. Since rural location was a common factor in all poverty levels and because poverty groups had other overlapping locations, the location factor was ruled out, leaving poverty level as the primary independent variable.

### **Overall Findings**

A preliminary analysis test for homogeneity-of-slopes indicated no interaction between the grade level and poverty level. Once homogeneity-of-slope was established, an analysis of covariance was conducted using poverty as the independent variable, SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) as the dependent variable, and grade level as the covariate variable. The results of the ANCOVA showed a significant relationship between the poverty and school counselor discrepancies in actual and preferred activities, with poverty accounting for 36% of the dependent variable, holding grade level constant. The adjusted means for the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) survey showed differences across poverty levels. The mid-poverty group had the largest adjusted mean ( $M = 44.72$ ), the high-poverty group had a

slightly smaller adjusted mean ( $M = 44.37$ ), and the low-poverty group had the smallest adjusted mean ( $M = 29.47$ ). The follow-up test of all pair-wise differences confirmed a significant difference between mid-poverty and high-poverty groups in relation to low-poverty groups. The adjusted means for mid-poverty and high-poverty did not differ significantly.

### **Arkansas School Counselor Activities**

The results from the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) revealed a large discrepancy between how school counselors actually spend their time in comparison to how they would prefer to spend their time. Results showed that Arkansas school counselors are spending more time than they would prefer on other activities considered non-counseling and less time on counseling interventions such as counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination. The SCARS subset results showed that school counselors are spending less time than they would prefer on coordination and more time than they would prefer on activities in the *other* category. The activity school counselors would most like to increase is coordinating with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school counseling program needs. The activity school counselors would most like to reduce is coordinating the standardized testing program which is part of the subset labeled other. The activity with the least discrepancy for all school counselors is participating on committees within the school.

### **Low, Mid, and High-Poverty Differences**

Counselors in low, mid, and high-poverty groups differed in the activities they would most like to increase and decrease. School counselors from low-poverty and high-poverty schools are actually spending less time than they would prefer on coordinating peer facilitation/peer mediation program. School counselors in mid-poverty schools spend less time than they would prefer on coordinating with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school

counseling program needs. Coordinating the standardized testing program is the activity low, mid, and high-poverty groups spend more time doing than they would prefer. The school counselors with the greatest discrepancies between actual and preferred activities are from mid-poverty school districts. School counselors from high-poverty school districts were not far behind. School counselors spending time on activities closer to their preference level are from low-poverty school districts.

### **Additional Questions**

Additional questions for the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) that were not tested for reliability and validity were not analyzed in the ANCOVA but did bring to light some other activities that school counselors may prefer or not prefer to do as frequently. The activity that all counselors spend less time doing than they would prefer is attending school functions. The activity that school counselors would rather spend less time doing is participating in IEP and 504 paperwork and meetings. However, when looking at each poverty level, low-poverty school counselors are spending more time than they would prefer on the IEP and 504 item, whereas, mid-poverty and high-poverty would rather spend less time on assisting and performing administrative duties. The group with the largest discrepancies on the total actual and preferred score differences for the additional items is the mid-poverty group. The low-poverty was next and the high-poverty was last.

### **Follow-up Questionnaire**

The follow-up and semi-structured interviews brought in-depth understanding to the results of the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005). Results from the follow-up questions showed that school counselors are not spending 80% of their time on direct/indirect services for students, as suggested by ASCA. It also showed that school counselors are spending more than 50% of their

time on non-counseling activities that are not congruent to their education and training. Low-poverty school counselors feel they have a collaborative relationship with their principals, whereas, high and mid-poverty do not. Also, mid-poverty and high-poverty school counselors reported informing their principals about the role of the counselor and asked their principal for a reduction in their non-counseling duties. High-poverty counselors felt changes were made as a result but mid-poverty counselors felt no changes were made. Low-poverty counselors did not inform or ask for a reduction in non-counseling duties. School counselors expressed feeling supported by their campus faculty and staff but believed faculty and staff did not have a clear understanding about the role of the school counselor. Some believed their principal, superintendent, and school board lacked concern for the counseling program. Almost all school counselors said their principal had faith in their ability to perform basic therapeutic techniques, but some reported that their principal had unrealistic expectations on the time needed to help students improve their behaviors.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

A semi-structured interview was performed last. Responses from the interview participants were analyzed and coded by themes. The themes that developed from the coding of responses resulted in evidence that further supports the quantitative results from the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) survey and from previous research on school counselor activities. The interview covered perceived barriers to providing direct/indirect services to students, ways to alleviate the problem, directors and supervisors, organizational constructs in the public school system, and on fulltime on-site licensed professional counselors.

The results were almost unanimous on every question. The most perceived barrier was in agreement with the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) results and follow-up questions. As a whole,

school counselors felt that testing coordination was the top barrier to providing direct and indirect services to students. The other barriers mentioned were: non-counseling duties such as 504, gifted and talented, clerical work, and administrative type duties. Nearly all schools counselors agreed that having a licensed school counselor as a director was preferable. School counselors felt certified school counselors in a directory role was preferable because they understand the purpose of the school counseling program and the role of the school counselor and are more likely to advocate for the counselor and the school counseling program. Not all school counselors were completely against having principals as directors as long as they were required to take a course on counseling as part of their degree program and participate in training programs about the role of the school counselor and the purpose for school counseling programs. Furthermore, school counselors would rather have a certified school counselor as a supervisor to get advice and support for problems that an administrator would not have experience doing. Most school counselors spoke positively about their principals but understood their principals to have a different philosophy and approach to student improvement. Nearly all school counselors were supportive of full-time, onsite licensed professional counselors in the school and saw the value in having a therapist who could work with students who require more intensive therapy. Only a few counselors were concerned that they would end up doing all paperwork and no counseling.

### **Summary of Findings**

In general, school counselors in Arkansas are not are not spending time as they would prefer on counseling, curriculum, coordination, and consultation. Conversely, they are spending a considerable amount of time on non-counseling duties such as testing coordination, Individual Education Plans (IEP), 504 coordination, administrative type duties, and clerical work. The

activity that school counselors would most like to spend more time doing is coordinating with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school counseling program needs. The activity they would most like to reduce or completely remove is coordinating the standardized testing program.

### **Implications**

This study has the potential to be impactful because it explores a multitude of variables influencing the discrepancies in actual and preferred school counselor activities using a social justice framework. The results of this research supports previous research showing that school counselors would prefer to practice in a manner that is congruent to the American School Counseling Association's National Model (Scarborough, 2008). It also addresses the barriers affecting the time spent by school counselors on direct and indirect services to students and reveals the perceptions of school counselors on the organizational obstacles preventing them from implementing an ASCA National Model school counseling program (ASCA, 2012).

Many studies have used either qualitative or quantitative research designs. However, this study has used a mixed-methods design. This research is significant because it takes into consideration the influence of poverty levels, organizational infrastructure, and the working relationship of counselors and administrators. It is one of the few mixed-methods research designs exploring the topic of school counselor activities and the factors that influence the discrepancies between actual and preferred practice. Furthermore, it utilizes multiple measurement instruments, which allows for a more multi-dimensional interpretation on the discrepancies in school counselor activities (Creswell, 2007, 2014).

The location of this study was conducted in a state that serves a large population of minority and impoverished students who live mostly in rural communities, making the study

results comparable to numerous school districts across the U.S (NCES, 2013). The research results has brought new and additional knowledge concerning the influence of organizational constructs and poverty in schools on the delivery of school counseling interventions to students. The information gleaned from this study has the potential to inform administrators, school board members, stakeholders, counselor educators, and state leaders on key policy and systemic changes needed for school counselors to provide a fully comprehensive developmental counseling program that meets the academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs of all students.

### **Limitations**

A possible limitation of this study would be in its restricted population sample that does not include other states. Also, the online and email delivery of the SCARS (Scarborough, 2005) survey may have reduced the number of counselors willing to participate. Since the SCARS instrument is a self-reported survey, and the semi-structured interview is on counselor perceptions, without principal input, it could have created a slightly biased view (Scarborough, 2005). Furthermore, results could be biased due to timing of its implementation. For example, the spring is the semester for standardized testing, scheduling classes, creating a master schedule, awarding of scholarships, honors ceremonies, award ceremonies, and graduation. The stress of coordinating the standardized testing would most likely create negative feelings among all counselors for every grade level. Other stressors and end of year fatigue could have had a negative influence on counselor responses as well. Furthermore, participant problems with logging on and staying logged on the Qualtrics survey website kept some participants from completing the survey. Another limitation that became apparent in the semi-structured interviews was the fact that school counselors had just participated in an annual school counselor



survey conducted by the Arkansas Department of Education.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

For future research, it is recommended that this study have a pre and post-test to make sure time of school year is not an influential factor on the results. Also, a larger sample size, such as a national study with more diverse participants is suggested. The views of the administrators may also be of interest for future research on school counselor activities as well. Additionally, a longitudinal study that documents school counselor activities throughout the year on a daily and weekly basis may be helpful in supporting this and other research results showing discrepancies in actual and preferred practice. This could be done by an individual counselor, by a number of counselors collectively, or as part of research study.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the school counselor and the purpose of the school counseling program has evolved over the years since its early beginnings. Unfortunately, the changes made throughout the history of school counseling have rarely been a result of school counselor initiation. Most often the role of the school counselor and the activities school counselors are expected to carryout have grown out of political, social, and economical development. Economics, politics, and societal issues have all been a constant pressure on educational reform, which has in turn, influenced the role and functions of school counselor. These educational reform initiatives have spurred the development of various theories and approaches to meet the changing needs of students (Erford, 2003). Even though, the school counseling profession has emerged as an integral part of the school system. The importance of school counseling has ebbed and flowed in its importance by school officials and political leaders which has lead to numerous financial cuts for school counseling programs (Keys, et al., 1998; Schmidt, 2003). Thankfully, the American

School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2005) and The Education Trust (2002) brought clarity and purpose to school counseling when it developed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs and the ASCA National Model for school counseling programs. These two initiatives helped to outline the importance of school counselors as facilitators of student academic, career, and personal/social development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Erford, 2003).

Unfortunately, there continues to be confusion among school officials, administrators, and political leaders as to the function of the school counselor and school counseling program (Perusse et al., & Jones, 2004). School counselors continue to be asked to perform activities that are incongruent to their education and training due to the overemphasis of academic achievement tests, lack of support for school counseling programs, and knowledge of decision makers such as administrators, school boards, and state and national leaders (DeKruyf, et. al, 2013).

This current research study took into account the various studies on the discrepancies of school counselor activities to professional standards outlined by the American School Counseling Association. Personal experience and experience of other school counselors in Arkansas was the source of inspiration for the research topic. The aim of this study was to examine the activities of all Arkansas school counselors and compare the activities of school counselors across poverty levels to expose common barriers to direct and indirect services to students and to motivate school officials and political leaders in the state and in the nation to change policy and procedures in school counseling programs to better meet the mental health needs of students of today. Another driving force in this research study was the disparities in the amount of counseling services between poor and affluent students. It was important to examine the differences in services because a large number of students living in poverty who are suffering from mental health disorders. Past research has shown that students living in poverty need more

counseling services but are not receiving them. Therefore, it was imperative to get a better understanding of what services students were getting in each poverty level and why. This could only be done by looking at school counselor activities and by asking school counselors questions about the barriers to providing services to the student populations they serve. If schools are going to provide an equitable education and bridge the gap between affluent students and poor students, then, policy needs to change in order to meet their mental health needs. When students are mentally healthy, they are able to function in the school setting and learn. When students feel successful and feel they belong in school, they are less likely to drop out of school and build a better future for themselves.

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Appendix A  
IRB Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

April 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Angela McCoy Harless  
Kristin Higgins

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 15-03-617

Protocol Title: *A Comparison and Exploration of Arkansas Professional School Counselor Activities across Poverty Level*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/09/2015 Expiration Date: 03/27/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 300 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

## Appendix B

### **Pre-Notice Email**

Dear Arkansas School Counselor:

A few days from now you will receive an email to participate in a brief survey for an important research project designed to advocate for Arkansas professional school counselors. This project is to measure how school counselors actually spend their time and how they would prefer to spend their time.

The purpose for this research project is to show Arkansas school administrators, school officials, and government officials the barriers school counselors face when trying to implement a comprehensive developmental model and to urge officials to make positive changes in policies and practices to allow school counselors to do what they were trained to do ~ facilitate students in their academic, career, and personal/social development.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Angela McCoy Harless, M.S., L.P.C.  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arkansas

## Appendix C

### Survey Cover Letter

Dear Arkansas School Counselor:

I am writing to ask for your assistance in a research project to benefit Arkansas school counselors. Having been a school counselor myself, I understand your time is limited. The brief survey with follow-up questions will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The survey is designed to measure how Arkansas school counselors actually spend their time and how they would prefer to spend their time. I am also interested in your perceptions concerning the support you receive from administrators and other school staff, as well as thoughts concerning the barriers to providing a counseling program based on state and national standards and ASCA's suggested 80% of time to direct and indirect services to students. Your thoughts on the common practice of administrators being directors and supervisors will also be included.

As you know, there is a pervasive problem with the school districts in Arkansas reducing funds and counseling staff. School counseling programs are usually the first programs to go when it comes to budget cuts; leaving school counselors to cover more than one school campus or taking on other roles. This is an unethical and illogical practice, especially when considering the large amount of research supporting the benefits of school counseling programs on student achievement, behavior, and post-secondary opportunities. The goal of this project is to help change this way of thinking and advocate for Arkansas school counselors and their school counseling programs.

It is my hope that you will volunteer to participate in this research project to give a voice to the school counseling professionals in Arkansas. To show my gratitude for your participation, your name will be added to a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate of your choice. Your participation will involve filling out a survey and consent form stating that your information may be used in this study. Some counselors may be asked for a 15-20 minute follow-up telephone interview to provide more in-depth information. This is *optional* and is not a requirement to participate in the survey. All counselors will be given a code to keep your name and information from being identified. All information will be kept confidential and locked in a secure location. Responses will be anonymously reported as a group and not as individuals.

Your results will be provided only to you. The full report of the study will be made available through professional publications and presentations. If you are interested in knowing more about this research study, or if you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at [xxxxx@xxxx](mailto:xxxxx@xxxx).

Thank you for your support,  
Angela McCoy Harless, M.S., L.P.C.  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arkansas

## Appendix D

### **Thank You/Reminder Email**

Dear Arkansas Professional School Counselor:

This past week, you received a survey asking for your expert opinion on your experience as a professional school counselor in Arkansas. You were asked about your experience and thoughts concerning various barriers to providing a comprehensive school counseling program.

I am very grateful for your time and consideration in giving voice to the school counselors in the state of Arkansas. Your valuable input will help to advocate for school counselors and school counseling programs, and bring change to policies and practices in school districts across the state. If you have already completed and returned your survey, I thank you for your prompt reply. If you have not, please do so today. The more participants we have, the more support we have to be change agents for our profession.

If for some reason you did not receive a survey, or if it was misplaced or deleted from your email, please send me an email at xxxxx@xxxx or call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx and I will send another copy to you by postal mail or email, whatever you prefer.

Thank you so much,  
Angela McCoy Harless, M.S., L.P.C.  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arkansas



## Appendix E

### **An Exploration of Arkansas Professional School Counselor Activities in High-Poverty Schools Consent to Participate in a Research Project**

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

You are invited to participate in a research class project about the counselor activities and barriers to providing direct/indirect services to students. You are being asked to participate in this project because you have experience as a professional school counselor in Arkansas.

#### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

*Who is the Principal Researcher?*

Angela Harless, xxxxx@xxxx

*Who is the Dissertation Chair?*

Dr. Kristin K. Higgins, xxxxx@xxxx

*What is the purpose of this research project?*

The purpose of this project is to school counselor perceptions about barriers to providing student services.

*Who will participate in this project?*

There are 30 Arkansas school counselors participating (K-12).

*What am I being asked to do?*

Your participation will require the following:

A survey with follow-up questions and an *optional* telephone or email interview may be requested.

*What are the possible risks or discomforts?*

There are no anticipated risks in participation.

*What are the possible benefits of this project?*

Participation may result in new knowledge about school counselor activities, insight into their own district's school counseling program, and feelings concerning support by administrators and school staff.

*How long will the project last?*

The project will last two to three weeks. There will be a survey with follow-up questions interview (20 minutes) with a possible follow-up interview 5-7 days later.

*Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this research project?*

There will be a drawing for a \$50 gift card of your choice and professional support from the results.

*Will I have to pay for anything?*

No, there will be no cost associated with your participation.

*What are the options if I do not want to be in the project?*

If you do not want to be in this project, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the project. Your job, relationship with your school district, the University of Arkansas, and/or national or state organization will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

*How will my confidentiality be protected?*

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law.

All survey and interview responses and data will be coded (anonymous) and records will be locked in a secure area. Results will be presented at the University of Arkansas and possibly published. Any anecdotes from the interview will be presented as a group result or theme.

*Will I know the results of the project?*

At the conclusion of the project you will receive feedback about the results. You may contact the course instructor, Dr. Kristin Higgins, xxxxx@xxxx or the Principal Researcher, Angela Harless, xxxxx@xxxx. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

*What do I do if I have questions about the research project?*

You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Dissertation Chair as listed below for any questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Angela Harless, M.S., LAC  
111 S. Chappelle  
Ashdown, AR 71822  
xxx-xxx-xxxx  
xxxxx@xxxx

Dr. Kristin K. Higgins, Ph.D.  
Department of Rehabilitation,  
Human Resources, and Communication Disorders  
University of Arkansas  
135 Graduate Education Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
xxx-xxx-xxxx  
xxxxx@xxxx

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose

of the project as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

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Participant Signature

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Researcher Signature

IRB #15-03-617  
Approved: 04/09/2015  
Expires: 03/26/2016

Appendix F

**Interview Request**

Dear Arkansas School Counselor,

You have been nominated by your professional school counseling associates in the state of Arkansas to participate in a brief semi-structured interview. You were chosen by other professionals because of your extensive knowledge and expertise in the field of school counseling. This interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You have the option to either complete the interview via email or by telephone. If you choose to be interviewed by telephone, you may decide what day, time, and telephone number you would prefer. If you would like to assist in bringing deeper meaning to the survey results of this study in which you have participated and want to help your fellow school counselors in Arkansas, please send me a reply with your contact preference and I will get back with you to confirm your interview date/time, and contact preference. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Angela Harless

\* Please copy and paste the following to your reply.

**Name:** >Your Name<

**Three Preferred Dates & Times:** >date&time<; >date&time<; >date&time<

**Contact Preferrance:** (Email or Telephone)

\_\_\_\_ **Email:** >your email address@xxx<

or

\_\_\_\_ **Telephone:** >your-preferred-telephone number<

*Interviews will be recorded for transcription, coded, and destroyed following transcription and review by this researcher for accuracy. Your personal information will not be included after data is transcribed and coded. Information will be kept confidential in the extent allowed by law and University policy.*

Appendix G

**Demographic Questionnaire**

**Counselor Demographics**

*Please answer the following questions about you.*

1) Gender

- M
- F

2) Ethnicity

- African-American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Other

3) Grade Level

- Elementary
- Middle
- Secondary
- K-12

4) Number of years as a school counselor \_\_\_\_\_

5) Counselor certification Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

6) Member of a professional organization Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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7) Participated in leadership/advocacy within the past year? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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8) School counseling director/supervisor:

Administrator \_\_\_\_\_ Certified School Counselor \_\_\_\_\_

Other Counseling Professional \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_

### **School & Student Demographics**

*Please answer the following questions about your school.*

9) What is the percentage of minority students in your school:

0-25% \_\_\_\_\_ 26-50% \_\_\_\_\_ 51% - 75% \_\_\_\_\_ 76 – 100% \_\_\_\_\_

10) Please check the socio-economic status of your student population: (\*Based on AR

Free/Reduced Lunch)

Low-Poverty (less than 50%) \_\_\_\_\_

Mid-Poverty (50%-74%) \_\_\_\_\_

High-Poverty (75% or more) \_\_\_\_\_

11) The student to counselor ratio in your school:

Less than 250 \_\_\_\_\_ 250-450 \_\_\_\_\_ More than 450

12) Please check the location of your school: (\*\*See Map & Definition Below)

City \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

\* Arkansas 2013-14 Free/Reduced Lunch:

<http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/fiscal-and-administrative-services/e-rate/free-and-reduced-school-lunch-data>

\*\**Arkansas Location Code Map:* <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/PDF/states/AR.pdf>

*City* – Urban area inside a City with population: >250,000 to <100,000.

*Suburban* – Urban area outside of a City with population: >250,000 to <100,000.

*Town* – Urban Cluster area that is >35 miles to <10 miles from an Urbanized area.

*Rural* – An area that is <25 to >5 miles from an Urbanized area and >10 miles to <10 miles from and Urban Cluster.

Appendix H

**School Counselor Activity Rating Scale**

Below is a list of functions that may be performed by school counselors.

In Column 1, please write the number that indicates the frequency with which you ACTUALLY perform each function.

In Column 2, please write the number that indicate the frequency with which you would PREFER to perform each function.

*Please place the corresponding number in each box.*

	<b>ACTUAL</b> (Column 1)	<b>PREFER</b> (Column 2)
<i>Ratings:</i>	1 = I <u>never</u> do this ;	I would prefer to <u>never</u> do this
	2 = I <u>rarely</u> do this;	I would prefer to <u>rarely</u> do this
	3 = I <u>occasionally</u> do this;	I would prefer to <u>occasionally</u> do this
	4 = I <u>frequently</u> do this;	I would prefer to <u>frequently</u> do this
	5 = I <u>routinely</u> do this;	I would prefer to <u>routinely</u> do this

1= never    2= rarely    3= occasionally 4= frequently    5= routinely	ACTUAL	PREFER
<i>Counseling Activities</i>		
<b>1. Counsel with students regarding personal/family concerns</b>		
<b>2. Counsel with students regarding school behavior</b>		
<b>3. Counsel students regarding crisis/emergency issues</b>		
<b>4. Counsel students regarding academic issues</b>		
<b>5. Counsel with students regarding relationships (e.g., family, friends, romantic)</b>		
<b>6. Provide small group counseling addressing relationship/social issues</b>		
<b>7. Provide small group counseling for academic issues</b>		
<b>8. Conduct small groups regarding family/personal issues (e.g., divorce, death)</b>		
<b>9. Conduct small group counseling for students regarding substance abuse issues (own use or family/friend use)</b>		
<b>10. Coordinate referrals for students and/or families to community or education professionals (e.g., mental health, speech pathology, medical assessment)</b>		
<b>11. Follow-up on individual and group counseling participants</b>		

<i>Consultation Activities</i>		
<b>12. Consult with school staff concerning student behavior</b>		
<b>13. Conduct or coordinate teacher in-service programs</b>		
<b>14. Consult with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues</b>		
<b>15. Conduct or coordinate parent education classes or workshops</b>		
<b>16. Provide consultation for teachers regarding classroom management</b>		
<b>17. Consult with community and school agencies concerning individual students</b>		
<b>18. Assist in identifying exceptional children (special education)</b>		
<b>19. Participate in team/grade level/ subject team meetings</b>		
<b>20. Provide consultation for administrators (regarding school policy, programs, staff and/or students)</b>		
<i>Curriculum Activities</i>		
<b>21. Conduct classroom activities to introduce yourself and explain the counseling program to all students</b>		
<b>22. Conduct classroom lessons addressing career development and the world of work</b>		
<b>23. Conduct classroom lessons on various personal and/or social traits (e.g., responsibility, respect, etc.)</b>		
<b>24. Conduct classroom lessons on relating to others (family, friends)</b>		
<b>25. Conduct classroom lessons on personal growth and development issues</b>		
<b>26. Conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution</b>		
<b>27. Conduct classroom lessons regarding substance abuse</b>		
<b>28. Conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues</b>		
<b>29. Coordinate special events and programs for school around academic, career, or personal/social issues (e.g., career day, drug awareness week, test prep)</b>		
<i>Coordination Activities</i>		
<b>30. Coordinate and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program</b>		
<b>31. Inform parents about the role, training, program, and interventions of a school counselor within the</b>		



<b>context of your school</b>		
<b>32. Coordinate school-wide response for crisis management and intervention</b>		
<b>33. Inform teachers/administrators about the role, training, program, and interventions of a school counselor within the context of your school.</b>		
<b>34. Keep of track of how time is being spent on the functions that you perform</b>		
<b>35. Attend professional development activities (e.g., state conferences, local in-services)</b>		
<b>36. Coordinate with an advisory team to analyze and respond to school counseling program needs</b>		
<b>37. Coordinate a peer facilitation/peer mediation program</b>		
<b>38. Formally evaluate student progress as a result of participation in individual/group counseling from student, teacher and/or parent perspectives.</b>		
<b>39. Conduct needs assessments and counseling program evaluations from parents, faculty and/or students</b>		
<b>40. Coordinate orientation process/activities for students</b>		
<i>“Other” Activities</i>		
<b>41. Participate on committees within the school</b>		
<b>42. Coordinate the standardized testing program</b>		
<b>43. Organize outreach to low-income families (i.e., Thanksgiving dinners, Holiday families, weekly snack packs)</b>		
<b>44. Enroll students in and/or withdraw students from school</b>		
<b>45. Respond to health issues (e.g., check for lice, eye screening)</b>		
<b>46. Handle discipline of students</b>		
<b>47. Substitute teach and/or cover classes for teachers at your school</b>		
<b>48. Maintain &amp; complete educational records/reports (cumulative files, test scores, attendance reports, drop-out reports, etc.)</b>		
<b>49. Perform hall, bus, cafeteria duty &amp; other monitoring</b>		
<b>50. Schedule students for classes</b>		
<b>51. Calculate GPAs and/or print out grade reports</b>		
<b>52. Enter student data into school management system</b>		
<b>53. Participate in IEP &amp; 504 paperwork and meetings</b>		

<b>54. Attend school functions (e.g., ballgames, special events, performances, award ceremonies, field trips)</b>		
<b>55. Assist and/or perform administrative duties</b>		

\* Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner ~ Janna L. Scarborough

\* Adaptions were made to the subscale labeled "other" by this researcher.

Scarborough, J. L. (2005). The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale: An Instrument for Gathering Process Data. *Professional School Counseling, 8(3)*, 274-283.

Appendix I

**Follow-up Questionnaire**

*Please answer the following questions. Explanations are encouraged but not required.*

- 1) Do you spend the ASCA suggested 80% of your time to direct/indirect services for students? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what is your estimated percent of time devoted to these services? \_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Do you spend more than 50% of your time on non-counseling duties?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

What is your estimated time spent on non-counseling duties? \_\_\_\_\_%

- 3) What services do you feel are most needed in your school?

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- 4) Do you feel supported by the school faculty, staff, administrators, and school board?  
Most of the time \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely \_\_\_\_\_

Explain.

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- 5) Do you have a collaborative relationship with your principal? In other words, does your principal value your opinion and act on it as well?

Most of the time \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely \_\_\_\_\_

Explain (Optional).

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6) Do you feel your principal has faith in your knowledge and skills in using basic therapeutic techniques? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

Give an example that supports this view (Optional).

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7) Have you ever informed your principal or other school officials about the role of the school counselor based on the ASCA National Model? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

8) Were any changes made as a result? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

Example (Optional).

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9) Have you ever asked your director or principal to reduce non-counseling duties in order to perform more appropriate counseling activities? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

10) Were any changes made as a result? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

Provide an example.

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11) Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone or email interview to share your own unique experience in working with low, mid, and high-poverty student populations?

If so, please provide a contact number and the best time to reach you.

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12) Please name some professional school counselors you believe would be willing and able to provide in-depth knowledge about issues preventing Arkansas school counselors from

performing preferred activities in low, mid, and high-poverty schools. Please provide contact information for each.

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## Appendix J

### Semi-structured Interview

#### Introduction

*“Hello, I’m Angela Harless from the University of Arkansas. I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me about your experience as a school counselor. Your information will help bring insight and richness to the research results. All information will be kept confidential and kept in a locked and secure area. No comments that could identify you will be used in the dissertation or presentation. There will be six brief questions but some additional questions may be asked for clarification or understanding. Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?” Alright, I would first like to ask you a few questions to get to know you better, then we’ll start the interview questions.”*

#### Interview Questions

- “What are the most common barriers to providing direct/indirect services for students?”
- “What do you think should happen to alleviate this problem?”
- “What are your thoughts about the common practice of using principals as director/supervisors over school counseling programs rather than a certified school counselors or licensed mental health counselors?”
- “Do you have a district certified school counselor as director? If not, how would you feel about having a director of counseling services for the district?”
- “Do you think school counseling programs should be a separate entity apart from administrative control with various counselors who are in charge of curriculum, coordination, consultation, and counseling?”
- “How would you feel about having LPCs as permanent on-site therapeutic counselors as part of this type of program?”

*“We are about out of time. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss that we may not have covered?” I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview with me. As I mentioned earlier, the results will be shared with you to check for accuracy and after the study is completed. I hope this experience was as rewarding for you as it was for me. I believe the results of this study will be helpful for the school counseling profession, administrators, counselor educators, school officials, and government officials. Thank you and have a good day.”*