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## Exploring How Counselor Educators Define, Assess, and Manage Student Disposition Throughout the Gatekeeping Process

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Exploring How Counselor Educators Define, Assess, and Manage Student Disposition  
Throughout the Gatekeeping Process

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**

Professional disposition plays an important role in counselor-in-training (CIT) development. Disposition is defined as the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors that contribute to a becoming a professional (Spurgeon et al., 2012). In addition, disposition is an attribute that must be evaluated and remediated as a part of accreditation through the council for accreditation of counseling and related educational programs (CACREP). Despite, the importance of disposition in CIT development and the requirement from CACREP, there are several difficulties related disposition. First, there is not a universally accepted definition for disposition in counselor education. In addition, there are few psychometrically tested dispositions assessments available for formal evaluation. Lastly, remediation and gatekeeping of disposition is required, but there are no clear guidelines on how to manage disposition.

The purpose of this study was to explore how counselor educators define, assess, and manage CIT disposition throughout the gatekeeping process. Seventeen counselor educators from CACREP accredited programs participated. A constructivist grounded theory was conducted to find emergent themes of counselor educators experiences of defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Findings revealed that counselor educators have a working definition for disposition, assess disposition regularly, and manage disposition as needed. In addition, participants revealed that they learned how to define, assess, and manage disposition from education and employment. Lastly, participants revealed supports and barriers to defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Fellow faculty members and administration can be both a support and barrier and the complex nature of disposition was found to be a barrier. The findings suggest there is room for continued research, regarding how counselor educators define, assess,

and manage disposition. Implications and recommendations for counselor educators and counseling programs are included.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Disposition within the field of counselor education plays a key role in the development of competent counselors. Counseling students with the appropriate dispositional qualities should be open to new learning, able to receive feedback, are responsible, and hold values that are consistent with the counseling field (Spurgeon et al., 2012). Starting in 2016, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP.org) updated counseling training standards to “require assessment of student dispositions as a necessary component of program and student evaluation” (Garner et al., 2016, p. 1). Assessing a counselor-in-training (CIT) for certain dispositional qualities is an important change to counselor education as students are assessed beyond knowledge and counseling ability. The addition of disposition makes the assessment of counselors-in-training more holistic, which can assist with admissions decisions, as well as evaluating and developing CIT (Spurgeon et al., 2012). For example, assessing professional disposition moves beyond assessing counseling skills and academic fitness and ensures that CIT have the dispositional qualities required to be a successful counselor (Spurgeon et al., 2012). Not assessing for appropriate dispositional qualities could lead to gateslipping and potentially result in a graduate providing unethical or even harmful counseling services (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014).

### **Disposition**

Disposition is difficult to define and there are currently many working definitions, but for the purposes of this study the definition posited by Spurgeon et al. (2012) will be adopted. Spurgeon et al. (2012) defined disposition as the “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (p. 97). Based on this adopted definition, there are three domains that frame disposition, which are academic, personal, and

professional (Garner et al., 2016). Some examples of disposition as it relates to academic disposition are openness and conscientiousness (Garner et al., 2016). For example, CIT disposition in these areas would consist of a CIT being responsible to show up on time to class and turn in assignments on time. In addition, a CIT would be open to new learning and ideas in the classroom. Overall, the commitment to learning and open stance are dispositional qualities that contribute to mastery of counseling material in the classroom.

Moving on, the professional domain requires a CIT to have interpersonal skills, emotional stability, ethical behavior, coping/self-care, and cultural sensitivity (Garner et al., 2016). For example, CIT should be warm and accepting to others, while maintaining personal health when faced with professional difficulties. Lastly, the personal domain requires a CIT to have moral reasoning, self-awareness, and cooperativeness (Garner et al., 2016). A CIT would display an appropriate personal disposition by knowing when to seek feedback and make the needed adjustments. In the end, these domains describe a CIT who is eager and able to learn while attending to the self and others. These qualities are foundational in the development of CIT (Garner et al., 2020; Spurgeon et al., 2012).

The dispositional qualities previously listed contribute to becoming an effective counselor. A CIT with an appropriate disposition would be eager to learn and open to learning long after the education and licensing phases of counseling are completed. In addition, a CIT would seek personal growth and have the ability to be self-aware and other-aware. A CIT should carry certain beliefs about people into the counseling room to promote safety and openness during the counseling process (Miller et al., 2020). Lastly, a counselor must be able to maintain the logistical responsibilities that come with counseling, which includes being on time for sessions, completing treatment plans, and progress notes (Garner et al., 2016). These

dispositional qualities that make up a professional counselor are expressed and evident as CIT interact and behave throughout a program of study. The goal of counselor educators is to assess disposition early and often to ensure that CIT will be a fit in the counseling field (CACREP, 2016; Garner et al., 2016; Spurgeon et al., 2012). The need for CIT to possess specific dispositional qualities leads to the important question of how to assess and manage the disposition of CIT, which leads to the gatekeeper role of counselor educators.

### **Gatekeeping Defined**

To place disposition within counselor education, an understanding of gatekeeping must be established. Gatekeeping is an ethical standard set by the American Counseling Association (ACA) and CACREP. According to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) “Counselor educators, through ongoing evaluation, are aware of and address the inability of some students to achieve counseling competencies” (p. 15). In addition, the CACREP (2016) standards require that “Counselor education programs have and follow a policy for student retention, remediation, and dismissal from the program consistent with institutional due process policies and with the counseling profession’s ethical codes and standards of practice” (p. 5). The ethical responsibility and burden of gatekeeping is in place to protect consumers of counseling, uphold the integrity of the counseling field, and promote student growth. In the end, it is the responsibility for the counselor educator to produce competent counselors to ensure that community members are served ethically and effectively.

There are several models and definitions for gatekeeping as some definitions of gatekeeping discuss suitability for the counseling field, while others focus on the remedial nature of gatekeeping. For example, Freeman et al. (2016) defined gatekeeping “as an ongoing process used by counselor educators to intercede when counseling students are making insufficient

progress toward acquiring the knowledge, skill, and dispositional competence necessary to effectively practice counseling” (p. 29). The definition above will be adopted for the purposes of this study. This definition fits well with the ACA and CACREP mandates for gatekeeping and notes the ongoing nature of the process which will be discussed next.

### **Gatekeeping Described**

Counselor educators will engage in the gatekeeper role throughout a CIT education to encourage growth and pause a program of study if they are lacking competency in a specific area. As noted earlier, gatekeeping is mandated but the specific process and techniques and interventions used in gatekeeping are not well defined (McCaughan et al., 2015). With this mind, this section includes reasons for gatekeeping and one proposed literature-based method for navigating the gatekeeping process.

### **Reasons for Gatekeeping**

While there is not a clear gatekeeping process in place for the field, the main reason for gatekeeping is a lack of professional competence by CIT. Common areas that are assessed for competency during gatekeeping include academic fitness, counseling skills, and disposition. According to Freeman et al. (2016) a lack of professional competence consists of, but is not limited to “developmental issues, inadequacy in counselor training, insufficient supervision, deficits in moral character, or dispositional factors” (p. 28). Another perspective provided by Swank et al. (2014) defines deficiencies as qualities that inhibit professional functioning and include non-academic and academic factors. Academic factors are a student's potential to perform scholastically and are measured by grade point average (GPA) and test scores (Swank et al., 2014). Non-academic factors include interpersonal interaction style, which is normally assessed during the admission interview (Swank et al., 2014). For example, gatekeeping would

be required if a CIT failed to turn in assignments, did not attend class or became defensive when receiving feedback. These examples would be a lack of interpersonal skill and academic success and likely lead to remediation, which is a phase in gatekeeping. Overall, if CIT are lacking competency in any of the previously listed definitions or areas they would be remediated and given the chance to grow. If growth does not occur the CIT may be dismissed from a program.

### **Gatekeeping Applied**

The ethical burden of gatekeeping rests on the educating institution which requires a clear and effective way to assess the professional competency (Rapp, et al., 2018). One way to manage gatekeeping is presented by Ziomek-Daigle et al. (2010) in the form of four phases. The four phases consist of pre-admission, post-admission, remediation plan, and remediation outcome. While all CIT go through the pre and post admission process, not all CIT will go through the remediation phases. Each phase will be briefly explored.

#### **Pre-admission**

Starting the gatekeeping process at admissions allows counselor educators to screen out applicants who are not a suitable fit in the field (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). In addition, gatekeeping expectations are established at admissions which sets a tone moving forward in a counseling program. Garner et al. (2016) noted that the ACA code of ethics requires that counseling programs are required to disclose “levels of competency, appraisal methods, and timing for both learning and clinical competency” at admissions (p. 2). Competency standards are set by the university and/or an accrediting counseling organization and often measured by GPA, entrance exams, applicant interviews, reference letters, and written statements (Miller et al., 2020). This level of transparency with students sets expectations and ensures fairness (Garner et al., 2016). According to Foster and McAdams (2009), a lack of transparency at the outset of

the program can lead to faculty hesitancy in addressing professional performance issues during the post-admission phase.

### **Post-Admission**

After admission, CIT are continually assessed for professional behaviors, professional counseling skills, and professional dispositions throughout the span of the counseling program. Continued evaluation of CIT is important throughout the program to ensure that expected standards are met (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). For example, students might be provisionally accepted into a program until a certain number of credit hours are completed and successfully passed with a high enough GPA. The provisional status of acceptance is one of several gates that the CIT will face to continue through the program. Another common gate many programs utilize is to ensure that students are ready for the practicum phase of training. This gate can consist of an application and interview process that must be completed before seeing clients for the first time. These gates will ensure counselors are prepared to be professionals in the field, while protecting the integrity of the field and future clients. The post-admission phase is the longest phase of gatekeeping and can end with graduation as long as remediation is not necessary.

### **Remediation Plan and Outcome**

If CIT lack competency during the post admission phases, the remediation phase is triggered. The goal of remediation is to manage professional competency issues prior to graduation (Kaslow et al, 2007). During this phase the student would be notified of the lack of competency and a remediation plan would be set out by faculty to intervene in the problem area to allow for the CIT to grow. While setting a remediation plan, faculty will provide a timeline and a standard for successful completion of the plan. During the remediation plan the CIT has

the responsibility to engage in the process to grow and show change. In the end, if the CIT shows growth and completes the remediation plan successfully they will be allowed to continue their program of study (Ziomek-Diagle & Christensen, 2010). On the other hand, if a CIT is unable to successfully complete the remediation plan it may result in dismissal from the institution (Ziomek-Diagle & Christensen, 2010).

### **Problem of the Study**

The central problem of this study is the lack of a clear definition, assessment, and way to manage disposition within the gatekeeping process. There are several layers and complexities to this problem that will be explored in this section. First, there is not a clear definition, assessment, and way to manage CIT disposition within the gatekeeping process. Second, the complex nature of gatekeeping can be stressful and the lack of a clear model could potentially add more stress to counselor educators. Lastly, the combination of the stressful nature of gatekeeping and lack of understanding of disposition within the gatekeeping process can lead to *gateslipping*.

### **Disposition**

When assessing clinical, academic, and dispositional fitness in the counseling field, the dispositional domain is the most difficult to measure (Rapp et al., 2018). In turn, it is likely that a major reason gateslipping occurs is the lack of understanding around professional disposition (Rapp et al., 2018; Swank et al., 2014). Currently, there is not one uniform way to define, assess, and manage disposition in counselor education (Miller et al., 2020). Rapp et al. (2018) stated that disposition is one of the most difficult attributes to assess due to a lack of accurate assessments. Not only is disposition one of the hardest attributes to measure, there is little support from formal assessments as there are few that exist and those that do exist have limited information on reliability and validation (Garner et al., 2016). Lambie et al. (2018) revealed that

there is currently only one empirically tested assessment that comprehensively accounts for counseling skills, professional disposition, and professional behaviors. The lack of dispositional assessments leaves faculty to assess disposition in subjective ways that can negatively influence the gatekeeping process (Lambie et. al., 2018). For example, “proxy measures of disposition” such as reference letters, applicant interviews, and professional statements are used during the admissions process (Miller et al., 2020). Miller, et al, (2020) state that this way of assessing disposition is subjective as there is little evidence of validity or reliability.

To further enhance this argument Rapp et al. (2018) “found that although counselor educators feel comfortable in evaluating academic and clinical competencies, they often experience difficulty evaluating dispositional competencies that are nebulously and abstractly defined” (p. 191). Essentially, the academic factors that relate to gatekeeping are clear and measurable. For example, grade point average is a measure of a student’s academic fitness as they are required to participate in class and complete assignments and assessments that prove they have retained the required counseling knowledge. On the other hand, disposition has the most variability and subjectivity compared to academic and clinical competencies when faculty members were asked to assess CIT (Lambie et. al., 2018). Due to the abstract nature of disposition, faculty members desire more assessments for the interview portion of the admissions process, which centers around assessing disposition (Swank et al., 2014). A thorough understanding and ability to measure disposition is needed for the counselor education field. In the end, the complicated nature of disposition makes the gatekeeping process more difficult for counselor educators and can lead to instances of gateslipping during the gatekeeping process (Swank et al., 2014).

## **Gatekeeping**

The gatekeeping process can be very complex and demanding, which has been known to leave counselor educators emotionally drained (Rapp et al., 2018). In addition, the gatekeeping process can lead to conflict and confrontations with students, which can leave counselor educators with the fear of legal reprisals (Rapp et al., 2018). Overall, the gatekeeping process requires time and energy which can make the process difficult.

Gatekeeping faces a similar problem compared to disposition as gatekeeping is required, but no universally agreed upon guidelines have been established for the field (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Due to complexity of gatekeeping and the lack of clear guidelines to defining the process can lead to faculty avoiding student evaluations (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). For example, during the admissions gate, each institution must define what personal characteristics they are looking for in a potential CIT as there is no clear definition given (McCaughan et al., 2015). The lack of direction on process can create inconsistency from program to program. Overall, there is a need for clarity in all phases of gatekeeping practices to assist in managing CIT impairment (Rapp et al., 2018).

## **Gateslipping**

While the importance of gatekeeping has been established there are times when students who need remediation are allowed to continue on without help, this is known as *gateslipping*. According to Rapp et al. (2018) *gateslipping* occurs when, “evaluators who question a counselor in training’s clinical, academic, and dispositional fitness but fail to intervene with problematic behavior [and] run the risk of endorsing a student who is not ready for the profession” (p. 191). Due to the stressful nature of gatekeeping, gateslipping often occurs to avoid recrimination, conflict and even lawsuits” (Olson et al., 2016). In addition, Olson, et al. (2016) attributed

gateslipping to the lack of evidence through assessments and lack of department policy and procedure to address problems of professional competency. It can be suggested that with a fear of conflict and lack of adequate assessments to accurately assess CIT, gateslipping can occur. In the end, gateslipping is concerning for the counseling field and creates the need for investigation and response from the counselor education field.

The need for effective gatekeeping is evident as Swank and Smith-Adcock (2014) found an estimated “10% of all students in counseling programs” have deficiencies before starting in a counseling program (p. 48). In turn, faculty estimate that half of the “impaired” students allowed into counseling programs “continue through programs unremediated” (McCaughan & Hill, 2014, p. 29). Continuing on, Olson, et al. (2016) found “that 58% of the counseling faculty reported that they...have passed a student in one of [their] courses whom [they] deem to unsuitable for the counseling field” (p. 308). These examples of gateslipping warrant concern and the need for changes in assessing students who lack professional counseling competencies.

Continuing on, the future impact of allowing CIT to gateslip negatively impacts the professional counseling field and clients. For example, Olson, et al. (2016) surveyed 213 mental health professionals (MHP) and found that a majority of MHPs “are aware of colleagues with problems of professional competency... [and they are] disrupting the work environment and adversely affecting client care” (p. 308). The problematic students who were allowed to continue through counselor education programs without remediation are now out in the field providing subpar services. The negative effect on future clients and the counseling field require changes in counselor education. It is clear that the gatekeeper role needs more support to effectively uphold counseling standards.

## **Research Questions**

The primary research question of this constructivist GT study is:

1. How do counselor educators from CACREP accredited programs define, assess, and manage CIT disposition within the gatekeeping role and process of counselor education?

Sub-questions include:

- A. How do counselor educators define, assess, and manage disposition at each phase of gatekeeping?
- B. How do counselor educators manage both unprofessional and professional CIT dispositions?
- C. What factors do counselor educators describe as barriers and supports to defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition?

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to better understand how counselor educators are working with disposition through the gatekeeping process. More specifically, how are counselor educators defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition during the gatekeeping process. As previously mentioned, the gatekeeper role occurs throughout a CIT program of study. Therefore, counselor educators are faced with assessing and managing disposition over an extended period of time. Yet disposition is difficult to define, measure, and manage. This exploration will fill in gaps surrounding how counselor educators are managing CIT disposition. For example, understanding how counselor educators are defining and assessing disposition during the gatekeeping process will help to develop a unified definition, which can contribute to creating a disposition assessment. In addition, learning how counselor educators manage disposition can give guidance on how to come up with systemic ways to promote growth in CIT. Overall, the greater clarity of

disposition will give counselor educators much needed information to define, assess, and manage this important characteristic.

### **Researcher Position Within the Study**

The present study sought to examine a phenomenon that I have personally and professionally experienced. Reflexivity acknowledges the researchers “subjectivity and involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). In turn, the researchers need to be “reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 27). This process of being reflexive can ensure that the researcher biases do not determine the results, despite the influence of researcher preconceptions (Charmaz, 2014). The following section addresses reflexivity regarding the researchers educational and professional experience.

I am a 31-year-old who identifies as male and Hispanic. I have one-year experience as a counselor educator with a title of instructor of counseling. I have 5 years of counseling experience and 3 years of clinical supervision experience. I am a fully licensed counselor and continue to practice. I am a qualified and trained supervisor, but I am not yet a licensed clinical supervisor. My main assumption is that disposition is difficult to understand and manage as a counselor educator. In addition, I believe that researching disposition will allow for the counseling field to better define, assess, and manage disposition.

Continuing on, I have been through the gatekeeping process as a CIT and as a supervisor. As a student, I did not understand what gatekeeping was or that my disposition was being assessed to determine if I would pass through gates at the time. As a supervisor, I was trained and gained experience through a CACREP accredited counselor education and supervision program. In addition, I have on the job experience as a supervisor and counselor

educator. I have delivered supervision to over 40 CIT over the last two years. I have participated directly in the gatekeeping process while delivering course work, supervision, and remediation.

I have personally struggled with formally assessing CIT disposition during the gatekeeping process. From my perspective, disposition is complex and hard to define, assess, and manage. Informally, it seems obvious when a student is displaying professional dispositions as they are open to learning/feedback, collaborative, respectful towards others and self-aware. On the other hand, unprofessional disposition also seems obvious as a student lacks self-awareness and is defensive and not open to feedback. Yet, to formally operationalize and define disposition was difficult which made the gatekeeping process feel subjective from the counselor educator's perspective. Without a clear definition and assessment providing clear feedback to CIT and colleagues, I found a desire to focus on domains I could clearly measure such as counseling skills. While I did not avoid disposition, despite my desire, when faced with several CITs that lacked professional disposition the process became difficult and overwhelming. The CIT disagreed with my feedback which created conflict and tension during the supervision process.

These difficult experiences and knowledge of literature have led to the formation of several assumptions about disposition as it relates to gatekeeping. Due to the evaluative role of counselor educators and developmental level of supervisees, the anxiety of CIT is high which can lead to uncooperative behaviors and even false claims about the supervisor. On the other hand, CIT with a professional disposition would respond well and be curious to understand and eager to grow. Another assumption gained is that the lack of clear guidelines to define, assess, and manage disposition makes gatekeeping difficult. In turn, I believe that having clarity on disposition and how it influences gatekeeping will enhance the gatekeeper role and promote CIT growth and develop competent counselors.

While my experience and opinions may not be shared by others I will attempt to withhold my assumptions to reduce researcher bias. Limiting my assumptions while collecting and analyzing data will ensure that my assumptions are not imposed on participants. Procedures were put in place to increase the trustworthiness of this study, which will be discussed in full in chapter III. Procedures include a memo writing, the use of an external auditor, member checks, and frequent debriefing.

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions were made by the researcher throughout the study. First, the methodology utilized and described in the following chapters provides a trustworthy and robust study. Second, the researcher assumes that the participants will be honest and thorough during data collection. Lastly, the researcher assumes that a greater understanding of disposition as it relates to counselor education and gatekeeping will be useful for the counseling field as this information will be useful for counselor educators and in turn CIT.

### **Limitations**

There are several potential limitations present in the study which will briefly be discussed in this section. The first limitation is a lack of research surrounding disposition as it relates to creating a universal definition, assessment, and management process. Another limitation that could influence the research findings is my personal biases related to the topic. This is being managed through methodological processes which will be discussed in chapter III. Another limitation is participants could be collected from the same regional location, as many CACREP accredited counseling programs are located in the southern United States. Lastly, all interviews will be limited to an online format due for safety due to COVID-19.

## **Delimitations**

A delimitation of the study is the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants as the sample focuses on CACREP accredited counselor educators only. This delimitation was set in place because of CACREP standards to assess and manage professional disposition. It is likely that CACREP counselor educators will be familiar with disposition due to current standards. An additional delimitation would be the interview protocol. The interview protocol is set to be broad and not lead participants. Lastly, the methodological framework and philosophy is a delimitation as the purpose of the study is to explore the unique perspectives of counselor educators.

## **Summary**

Disposition is an important attribute in the field of counselor education. Disposition is required to be assessed during gatekeeping by faculty to ensure that CIT are fit for the counseling field. Disposition is made up of the behaviors and values that contribute to becoming a professional counselor. Currently, disposition is lacking formal assessments which makes gatekeeping more difficult. In the end, this study aims to gain an understanding of how faculty members are defining, assessing, and managing disposition during the gatekeeping process.

## **Definition of Terms**

Included in this section are definitions of key terms used throughout the study to mitigate any potential confusion. The following definitions were adopted for the purpose of this study. Other terms used throughout the literature will be defined as they are introduced.

1. *Disposition*: The “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 97).
2. *Gatekeeping*: The CACREP (2016) standards define gatekeeping as “The ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to monitor and evaluate an

individual's knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required by competent professional counselors and to remediate or prevent those that are lacking in professional competence from the becoming counselors" (p. 45).

3. *Gateslipping*: According to Rapp et al. (2018) gateslipping occurs when, "evaluators who question a counselor in training's clinical, academic, and dispositional fitness but fail to intervene with problematic behavior [and] run the risk of endorsing a student who is not ready for the profession" (p. 191).

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter consists of literature related to disposition and gatekeeping. More specifically, I explored how disposition is defined, assessed, and managed during the gatekeeping process. In addition, gatekeeping is defined and the process is explored to understand how counselor educators manage disposition. This review provides a look at the importance and difficulty of assessing disposition within the gatekeeper role.

### **Disposition**

Disposition is an important counselor attribute that plays a key role in the development of competent counselors (Spurgeon et al., 2012). CACREP (2016) requires that students be assessed throughout a counseling program. More specifically, the assessment of disposition should consist of identifying professional dispositions, measured on multiple occasions over time, and the data should be reviewed (CACREP, 2016). In addition, the ACA (2014) code of ethics requires counselor educators and CIT to be aware of interpersonal impairments that could negatively influence the counselor relationship or process. The requirement of identifying and assessing an appropriate disposition is vital to developing counselor competency (Miller et al., 2020). Disposition has been shown to be relevant to “clinical effectiveness, competence, and mastery” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 118). The following sections will explore several approaches to defining and assessing disposition.

### **Disposition Defined**

Currently, there is not one definition of disposition that is accepted in counselor education (Miller et al., 2020). Despite this lack of definition, there is consensus that disposition is a critical component to counselor development (Miller et al., 2020). According to Miller; et al. (2020) there are a “broad range of definitions, skills sets, and competencies” (p. 117) related to

disposition across many professions including counseling, psychology, school psychology, and social work (p. 117). Miller et al. (2020) noted that attempts to define disposition revolve around the characteristics required to obtain counseling mastery and effectiveness. For example, the field of education defines teacher disposition as the “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 97). In addition, school psychologists suggest the following traits be present in students before graduation, a “respect for human diversity, communication skills, effective interpersonal relational, ethical responsibility, adaptability, initiative, and dependability” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 98). Lastly, social work requires certain values to be present in students which are “service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, human rights, and scientific inquiry” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 98).

Continuing on, counselor education offers several definitions of disposition. CACREP (2016) defines disposition as “the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors that influence the counselor’s professional growth and interactions with clients and colleagues” (Glossary). Another definition proposed by Miller et al. (2020) in an attempt to unify the field is as follows:

Counselor dispositions are aspects of personal and professional functioning that subsume intellectual factors, personality characteristics, relational proficiencies, and values orientations accounted for by nine correlated, but independent, factors: cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal, personal wellness, personal–professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness, self-control, and suitability for the profession. Counselor dispositions influence and are influenced by cognitive, affective, and behavioral development in a manner consistent with the advancement of clinical proficiency (p. 127).

Miller’s et al. (2020) definition accounts for professional behaviors and innate personality traits.

Another attempt to define and operationalize disposition was presented by Spurgeon et al. (2012) who found five core dispositions. The five dispositions considered necessary for CIT growth are commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness (CORIS). A further description of CORIS includes that CIT are invested in learning, open to ideas and change, able to honor diversity, take personal responsibility and grasp an understanding of the self (Spurgeon et al., 2012).

Based on all of these definitions, disposition consists of both the inner world and outer expressions of CIT. The inner beliefs and values seem to be linked to the outward behavior that is displayed. In turn, a CIT should maintain certain internal qualities that contribute to outward behaviors that result in growth, learning, and professionalism. Based on current literature there are many ways to define and categorize disposition. The following section will explore counselor education research that defines and assesses disposition.

### **Disposition Research**

In the past, personality tests such the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory or the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire were used to assess disposition (Garner et al., 2020; Garner et al., 2016). This approach was in conflict with the Americans with Disabilities Act which has led to the use of rating scales and rubrics to measure disposition (Garner et al., 2020; Garner et al., 2016). The rubric style of assessment is preferred as it provides clarity to CIT and allows for counselor educators to give feedback to promote growth (Garner et al., 2020; Panadero et al., 2013). The shift from personality tests to formal assessments has led to the development of dispositional assessments.

There are a few CIT disposition assessments and what does exist has little information on reliability and validity (Garner et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2020). For example, there are several

assessments that measure disposition but lack psychometric testing. Several disposition assessments that lack psychometric testing include the Counselor Characteristics Inventory, the Professional Performance Fitness Evaluation, and the 5-Point Personal Characteristics Evaluation Form (Miller et al., 2020). Continuing on, Spurgeon et al. (2012) conducted a case study and found five core dispositions which are commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness (CORIS). CORIS was developed through focus groups with faculty members in an attempt to operationalize disposition (Spurgeon et al., 2012). The previously listed work is helpful to operationalize disposition, but lacks psychometrically tested assessments to measure disposition.

Dispositional assessments that include psychometric testing include the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (PDCA) developed by Garner et al. (2016), the Counseling Competencies Scale (CCS) developed by Swank et al. (2012), and the Counselor Personality Assessment (CPA) developed by Halinski (2010). For the purposes of this study the PDCA and CCS will be further explored in the following section. The CPA will not be explored as it focuses on personality, which conflicts with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### **Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (PDCA)**

The PDCA is a rubric style assessment that is designed to only measure the disposition of CIT. The PDCA is used to assist faculty in assessing disposition at admission and throughout a CIT program of study. The PDCA adopted Spurgeon et al. (2012) disposition definition as the “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (Garner et al., 2016, p. 2). With this definition in mind, Garner et al. (2016) describes three domains that encompass disposition which are academic, professional, and personal. Within these three domains, the PDCA has 10 characteristics which are

conscientiousness, coping and self-care, openness, cooperativeness, moral reasoning, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, emotional stability, and ethical behavior (Freeman et al., 2017).

### ***Academic Domain***

The academic domain consists of openness and conscientiousness (Freeman et al., 2017). Conscientiousness is described as being responsible, self-motivated, and diligent (Freeman et al., 2017). Openness is operationalized as having passion for learning and remaining curious in the classroom and the field (Freeman et al., 2017). Academics are a vital part of disposition as the ability to engage with counseling material is the foundation for future practice and future growth.

### ***Professional Domain***

The professional domain consists of interpersonal skills, emotional stability, ethical behavior, coping and self-care, and cultural sensitivity. Interpersonal skills are the ability to be warm, agreeable, genuine, and accepting of emotions (Freeman et al., 2017). Emotional stability is managing difficult situations with control (Freeman et al., 2017). Coping and self-care show an ability to be able to manage burnout and addiction (Freeman et al., 2017). Cultural sensitivity is the awareness and acceptance of other cultures in a professional manner. Lastly, ethical behavior is acting in accordance with the counselor identity by following “legal, ethical and professional” guidelines (Freeman et al., 2017).

### ***Personal Domain***

The personal domain consists of moral reasoning, self-awareness, and cooperativeness. Moral reasoning is displayed through honesty, integrity, and maintaining professional values and standards (Freeman et al., 2017). Self-awareness is the “capacity for intrapersonal depth, evidenced by openness, self-understanding, non-defensiveness, and consistent commitment to

personal growth” (Freeman et al., 2017, p. 5). Lastly, cooperativeness reflects agreeableness in students and allows for faculty to measure behaviors that reflect aggressiveness or non-compliance (Freeman et al., 2017).

### ***Psychometrics of PDCA***

The PDCA is a rubric designed assessment used to aid counselor educators evaluate disposition at admissions, during coursework, and during the internship phase of learning (Garner et al., 2016). A rubric approach was chosen for the assessment to promote clarity of each disposition domain and the potential to increase standardization between raters (Garner et al., 2016). The PDCA is designed only to measure disposition and is intended to be integrated across curriculum in a counseling program (Garner et al., 2016).

The three domains measured on the PDCA are academic, professional, and personal. These three domains were split into nine items in the first version of the PDCA which are conscientiousness, critical thinking, appreciation of learning, interpersonal skills, self-regulation, professionalism, self-awareness, character, and spirituality (Garner et al., 2016). The revised version of the PDCA-R now consists of the following ten domains, conscientiousness, coping and self-care, openness, cooperativeness, moral reasoning, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, emotional stability, and ethical behavior (Freeman et al., 2017). These areas were developed through an extensive review of over 30 years of literature from psychology, social work, counseling, and education (Garner et al., 2016). In addition to the literature review, the big five personality assessment and the characteristics of successful learners were reviewed to develop each area of assessment on the PDCA (Garner et al., 2016).

Garner et al. (2016) assessed the PDCA for interrater reliability and internal consistency to establish reliability and construct validity. The interrater reliability was in “excellent range”

(ICC = .88) when using an intraclass correlation coefficient (Garner et al., 2016, p. 7). Internal consistency and instrument reliability of the PDCA was established through the use of an inter-item correlation matrix which revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .939 (Garner et al., 2016). Lastly, the construct validity was measured by a Pearson product-moment correlation to test the relationship between the PDCA and the NEO-FFI, which is based on the big five trait assessment. The results produced "low to moderate" correlations between the PDCA and NEO-FFI which "suggests satisfactory construct validity for the PDCA" (Garner et al., 2016, p. 9). In the end, the PDCA has two iterations, one for admissions and another for non-admissions. The admissions and non-admissions forms are the same in every way except for one domain that is added on the clinical form or non-admissions form to address ethical behavior while in internship.

The PDCA-R is scaled from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning *below expectations*, 3 represents *meets expectations*, and 5 means *above expectations*. Additionally, a score of 2 or 4 can be selected if a counselor educator noted partial agreement with categories between 1, 3, or 5. For example, a supervisor could feel a supervisee is displaying attributes from *meets expectations* and *above expectations*, which would be scored as a 4 instead of a 3 or 5. This allows for some flexibility between the main categories.

### **Counseling Competency Scale**

The CCS was developed to meet counselor education needs of assessing CIT competence with a psychometrically sound tool (Swank et al., 2012). Both the ACA code of ethics and CACREP standards align with the items assessed on the CCS. The CCS developed out of the first version of the assessment which was named the Counselor Skills and Professional Behavior Scale. The first version was revised to define items more thoroughly and develop a clear scoring

method. The three main areas assessed on the CCS that directly relate to CIT competency are counseling skills, professional dispositions, and professional behaviors (Swank et al., 2012). The CCS comprises of 32 items that are split between counseling skills (12 items), professional dispositions (10 items) and professional behaviors (10 items) (Swank et al., 2012). The CCS takes a rubric approach to evaluation and rate students in the following categories: harmful, below expectations, near expectations, meets expectations, and exceeds expectations. In the end, the CCS provides a comprehensive and holistic assessment of CIT competency (Swank et al, 2012).

### ***Factors Defined***

Within the first factor of the CSS, counseling skills are assessed. Specific examples of counseling skills are nonverbal skills, reflecting, encouragement, questions, confrontation, and goal setting (Swank et al., 2012). Counseling dispositions and behaviors are the next factors that are assessed. These factors consist of ethics, boundaries, record keeping, adherence to policy, emotional stability, motivation to learn, open to feedback, flexible, genuine, and multiculturally competent (Swank et al., 2012). The comprehensive approach of the CSS is helpful for counselor educators so they can use one assessment tool for counselor competency.

### ***Psychometrics of CCS***

The content validity of the CCS has been assessed through an extensive literature review (Swank et al., 2012). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was completed to assess construct validity (Swank et al., 2012). The EFA found high correlation between factors and no cross loading which “adequately accounts for the data” (Swank et al., 2012, p. 198). In addition, the internal consistency reliability for each factor was at or above .70 with an overall Cronbach’s alpha of .93, which confirms internal consistency of the assessment tool (Garner et al, 2020;

Swank et al., 2012). Continuing on, the interrater reliability found a low correlation of  $r=.57$  (Garner et al, 2020; Swank et al., 2012). Lastly, the criterion-related validity was explored by comparing the CCS score and semester grade which found a moderate correlation (Swank et al., 2012).

### **Issues of Disposition**

The literature reveals two main concerns which are defining and assessing disposition. There are many disposition definitions and limited psychometrically sound disposition assessments. The many definitions and approaches to operationalize disposition is helpful to move the field forward, but it also makes it difficult to adopt a working definition. For example, Spurgeon et al. (2012) conducted focus groups with faculty members to operationalize disposition. This process was found to be helpful for faculty and students as the department looked at how they define and what they value when discussing disposition. The author then suggests that faculty discuss the qualities their program values to develop direction for defining disposition (Spurgeon et al, 2012). This is one example of how many disposition definitions are developed as many professionals have slightly different approaches to disposition. In the end, multiple definitions can lead to confusion and potentially lead to disposition not being assessed (Miller, et al., 2020). The lack of a unified definition and way to assess disposition can lead to students remaining in programs despite the lack of professional competence (Miller, et al., 2020).

The difficulty to create one working definition of disposition then influences the development of psychometrically sound assessment tools to measure CIT disposition. To be clear, current research on disposition offers helpful literature reviews and processes to develop a working definition and all definitions have similar ideas that overlap. Despite the research there is still difficulty to develop an assessment that is psychometrically sound as one accepted

definition is not present. For this reason, there are only a few psychometrically tested disposition assessments. In the end, the lack of an agreed upon definition and limited assessment tools continues to contribute to difficulties in managing disposition issues.

With these ideas in mind, the PDCA and CCS were chosen to be explored due to their psychometric testing. The CCS provides a holistic measurement of CIT competency, but lacks interrater reliability. On the other hand, the PDCA which only focuses on disposition has sound psychometrics, which make it a good candidate to use as a measuring tool for this study. The PDCA will be used as a key when coding participant data. In addition, the personal, professional, and academic areas addressed in the PDCA give clarity to the definition of disposition while meeting ACA and CACREP requirements. In turn, the PDCA will provide direction and clarity when defining and assessing disposition. Also, the rubric style of the PDCA gives insight into how disposition influences the education process which includes course work, social interactions, clinical work, and sense of self. It is clear that disposition is a complex and multifaceted concept that is difficult to assess, but the PDCA gives direction and clarity to counseling educators.

### **Gatekeeping**

An examination of gatekeeping reveals the importance, required energy, and complexities related to this process. The gatekeeping process and disposition are directly linked. An exploration of how disposition is managed within the gatekeeping process will give a better understanding of the process and potential difficulties that counselor educators face. In the end, the issues revolving gatekeeping will be presented.

## **Gatekeeping Defined**

The gatekeeping is an ongoing process of assessing CIT for professional counseling skills, professional behaviors, and professional disposition. Gatekeeping is required both by ACA (2014) and CACREP (2016). The CACREP (2016) standards define gatekeeping as “the ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to monitor and evaluate an individual’s knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required by competent professional counselors and to remediate or prevent those that are lacking in professional competence from the becoming counselors” (p. 45). It is key to note that the CACREP definition states that counselor educators monitor disposition, which implies the ongoing nature of gatekeeping. This specific monitoring process and evaluation compliments the Freeman et al. (2016) definition of gatekeeping which states gatekeeping is “as an ongoing process used by counselor educators to intercede when counseling students are making insufficient progress toward acquiring the knowledge, skill, and dispositional competence necessary to effectively practice counseling” (p. 29). The gatekeeping process starts during the application/admission process and continues throughout the program of study (Schuermann et al. 2018). In addition, the policies of assessing and evaluating professional competency must be presented to CIT in a clear and consistent manner to ensure fairness (Schuermann et al., 2018). An exploration of disposition within the gatekeeping process will now be presented.

## **Gatekeeping Process**

Counselor educators are continually monitoring CIT for professional competence with the responsibility to ensure that graduates can provide professional counseling services (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To assist in the gatekeeping process several models have been developed to guide counselor educators. Gatekeeping practices emerged in the 1990’s that included a framework

to identify and evaluate competency (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). For example, some counselor educators include an evaluation form as a part of the student handbook and course syllabi (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). The practice of evaluation transparency is now a CACREP standard to ensure students are informed of expectations and program requirements (CACREP, 2016). In addition, other programs built on these practices to include other forms of assessment to measure counseling skill and student behaviors (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Despite the requirement for gatekeeping there is not one framework that guides the entire gatekeeping process (McCaughan et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). In turn, Ziomek-Daigle et al. (2010) proposed a four-step gatekeeping model to guide counselor educators. The four steps consist of preadmission, postadmission, remediation and post remediation (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). This model of gatekeeping is one of the most utilized gatekeeping models and for the purposes of this study will be used to frame the gatekeeping process. More specifically, the researcher will integrate the PDCA into all gatekeeping phases to enhance the overall gatekeeping process. This process will help to define, assess, and provide some guidance on how to manage disposition.

### ***Preadmission***

During the preadmission process candidates are assessed for academic aptitude and interpersonal skills (disposition) to determine fitness and readiness for graduate counseling work (McCaughan et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To assess academic fitness candidates are often assessed by undergraduate grade point average, standardized test scores, interview, and written statements (Garner et al., 2020; McCaughan et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To assess interpersonal fitness or disposition, institutions often use interviews to screen candidates, which can consist of role-play vignettes, specific questions, and a formal discussion (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010, p. 410). A majority of schools rely on interviews and personal statements to

gauge personal and interpersonal characteristics during the preadmission process (Garner et al., 2020; McCaughan et al., 2015). The previously listed criteria have shown to predict academic fitness but the field lacks an agreed upon way to assess disposition at preadmission (Garner et al., 2020; McCaughan et al., 2015). In the end, disposition is often not formally measured at the preadmission gatekeeping phase and in some cases is not measured at all (Miller et al., 2020).

With the use of the PDCA at preadmission, counselor educators could formally assess disposition during the normally scheduled interview time with counseling candidates. In this case, counseling applicants would be screened out if professional disposition qualities are not present. On the other hand, if a counseling applicant holds the proper attitudes, values, and behaviors required of a CIT then they would be accepted into the counseling program. The implementation of the PDCA at preadmission would allow for quality gatekeeping standards.

### ***Postadmission***

During the postadmission phase of gatekeeping CIT would undergo continued evaluation to ensure that academic and interpersonal standards are met (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Evaluation would occur during all course work which includes both clinical and non-clinic courses (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To evaluate academic standards grades must be maintained at a “B” or above throughout a program of study (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To assess interpersonal and dispositional characteristics faculty members evaluate interactions of CIT with peers, faculty members, and site supervisors (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Many faculty members noted that clinical supervision is an important time to gauge student disposition as they are growing by receiving and implementing feedback (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Additionally, counselor educators are assessing CIT disposition in the classroom and social gatherings to assess disposition (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010).

During the postadmission phase, the PDCA can be used to formally assess disposition rather than using current forms of subjective measures (Lambie et al., 2018). The clear definition and rubric style assessment allow for clear assessment and evaluation. For example, the PDCA assesses conscientiousness which addresses responsibility, diligence, and motivation to learn in the classroom. Another area of assessment on the PDCA is interpersonal skills which will assess CIT ability to be warm, agreeable, and genuine with peers and faculty. The PDCA provides a clear way to define and assess disposition which allows counselor educators to give specific feedback to students on their dispositional characteristics.

CIT will spend most, if not all their time in the postadmission phase of gatekeeping. As long as students meet academic and dispositional requirements they will remain in the postadmission phase until graduation. In turn, the PDCA should be used regularly on each student to fulfill the ongoing gatekeeping standard set by CACREP. Current use can consist of faculty members filling out the PDCA at the conclusion of every course regardless of type, clinical or knowledge based. For example, during supervision in clinical courses counselor educators will regularly address personalization of CIT. Personalization is a foci area within the discrimination supervision model and is used to address both intrapersonal and interpersonal parts of CIT (Bernard et al., 2019). The intrapersonal and interpersonal are both dispositional characteristics and the PDCA can provide clear direction for discussion personalization or disposition during the supervision phase of training. If CIT display a lack of professional competency during the postadmission phase they would move into the remediation phase of gatekeeping.

## ***Remediation***

During the remediation phase, CIT have been found to be lacking professional competency and in need of more time and energy to grow (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). The areas to be managed remain the same and consist of personal or academic CIT competence (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Faculty members must assess the area lacking competency and determine if remediation is possible (Bernard et al., 2019). If faculty members determine that remediation is a possibility, a concrete plan to remediate the CIT lack of competence will be put in place (Bernard et al., 2019). Remediation plans should be clear about growth areas and should include collaboration with CIT (Bernard et al., 2019). Lastly, remediation plans should be clearly written out in contract form with detailed explanations and requirements for remediation completion (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010).

There are many interventions to assist faculty members with remediation plans that promote CIT growth. Ziomek-Daigle et al. (2010) recommended intensified supervision for either academic or clinical concerns which can consist of extra supervision, additional clinical video review, a change in supervisor, reduced clinical caseload, or repeating course work (Bernard et al., 2019; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To address personal development or disposition a leave of absence or personal counseling is recommended (Bernard et al., 2019; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010).

During remediation the PDCA could be used as a tool to facilitate conversations during extra supervision. It is important to note that most cases of remediation are due to dispositional or non-academic competencies (Smarinsky, 2020). For example, a study of 86 cases of problems with professional competence led to 55 cases of remediation (Freeman et al., 2019). Of those 55 cases 31 cases, which is over 50%, led to dismissal and were directly related to disposition issues

which included lying, interpersonal skills, and emotional stability (Freeman et al., 2019). Knowing that many cases of remediation will include problems of competency related to disposition, the PDCA can be a reliable and valid tool to help grow CIT or support dismissal. There is not research on the efficacy of using the PDCA to manage disposition. In addition, there is no current research to show the efficacy of normally utilized interventions such as increased supervision, repeating course work, therapy or a leave of absence (Kaslow et al., 2007; Smarinsky, 2020). Considering the lack of research surrounding efficacy for gatekeeping interventions the PDCA would require further research to determine its efficacy to encourage growth through clear discussion about expectations and growth.

### ***Remediation Outcome***

The final phase of gatekeeping is the remediation outcome of the remediation plan which can be successful, unsuccessful, or indifferent (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). To be successful in remediation the CIT would complete the remediation plan in its entirety and show change based the collaborated remediation plan (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). A successful completion of remediation would result in the CIT continuing on the program and would reenter the postadmission phase of gatekeeping until graduation. An unsuccessful remediation outcome means a CIT did not complete the remediation plan set out by faculty in collaboration with the CIT (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). The result of an unsuccessful remediation outcome leads to dismissal from a program or self-selection out of the program after faculty advisement (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). An indifferent result “yields marginal results” which allows for CITs to continue on in the program (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). The PDCA can be a guide to determine if a remediation plan is successful. The PDCA is a rubric style assessment that is scored from 1 to 5 and gives clear definitions of what attitudes or behaviors are below expectation, meeting

expectations, or exceeds expectations. In turn, when writing a remediation plan the PDCA can be used to determine if dispositional requirements have been met to continue on in the program or if dismissal is necessary. It is important to note that previously completed PDCA forms will have been filled out at preadmission, postadmission, and during the remediation plan which can all support the remediation outcome.

### **Issues of Gatekeeping**

The main issue of gatekeeping is directly related to gateslipping which often occurs because of the lack of a clear gatekeeping process, lack of formal assessments to support remediation decisions, and a fear of lawsuits or conflict. Gateslipping occurs when faculty members allow CIT who lack professional competence in any area to continue on in education and even graduate when they should be remediated or dismissed (Rapp et al., 2018). For example, Olson et al. (2016) reported that over half of all faculty admitted to passing a student who they deemed to be unfit for the counseling field. In addition, it is estimated that half of all CIT who lack professional competency are allowed to continue their program of study without remediation (McCaughan et al., 2014). Gateslipping is problematic for the counseling field, counselor liability, and more importantly, client welfare (Miller, et al., 2020).

### ***Gatekeeping Process***

Gatekeeping is a clear mandate in the counselor education field but the process and practical application is open to each institution. Despite the ethical mandate not all programs practice effective gatekeeping practices (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). In fact, the gatekeeping process is not well defined and yet the burden of gatekeeping across a program of study is put directly on faculty members (McCaughan et al., 2015). The lack of clear guidelines can cause

confusion as counselor educators may understand gatekeeping policies, but misunderstand application (Schuermann et al., 2018).

Another factor outside of misunderstanding application is counselor educator reluctance to fully embrace the gatekeeper role. This reluctance to accept the gatekeeper role is likely related to the humanist nature of counselors (Schuermann et al., 2018). The humanist tends to focus on strengths and being supportive which can be counterproductive to the gatekeeper role and process (Schuermann et al., 2018). Even with clear formalized guidelines established in an institution to evaluate counseling competencies, the individual faculty member has to carry out the process which can lead to gateslipping (Schuermann et al., 2018).

### ***Lack of Formal Assessments***

The lack of disposition assessments relates to gateslipping because there are many definitions causing confusion and tools lacking psychometric testing (Miller et al., 2020). The lack of unified definition and assessment tool leads to disposition feeling vague and complex to define, assess, and manage during gatekeeping phases (Miller et al., 2020). In addition, most of the disposition assessments presented in literature lack psychometric testing which leads to a subjective measuring of disposition (Miller et al., 2020). Overall, the lack of formal disposition assessments contributes to the difficulty to define, assess, and manage disposition. The difficulty to manage disposition is compounded within a loosely defined gatekeeping process which can then lead to instances of gateslipping.

### ***Legal Issues***

Another contributing factor that leads to gatekeeping difficulties is fear of legal reprisal (Rapp, et al., 2018; Schuermann et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, there are not many reliable disposition assessments which leaves counselor educators without formal assessments to

present if faced with legal disputes. The courts are more favorable to counseling departments if they have formal assessments and implement a formalized gatekeeping process (Garner et al., 2020). On the other hand, counselor educators are vulnerable when in legal disputes without psychometrically sound disposition assessments. In turn, counselor educators may opt for personal safety to avoid legal retaliation and forgo their professional responsibility of gatekeeping (Miller et al., 2020). Overall, gateslipping can occur if formal assessments are not used to measure disposition.

### **Summary**

The importance of gatekeeping disposition is clear as it ensures that clients are protected and the integrity of the counseling field is maintained (Miller et al., 2020). In addition, a clear gatekeeping process will likely lead to lower instances of legal reprisals and will instill greater confidence in counselor educators (Schuermann et al., 2018). This same line of thinking can be applied to a greater understanding of defining, assessing, and managing disposition so counselor educators can guide CIT with more confidence. The following study will add to a growing body of research by exploring the process of defining, assessing, and managing disposition.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

The goal of qualitative methods is to gain a deep understanding of a phenomena or experience. With this goal in mind, a qualitative approach was used to better understand and explore disposition within the gatekeeping process. According to Creswell et al. (2018), qualitative researchers, “study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 860). In turn, this dissertation will provide a look into how disposition is defined, assessed, and managed within the gatekeeping process, which will provide rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences (Creswell et al., 2018). Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory (GT) will be used to explore disposition due to a lack of one universal and agreed upon way to define, assess, and manage disposition. GT fits well into the goals of this study as a theory is developed based on participant experiences (Strauss et al., 1998). In the end, GT will facilitate “insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss et al., 1998, p. 12). The model developed from the findings will help counselor educators define, assess, and manage disposition within the gatekeeping process.

#### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Within GT there are several different approaches which include classical GT, Straussian GT, and constructivist GT. All GT approaches have similarities that include, “theoretical sampling, saturation, comparative analysis, memos, and substantive versus formal theory” (Kenny et al., 2015, p. 1272). The constructivist GT does stand apart from classical and Straussian GT in several ways as it requires different coding procedures, use of literature, and philosophical assumptions (Kenny et al., 2015). Charmaz developed the constructivist GT coding approach to be more flexible during the coding process which allows the researcher to be a co-

creator of the data with the participant (Charmaz, 2014). Continuing on, the use of literature promotes that researchers engage with literature throughout the whole study while classical GT procedures require the researcher not to immerse in the literature until after the data is collected (Kenny et al., 2015). Lastly, the philosophical assumptions of constructivist GT differ from the other research approaches as this approach believes that reality is not objective, but that people construct reality, meaning that multiple realities exist (Charmaz, 2014; Kenny et al., 2015; Mills et al., 2006). The flexible coding and constructivist approach compliment the current study as disposition is misunderstood with several definitions, assessments strategies, and management styles. The constructivist GT approach allowed for the theory to be interpreted from many perspectives to provide a thorough exploration and theory development.

### **Theoretical Lens**

Constructivist philosophy moves away from an objective external reality and adopts the idea of multiple realities (Charmaz, 2014). According to Creswell et al. (2018), individuals make meaning through their own subjective view of the world. In addition, these meanings are “varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 1325). From this perspective, the researcher will “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation,” rather than “starting with a theory to develop meaning” (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 1329). For constructivist GT, the researcher and participant construct meaning through very specific methods, such as memo writing, member checks, and interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) noted that social constructivism is aligned with constructivist GT as both posit that learning and knowing occur in social contexts. Overall, the constructivist GT approach gives voice to each participant by accounting for their unique experience and acknowledges that the

researcher is apart of this process. The constructivist GT approach fits well into the current goals of this study as disposition is a misunderstood concept and this approach will consider the many perspectives that counselor educators hold.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question of this constructivist GT study is:

1. How do counselor educators from CACREP accredited programs define, assess, and manage CIT disposition within the gatekeeping role and process of counselor education?

Sub-questions include:

- A. How do counselor educators define, assess, and manage disposition at each phase of gatekeeping?
- B. How do counselor educators manage both unprofessional and professional CIT dispositions?
- C. What factors do counselor educators describe as barriers and supports to defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition?

### **Participants**

It is recommended that data is collected until saturation is met, which means “no new properties emerge” (Charmaz et al., 2014). The researcher met saturation with 17 interviews. Inclusion criteria consists of counselor educators who graduated from CACREP accredited programs and who are currently employed at CACREP accredited counseling programs. This inclusion criteria ensures for rich and relevant data as CACREP programs set standards of gatekeeping and assessing disposition.

## **Recruitment Strategies and Sampling Procedures**

Constructivist GT requires an initial sampling and then moves onto theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained before conducting this study. See Appendix E for IRB approval letter. The researcher collected the sample through an online listserv called Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET). CESNET is an online listserv that consists of counseling students, supervisors, and educators. The researcher emailed potential participants a recruitment letter to offer the opportunity to participate in the study. See Appendix A to review the recruitment letter. Counselor educators who desired to participate in the study contacted the researcher directly. The researcher then sent participants the informed consent. The informed consent was sent through Qualtrics, which is a safe and secure electronic platform. The completed informed consents were securely stored on an encrypted flash drive. The informed consent provided details, including but not limited to, the purpose of the study and any risks or benefits of participation. See Appendix B for the informed consent. After completion of the informed consent process, participants were cleared to participate in the present study.

### **Theoretical Sampling**

After initial sampling, a theoretical sampling approach is utilized in GT (Charmaz, 2014). The initial sampling starts the process by “establishing criteria” and the theoretical sampling guides theory development (Charmaz, 2014, p. 196). The purpose of theoretical sampling is to gain a full understanding of the theoretical categories developed (Charmaz, 2014). After initial data was collected the researcher refined the data and then collected additional data through theoretical sampling to support initial coding and fill any categories that were lacking (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling was done until the point of saturation. Saturation was met as

categories were robust, which means the relationships between categories have been “defined, checked, and explained” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 212). This approach ensured that the emergent theory is refined and full (Charmaz, 2014). Overall, theoretical sampling was used to fill any gaps in data and to build full and comprehensive categories.

### **Instruments**

In conjunction with the completion of the informed consent, participants were asked to complete a short demographics survey. See Appendix D for the demographic survey.

Demographic information collected includes sex, age, ethnicity, clinical/supervisor licensure, years of experience, university accreditation, title, and rank. The researcher then used a semi-structured interview as the main source of data collection. The semi-structured interview consisted of questions directly related to main research questions to learn how counselor educators are defining, assessing, and managing disposition within the gatekeeping process. See Appendix C for a detailed interview protocol.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews which is consistent with constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2014). All interviews were conducted through GoToMeeting by LogMeIn (2020) which met the confidentiality and privacy standards set by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Interviews were held in online format to ensure the safety of the researcher and participants due to the COVID-19 virus. Interviews were stored securely in a computer software named GoToMeeting. Transcripts of the interviews were downloaded directly to an encrypted flash drive. All identifying information was changed and replaced with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

The participants completed one 60-90-minute semi-structured interview. Before recording, participants were reminded of informed consent to ensure participant comfort. In addition, participants were reminded that this interview would be confidential and they were given the chance to offer a pseudonym. No participant chose a pseudonym. The interview guide provided some structure to the interview, but the researcher was flexible to follow the participant to ensure the participant can fully share their experience. See Appendix C to review interview protocol. Interviews were in-depth to provide a full understanding of participant experiences and meaning (Kenny et al., 2015). The researcher offered follow-up interviews and emails with participants to review data and make corrections as needed. Follow-up emails were sent after data analysis was complete to allow participants a chance to review analyzed data to make corrections and make comments. This approach achieves the co-creation of meaning between researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2014).

## **Data Analysis**

Constructivist GT methods offer principles and guidelines to conducting qualitative research rather than a strict formula (Charmaz, 2014). This methodological approach discovers and creates meaning to generate theories (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) proposed a specific flexible and creative coding process that consists of two coding phases that lead to constructing a theory grounded in the data. The process is malleable and fluid and requires the researcher to creatively engage with data to create emerging categories (Kenny et al., 2015). According to Charmaz (2014) the coding process will define and create meaning from the data. The two major phases of coding within constructivist GT are initial coding and focused coding. Ultimately, a grounded or emergent theory will be developed as a result of these two coding phases. Methods

used during the coding process to create categories are processed through focused GT techniques such as memo-writing, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Kenny et al., 2015). The data collected from the in-depth semi-structured interviews underwent the constructivist coding process to develop a grounded theory on the topic of defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Throughout the coding process the researcher conducted hand-coding and did not utilize a coding software.

### **Initial Coding**

The first phase of initial coding begins with the specific “words, lines, segments, and incidents” within the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 108). The purpose of the initial or open coding phase is to remain open to where the data leads, thereby assisting in gaining insight into the main concern and problem-solving strategies of participants (Kenny et al., 2015). In turn, by examining the words, lines, and segments in the data, the researcher moves toward “core conceptual categories” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116). The words, lines, and segments that emerge from the data in the initial coding phase reveal participant point of view, and tend to be short and action oriented (Charmaz, 2014).

### **Focused Coding**

In the second phase, focused coding, recurring codes that contribute to provisional categories, are noted (Kenny et al., 2015). This phase of coding narrows the focus of large amounts of data to hone in on the codes that continue to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). The focused codes occur more frequently among initial coding and they are more conceptual rather than focusing on specific words or lines (Charmaz, 2014). In the end, the focused coding process was used to “synthesize, analyze, and conceptualize larger segments of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

### ***Constant Comparison***

Constant comparison was used at each level of data analysis to find similarities and differences in the data. Constant comparison takes the researcher deeper in the refocusing coding phase (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher compared interview statements and incidents from within a single interview and across all interviews to make sense of incoming data (Charmaz, 2014). Overall, this method was used to develop and confirm categories found in the data.

### ***Memos***

Following each interview, the researcher recorded personal reflections in the form of memos. Memos occurred at the start of data collection and continued through all phases of data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Memo-writing helped to guide the theoretical sampling process to find emerging themes early in the data collection process and continued throughout data analysis to assist in the co-construction and development of the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014). Also, memos created space for the researcher to interact with the data to create ideas, ask questions, and be mindful of assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). Lastly, memos promoted reflexivity of the researcher and fill out categories (Charmaz, 2014).

### **Theoretical Coding**

The final phase of coding involved theory building. In this phase, codes from the first two phases of coding were “integrated into a theory” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 149). The theoretical coding phase tells a story of the first two phases of coding to create structure. Theoretical coding was used to paint a clear picture of the data by describing the specific relationships that emerged during the focused coding phase. The constructed meaning through theoretical coding “increases the analytic power of your codes” making the data “precise and penetrating” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 160). At this point of the coding process a theory/model was developed.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is used in qualitative research to prove accuracy and credibility of research findings (Creswell et al., 2018). Trustworthiness proves the rigor and legitimacy of a study by showing the accuracy of research findings (Creswell et al., 2018). In turn, trustworthiness provides readers with the assurance that the methods used in the study were carried out in an intentional, rigorous, and ethical fashion. For example, the researcher was transparent by describing detailed information on participants, data collection, data analysis, and researcher reflexivity. Specific areas of trustworthiness consist of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following section will describe the procedures taken to establish trustworthiness which includes triangulation, member checks, memos, and external auditors.

### **Credibility**

Credibility provides the reader with the assurance that the current study has accurately recorded and managed the data through detailed reports in methodology (Charmaz, 2014). Credibility or qualitative reliability is established through proving the methodology is rigorous through being transparent and following a clear process (Creswell et al., 2018). Credibility is established in this study through providing clear and detailed descriptions of methods used to collect and analyze data. More specifically, triangulation, member checks, and memo writing all assist to establish credibility.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation is a method of using several data sources to support research findings (Creswell et al., 2018). For this study, two forms of data were used to develop emergent categories, which consisted of semi-structured interviews and memo-writing. In addition, a

constructivist lens was used throughout the study to interpret emergent coding categories. To further enhance triangulation, theoretical sampling was used to establish two types of sampling to ensure full and rich descriptions of participant experiences. Lastly, an external auditor was used to objectively assess the entire study, which includes the methodology and research findings for accuracy and consistency. These multiple sources of data all contribute to establishing trustworthiness of the research findings (Creswell et al., 2018).

### ***Member checks***

Member-Checks are used to collaborate with participants to check initial data and the research findings for accuracy (Creswell et al., 2018). Participants were given transcripts to review the data to make any changes, additions, or comments to add to the accuracy of the co-created grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell et al., 2018). Participants were given a month to review the data and make changes. Eight participants responded to the member check email.

### ***Reflexivity through memo-writing***

To ensure credibility the researcher will be reflexive, transparent, and ethical while interviewing and coding. The researcher will practice reflexivity to address “preconceptions that emanate from such standpoints as class, race, gender, age, embodiment, culture, and historical era” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 155). Memo-writing was used to display researcher reflections, experiences, and theory development throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher assessed areas related to current political climate, race issues and concerns, cultural considerations, gender, and COVID.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is a type of trustworthiness that ensures “the confirmation that the data represents the changing conditions of the phenomenon under study and should be consistent

across time, researchers and analysis techniques” (Sikolia, et al., 2013, p. 3). According to Sikolia, et al. (2013) dependability is accomplished through outside audits to confirm that the methodology was implemented correctly. Audits can be completed by peer researchers, advisors, or colleagues (Sikolia, et al., 2013). Continuing on, confirmability refers to an outside observer finding the same results as the researcher when presented with the same data (Sikolia, et al., 2013). An external auditor was used to examine methodology, results, and objectivity in this study to achieve dependability and confirmability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the ability to apply the findings of a study to other settings (Sikolia, et al., 2013). To achieve transferability the researcher provided clear and detailed descriptions of “the research, the participant’s diverse perspectives and experiences, methodology, [and] interpretation of results” (Sikolia, et al., 2013, p. 2). In addition, the researcher provided information about the researcher as a co-creator of meaning in the data collection and analysis process. The information provided by the researcher should be clear enough for another research to replicate the study in another setting. In addition, the use of detailed memo writing ensured that the researcher was reflexive throughout the process. Lastly, semi-structured interviews, a detailed coding protocol, and an external auditor provided clarity to achieve transferability.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

Chapter four provides a discussion on the current findings of this study. First, a summary of participant information will be provided. Second, the emergent themes and grounded theory found in participant data will be presented. The findings consist of sections on personal learning, defining disposition, assessing disposition, managing disposition and concludes with barriers and supports.

### **Participants' Backgrounds**

There were 17 participants in the study who are located all over the country. All participants are employed at a CACREP accredited counseling program. The counseling experience of participants ranges from 4 - 35 years of experience. While all participants have counseling experience, not all are currently practicing as 9 are not practicing and 8 are actively counseling. Of the 17 participants, only 1 participant is not currently a licensed counselor. The clinical supervision experience of participants ranges from 1 - 35 years. All participants are qualified clinical supervisors. Some states require an additional supervision licensure and 7 of the 17 are licensed supervisors in their home state. The participants have varied titles which includes eleven participants on the tenure track, two participants are instructors of counseling, three are a professor of practice, and one listed other. The rank of participants are ten assistant professors, two associate professors, four full professors, and one listed other.

The age of participants ranged from 29 - 67 years old. Based on identified gender, the sample consisted of 13 females, 3 males, and 1 gender neutral participant. The ethnicity of the participants is 13 Caucasians and 4 African-Americans. A few participants within these two major ethnicities described themselves as white, Irish, eastern European or Black. Identifying information has been erased and participants were given pseudonyms.

**Jacob**

Jacob is a 30-year-old who identifies as male and Caucasian. Jacob is a licensed counselor with 4 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Jacob is a qualified clinical supervisor with 3 years of supervision experience. Jacob is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

**Sara**

Sara is a 42-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Sara is a licensed counselor with 14 years of experience and is currently practicing. Sara is a qualified clinical supervisor with 10 years of supervision experience. Sara is an instructor of counseling at current university with the title of associate professor.

**Sandi**

Sandi is a 67-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Sandi is a licensed counselor and school counselor with 35 years of experience and is currently practicing. Sandi is a qualified clinical supervisor with 20 years of supervision experience. Sandi is a professor of practice at current university with the title of full professor.

**Micaela**

Micaela is a 29-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Micaela is a licensed counselor and school counselor with 8 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Micaela is a qualified clinical supervisor with 3 years of supervision experience. Micaela is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

**Mary**

Mary is a 55-year-old who identifies as female and African-American. Mary is a licensed counselor with 30 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Mary is a qualified clinical

supervisor with 4 years of supervision experience. Mary is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

### **Jennifer**

Jennifer is a 34-year-old who identifies as female and Black. Jennifer is a licensed counselor with 8 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Jennifer is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 4 years of supervision experience. Jennifer is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

### **Kendra**

Kendra is a 43-year-old who identifies as female and Irish. Kendra is a licensed counselor with 15 years of experience and is currently practicing. Kendra is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 15 years of supervision experience. Kendra is a professor of practice at current university with the title of full professor.

### **Hannah**

Hannah is a 56-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Hannah is a licensed counselor with 30 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Hannah is a qualified clinical supervisor with 25 years of supervision experience. Hannah is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

### **Paul**

Paul is a 63-year-old who identifies as male and Caucasian. Paul is a licensed counselor with 30 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Paul is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 30 years of supervision experience. Paul is currently a full professor with tenure.

**Erin**

Erin is a 40-year-old who identifies as cis-gendered female and Black. Erin is a licensed counselor with 15 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Erin is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 10 years of supervision experience. Erin is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

**Lizzie**

Lizzie is a 52-year-old who identifies as gender neutral and Caucasian. Lizzie is a licensed counselor with 6 years of experience and is currently practicing. Lizzie is a qualified clinical supervisor with 3 years of supervision experience. Lizzie is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

**Tony**

Tony is a 67-year-old who identifies as male and eastern European. Tony is not currently practicing or a licensed counselor and has 35 years of clinical experience. Tony is a qualified clinical supervisor with 30 years of supervision experience. Tony is a full professor at current university and did not disclose tenure status.

**Olivia**

Olivia is a 35-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Olivia is a licensed counselor with 13 years of experience and is not currently practicing. Olivia is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 11 years of supervision experience. Olivia is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

**Stacey**

Stacey is a 47-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Stacey is a licensed counselor with 21 years of experience and is currently practicing. Stacey is a qualified clinical

supervisor with 19 years of supervision experience. Stacey is a professor of practice at current university with the title of associate professor.

### **Mollie**

Mollie is a 34-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Mollie is a licensed counselor with 9 years of experience and is currently practicing. Mollie is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 5 years of supervision experience. Mollie is an instructor of counseling at current university.

### **Heather**

Heather is a 37-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Heather is a licensed counselor with 11 years of experience and is currently practicing. Heather is a qualified and licensed clinical supervisor with 9 years of supervision experience. Heather is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

### **Angie**

Angie is a 37-year-old who identifies as female and Caucasian. Angie is a licensed counselor with 10 years of experience and is currently practicing. Angie is a qualified clinical supervisor with 1 year of supervision experience. Angie is on the tenure track at current university with the title of assistant professor.

## **Emergent Themes**

This section presents the constructivist grounded theory that emerged from participant experiences. Initially, the emergent themes focus on how counselors currently define, assess, and manage disposition. Next, themes discussing the barriers and supports that counselor educators face when learning about or managing disposition are presented. Lastly, themes are presented on participant's personal learning of defining, assessing, and managing disposition. The following

sections will provide participant quotes to support the findings and emergent themes. Emergent themes in this section resulted from direct participant quotes that were consistent across participants. This ensures that saturation was found in results. To ensure that all participants were represented in the findings, please see Appendix F for additional quotes that highlight and support emergent themes. Overall, the flow of emergent themes from participant data starts with personal learning of disposition and moves to the implementation of disposition learning as a counselor educator.

### **Defining Disposition**

First, participants describe how they define disposition, which answers the primary research question of this study. Based on participant reports, disposition consists of two distinct themes that make up the definition of disposition. The two themes that emerged when defining disposition are the internal characteristics of the CIT and the external behaviors displayed by the CIT. The internal characteristics refer to values, beliefs, and attitudes of CITs. The external behaviors consist of relational interactions, ethical behaviors, and professionalism displayed by CIT. The following sections will expand on the internal characteristics and external behaviors that define disposition.

All participants provided a definition for disposition. While all were not exactly identical, the same themes continued to emerge. All participants referenced that all CIT with a counselors' disposition will have certain beliefs, values, and attitudes that will manifest behaviorally. For example, Jacob stated, that "dispositions are attitudes, characteristics, and ways of being." In addition, Micaela stated that people in the helping field have "foundational values..." [and] "come with a heart of service." Continuing on, Kendra described disposition as "openness, respect, integrity, self-awareness..., values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors that

influence the counselor's professional growth." Sandi stated that though "core values underlie [disposition], I think we're really looking for professional behaviors that are exhibited by students as they travel throughout the program would be reflective of...counseling professionals in the field." In the end, the emergent definition from participants includes the internal characteristics and professional behaviors that contribute to becoming a competent and effective counselor.

Tony provided a list from his current university with the 10 disposition standards used to define disposition, which includes, openness to new ideas, flexibility, cooperativeness with others, willingness to accept and use feedback, awareness of own impact on others, ability to deal with conflict, ability to accept personal responsibility, ability to express feelings effectively and appropriately, attention to ethical and legal considerations, and initiative and motivation. These 10 standards describe behaviors and internal characteristics that CITs should value and display. For example, the willingness to accept feedback is predicated on an internal desire to learn and the ability to use that feedback describes a behavioral component. This list provides another example of how disposition consists both of internal characteristics and behaviors. Erin supported Tony's list and stated,

When I think of professional dispositions, I think about traits, I think about attitudes. I think about personal characteristics, also I think about behaviors. It can be things, ranging from, professionalism, values, beliefs, it can also relate to ethics. It can also relate to, you know, cultural competency. It can also relate to when we think about professional dispositions for professional orientation and identity amongst other variables when I think about dispositions. I can add receptivity to feedback and being able to honor diversity.

Defining disposition consists of two main areas, the internal characteristics and behaviors that demonstrate these beliefs and values. Another example of how the internal is manifested behaviorally is "honoring diversity" as explained by Erin. The internal belief is that diversity is

important, which should lead to behaviors such as learning how to honor diversity in others and actually following through. Follow through can look like addressing diversity in the counseling room to honor client diversity. The data supports a two-part definition on disposition which includes internal characteristics and external behaviors.

### **Assessing Disposition**

The following section will review how participants assess disposition, which directly answers the primary research question of this study. Emergent themes revealed two main ways of assessing disposition: informal and formal assessment. In addition, participants noted that a part of assessment starts with earlier disclosure that CIT will be assessed. Informal assessment consists of daily interactions or observations of CIT. Formal assessment is the implementation of an objective tool used to assess disposition. CIT are being assessed thoroughly throughout their program of study both formally and informally.

### ***Disclosure***

Before assessment can begin, counselor educators first set expectations with students to describe professional dispositions and that CIT will be assessed. For example, Micaela stated, “I tell my students that every interaction you have with your professor is a dispositional evaluation.” In addition, Sandi stated, “the students are informed of the dispositional process in their very first semester and it’s in the handbook.” Jacob noted the importance of assessing disposition by stating, “an important part of management of dispositions is gatekeeping at admissions. So, I’m going to be very intentional of dispositions at admissions.” Continuing on, Kendra discussed the importance of discussing disposition expectations early with future CITs:

[its start with] disclosure, disclosure, disclosure. Well, part of my old job was admissions, remediation and assessment, and...if you tell them before admitting them [during] pre-admission you disclosed to them, this is what you're going to be assessed on, you have to be competent in these areas, and if you're not, you're going to get a lot of feedback about

it until you're up to par. You know, this is what our comportment remediation process is, like, telling them all that before they sign the paperwork and pay their tuition.

Early disclosure about disposition assessment and the management process serves the student, the university, and the counseling field.

### ***Informal Assessment***

First, there is an informal assessment which is completed during interactions with CIT as well as observing CIT with each other. Examples of informal interactions include the admissions interview, classroom interactions, email exchanges, and overall observation. Tony described the need to observe students in several settings which “can be in class, it can be in group work, it can be an interview.” Additionally, Micaela stated that “every interaction you have with your professor is a dispositional evaluation...every email you send is a dispositional interaction, your engagement in class or the way that you participate in group work.” Lastly, Jennifer added that informal assessment starts “in the classroom...my advising sessions...and admissions interviews.” All participants are reported noticing the behaviors of CITs in all interactions and observations.

While this type of assessment is referred to as informal, this type of assessment is implemented by trained and experienced counseling professionals. For example, Hannah described the use of clinic judgement in the following quote:

I'm using my clinical intuition and my clinical knowledge, which should be honed in a counselor educator, so it's not like I'm not using a honed tool. Clinic impressions have been a part of our therapeutic process for working with clients for a very long time. It helps us form our conceptualization.

Additionally, Heather added, “it's our therapeutic intuition, we know what professionals should and shouldn't do, and we're seeing the way these interactions are either appropriate or inappropriate.” Counselor educators are all using their clinic experience as a way to informally assess CIT through every interaction and observation.

During these informal assessments' counselor educators are looking for dispositions that display professionalism that reflect a professional counselor. Participants are assessing CIT values, beliefs, social skills, and behaviors. For example, Jennifer described that she is looking for how CIT "deal with being in a group or how you deal with diversity." Sara stated she is "looking at [CIT] values [and] do they put their core values onto [working with clients] ...that's where we get into boundary breaks." In addition, Sandi is "looking for openness to new ideas, the willingness to accept feedback and implement feedback." In these examples, we see informal assessment of social skills, values, and beliefs and how they behaviorally manifest in professional settings such as the classroom or counseling room.

### ***Formal Assessment***

The second way of assessing is through the use of formal assessments. To implement formal assessments, the counselor educator fills out an assessment that is built to assess CIT disposition. Mollie, stated the "counselor competency scale is a very concrete way...[and] formal way of assessing [disposition]." Kendra formally assesses CIT and described the "best" tool she found is "the counseling competency scale revised [because] they've aligned each one of their skills and dispositions and behaviors with the CACREP standards." Hannah stated "when it comes to the measurement of [disposition] I use my own tools." Sandi described the use of formal evaluations:

We very much believe in... faculty evaluation of the student, and we use that pretty consistently throughout the program, to reflect that in our evaluations. So, we do have a rubric, and what I was looking at when I was reading to you is the rubric that we have and we do it every semester throughout the entire time the student is in the program...this is the formal dispositions assessment.

In the end, all but one participant reported using a formal assessment tool to measure disposition. The participant that reported not using a formal assessment has used formal assessments in the past and current program is in the process of developing a formal assessment process.

Not only are counselor educators formally assessing disposition, they are following CACREP standards to assess CIT disposition. CACREP standards require that programs have a systematic process in place for assessment and management (CACREP, 2016). Mary stated, “we actually have an objective form...there’s due process, so we want to make sure that we follow the same steps for everyone.” In addition, CACREP standards require that CITs are assessed throughout their program of study (CACREP, 2016). Paul stated that “we have an evaluation form that’s done at multiple points throughout the program.” Lizzie stated “we have a form that we use that has been broken down into five pieces...according to CACREP.” Also, Micaela stated, “CACREP gives us a lovely framework... [and we assess at] different points throughout a student’s program.” Lastly, Tony stated “the CACREP standards say that everybody has to be assessed multiple times throughout the program, so we assess after the start of the program...the following [year]...and before they do internship.”

Both informal and formal assessments, observations, and interactions are then discussed with other faculty in meetings or consults to further assess CITs. Olivia described this informal nature by stating, “if there is a red flag in a class, that faculty would bring it to the core faculty and say, I have an issue with this student.” Sandi described “in our weekly staffing meetings, we have a time that we call students of concerns and faculty have the opportunity to bring concerns...to consult and make decisions...and that gives us a chance to intervene before we get to the formal assessments.” Tony believes the “informal part [is] putting faculty together [so] everybody can talk about the person, the therapist, how you experienced [the CIT].” In the end,

all the assessments are completed and brought to faculty so that management of disposition can begin.

### **Managing Disposition**

At this point, participants have described how they define disposition and how they assess disposition. Now, participants share how they manage CIT disposition, which answers the primary research question of the study. This section is broken down into two sections which includes managing unprofessional disposition and managing professional disposition. It is important to note that several participants referred to remediation as growth plans, but the process and actions are the same.

#### ***Unprofessional Disposition***

Participants describe both informal and formal remediation as ways to manage disposition. First, informal remediation starts with one-on-one conversations with CIT to give them a chance to receive the feedback and implement change. If the informal conversation does not lead to CIT change the next step of management is formal remediation. It is important to note, that informal remediation may be skipped if the unprofessional disposition warrants formal remediation. CIT can then be dismissed from a program or continue in the program depending on if remediation is successful or unsuccessful.

The purpose of the informal remediation conversations is to give CITs the opportunity to grow and make changes before a formal remediation plan is needed. Jacob described three steps to the remediation process, which starts with noticing CIT behavior patterns and the “second level might be informal, [to] reach out...[maybe] just talk in person or an email or set up a zoom call to talk about what’s going on. And then I would say, third, which could potentially bypass the second or it could be after [informal] would be formal, maybe your remediation plan.” Sandi

added that informal remediation is “just a conversation between the advisor and the student with a verbal agreement to work on that and then the advisor ideally would note that conversation [in] advising notes.” Angie stated, “informally it’s more reactionary than proactive if that makes sense, because it becomes a discussion when it becomes a problem.” Informal assessment is early detection of unprofessional dispositions, which generally leads to informal remediation opportunities for CIT growth. Kendra discussed the importance of earlier intervention through informal remediation:

I realized that if I do the [informal remediation] work upfront... and I am real with them, and I'm authentic, and they understand where I'm coming from in this relationship, and understanding what my motivation is for their growth, then that cuts out a lot of the problem later, you know? And it sets them up for when the moment comes and I do have to confront something, that they're not going to look at me as I'm the enemy, that just wants to ruin their career and kick them out of school.

Informal remediation is used to give CIT a chance to be open to feedback and respond to feedback. Informal remediation consists of conversations to give CIT a chance to change unprofessional behaviors.

If informal remediation does not produce the necessary change or growth in the CIT, then formal remediation is the next step. Formal remediation is like a contract for CITs who are displaying unprofessional disposition. Formal remediation is made official and clear through a written plan so the CIT knows specifically where they need to grow. Sara explained, “I just think you need to have it written down. You need to have it in black and white at that point in time, and solid, so that people can look back at it and see what the expectation was and what the follow through is.” Jennifer explained the process, “you know, follow up with your advisor development plan, sign it, and then, as the advisor, we were expected to maintain and make sure the things that were on the remediation plan were followed through by whatever timeframe.”

Sandi provided an examples of a formal remediation process by stating:

When we have places where the development of dispositional areas hasn't developed as we would like them over time. We create a formal written remediation where students have had to reflect on the dispositional area, study it a bit and write something to us about what that means to them, [and] how they intend to improve.

The goal of remediation is to grow CITs, but also to keep them accountable during the process.

The remediation process is the same for all students, but the remediation plan that is written down is made specifically for each CIT and their particular growth area. Mary provided an example of managing disposition:

If [the issue is] openness to feedback, and [we] might meet with your advisor, and we are going to measure your (CIT) progress, and actually document remediation steps. It will be different for everyone, because I want to tailor it to that person, but we're going to have them sign it. "Yes, I agree to progress in these activities." So, it will be whatever that student needs.

In the end, if the process is not successful continued remediation can occur or dismissal from the program. Kendra described the formal process:

So, then the real compartment issues that are really heavy...they're given a remediation plan. As the director of remediation, oftentimes it was my job, with a committee, to assess what the student needed, what the level of remediation was needed, and then assign them to a faculty, but I would meet with them (the CIT) first. That was probably the toughest. So, to me, everything else is easy, because, once you tell them, you're now on a remediation plan, because you did this, this, and this... And you're going to have to do this for, you know, three months, and meet with this faculty member, and pass this. Otherwise, you will be subject to possibly being let go from the program.

To summarize, the counselor educator starts with informal remediation through conversations and moves to formal remediation if informal remediation was not successful. Dismissal or continued remediation is possible if formal remediation is not complete. In the end, the purpose is to grow CIT into counseling professionals or gatekeep to protect future clients and the integrity of the counseling field.

### *Professional Dispositions*

Counselor educators note that unprofessional dispositions take up more time, which leaves less engagement with CIT who display professional dispositions. In the end, positive feedback is given to CIT exhibiting professional disposition through formal assessments, but verbal feedback is not given at the same rate when compared to unprofessional disposition. Jacob stated that CIT who are doing well are often overlooked by stating, “we notice the nail that’s sticking up more than the nails that are all in.” When discussing giving dispositional feedback to students who display professional disposition Tony stated, “I think that we overlook them...given the number of students we deal with each year.” Continuing on, Olivia stated that “problem students take up way more time and energy than they probably should.” Lastly, Stacey agreed with previous counselor educators and stated, “unfortunately, the students who don’t behave get 90% of our attention, whereas the students who do well tend to go unrecognized.” In the end, counselor educators note that CIT with professional disposition may be overlooked as unprofessional disposition takes up more time.

While counselor educators report that unprofessional disposition takes up a majority of their time, professional disposition is managed through giving feedback both formally and informally. All counselor educators give feedback through formal disposition assessments. This is evident in that counselor educators reported using a formal disposition assessment, which includes providing CIT with feedback on dispositional areas that meet or exceed expectations.

Jacob stated, “formal assessments drive home what ‘were actually saying specifically.’”

Continuing on, Sandi explained that:

We respond just by giving the feedback in written form. They get it in written form, along with the comments that are on there, that do cheer them on, um, and they have the opportunity to read that and then you know.

In the end, all CIT will receive positive feedback on formal assessments.

Another way counselor educator's give feedback is through informal conversations with CITs when the opportunity arises. Heather stated "I am very quick to be very encouraging" to students "I experience as exceptional." Mollie also gives verbal feedback as she stated she "keeps giving them verbal reinforcement, [and] praise. Continuing on, Stacey stated, "I try to acknowledge when students are doing good work and when they are engaged...through genuine feedback." Jacob states that he uses "reinforcement...giving strength-based feedback and informal check-ins" to encourage CIT who are displaying professional disposition. Sara highlighted the importance of providing CIT with positive verbal feedback:

I love to encourage my students and my supervisees and anybody that's working for me and let them know. I don't think that we let people know enough how well they're doing. I think we actually missed that piece a lot. We don't reward, and I think it's important to reward people through verbal feedback.

Participants all reported a lack of managing CIT who display professional disposition. Despite this feeling, participants provide written feedback on formal assessments and mention trying to provide positive feedback when the opportunity arises.

### **Barriers and Supports**

Participants noted various supports and barriers to defining, assessing, and managing disposition. The shared support for all participants is faculty and administration. Barriers include the complex nature of disposition, faculty, and administration. The data displayed that faculty and administration can be both a support or barrier depending on the university.

#### ***Supports***

Participants shared that the main support for defining, assessing, and managing disposition is faculty and administration. To highlight the importance of faculty support Sandi stated, "faculty buy-in has definitely been a support. All of our faculty, our previous faculty, and

our current faculty, have been highly supportive of this idea, highly supportive of giving lots of feedback to students.” Continuing on, Stacey stated, “I feel really, really fortunate to call a group of counselor educators, colleagues. Don't get me wrong, we don't always see eye to eye on everything. But I would say, I've been around enough counselor educators to know what we have is pretty special. You know, so, I don't have to feel alone in things, and that feels nice, right? and we're all in it together.” Faculty is a support when managing disposition.

Continuing on, leaders in universities also have shown to be supportive when managing disposition. Sandi mentioned “the university gets it and supports it” in regards to assessing and managing CIT disposition. Also, Mary stated, “I think our strongest support is our department chair. He is phenomenal. He is supportive of everything that we do, and an excellent leader.” Lastly, Lizzie stated, “I work with a group of faculty that's very supportive and then within the Department of Education is also supportive.” Overall, the university leaders and faculty can be a support when defining, assessing, and managing disposition.

### ***Barriers***

As mentioned in the previous section, faculty and administration can be supportive, but these same people can also be a barrier to defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Micaela stated, “the biggest barrier to assessment of dispositional evaluations is when you have colleagues who are like no, that's not happening, almost like being gaslighted for lack of a better term.” In turn, Micaela described “I got my hands slapped, and I think that it makes it harder to bring up issues that occur in the future because you're not sure what response to anticipate.” This reticence to bring up students of concern could lead to issues of gatekeeping. Continuing on, Mary noted her worry related to faculty, “We are concerned that they may not have the buy in, because... they've never had to do this before.”

In addition to a lack of faculty support, administration can also be a barrier to defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Tony stated, “I think the biggest issue of support, is buy-in from administration, who are really in charge of our program.” For example, Jennifer stated, “if the institution and that next person up [department head, provost, dean, etc...] doesn’t understand the significance of professional dispositions for counselors, that can be a barrier.” Hannah provided an example of how administration can be a barrier:

I was at one university where the discussion was, yes, this is unprofessional behavior. Yes, we acknowledge it as unprofessional behavior, but we're not going to bring it forward to remediation, because the dean and the chair of the department will see this as a negative against us faculty as unable to control the behavior and if we bring remediation up, this student is likely to get angry enough to go to the chair and the dean and if we get that attention on us for this, it will look badly on us.

Overall, both faculty and administration can be a barrier when they do not have buy in or understand the importance of disposition to counselor education.

Another barrier is the overall complexity of disposition. Disposition complexity relates to operationalizing and assessing disposition due to its relational nature. For example, Jacob discussed the complex nature of disposition by stating, “that’s a tricky thing because how do you measure a belief or a value? So, I think that it does get a bit ambiguous, but we do our best to operationalize it.” In addition, Sandi stated, “situations where grades don't necessarily agree with dispositions, which can be a really tricky area. Dispositions are important, but if they're not reflected in grades it's harder for students to understand their importance.” Lastly, Erin stated, “When I think about barriers that are faced with assessment and disposition is the lack of a lack of uniform definition. Continuing on, the following quotes support the relational complexity of disposition. Hannah stated, “when it comes to dispositional traits, you know being able to navigate complex relationships with others, which is a part of that. It’s not always so easily checked.” In addition, Mollie stated,

I think that sometimes it's really challenging to do remediation for all aspects of professional disposition, because I think certain aspects of professional disposition, like behaviorally, timeliness, and organization those kinds of things are easier to assess and intervene with other aspects in terms of core values, beliefs and attitudes can be really challenging.

Disposition is complex to define and assess, which in turn impacts the ability to manage.

### **Personal Learning**

Participants report that they learned how to define, assess, and manage disposition through experience. All participants note previous experience as a contributing factor when learning how to define, assess, and manage disposition. The experience mentioned by participants can be broken down in two areas: education and employment.

### ***Employment***

A part of personal learning is experience through employment. Employment is a contributing factor of learning as participants describe learning from clinical work, the counseling field, counseling literature, and the council for accreditation of counseling and related educational programs (CACREP). Sandi described the learning process:

I've been involved with the program pretty much since its inception. So, I've watched it grow over time and we didn't start out having a professional dispositions measure. But as we grew and started to head toward accreditation. We knew that it was important thing to be doing, so, we started to look into the literature and started to talk amongst yourselves, amongst the faculty that was there in the beginning of the program, about the kinds of things that we felt were the things that made students successful, both during the program, and also as we watched them go out into the field. To be successful, what were the kinds of behaviors that they needed to show that they were able to do consistently? And then I think the faculty who were there originally were all also practitioners, in addition to being professors. So, we had that lens on the profession and what it takes to do that.

Based on Sandi's report, experience in the counseling field contributed to her personal learning of disposition. This same theme emerged from all participants.

For example, Micaela learned to assess disposition from experience as a professional counselor and stated, “[I learned] from the way that I assess clients in my clinical practice.” Kendra explained how her work experience prepared her to manage disposition, “the first job I ever had clinically was in a residential treatment facility... and they taught me how to deal with conflict, and they taught me how to be authentic, and how to build relationships and with a lot of diversity.” Paul added the importance of clinical experience when discussing CIT disposition, “The faculty and I have all been counselors...with extensive experience...so there's personal experience that goes into that.” In addition, Sara described learning from her employment experience, “the school I work for also does trainings every year and one training we do every year is how to give feedback and how to evaluate students.” Sara continued, “I’ve gone through quite a bit with every university that I’ve trained with for being a supervisor.” In the end, it is clear that employment prepares counselor educators to work CIT through clinic experience and training.

Continuing on, participants note the influence of the counseling field on their understanding and management of CIT disposition. The counseling field includes CACREP, research, and fellow counselor educators. Sandi noted “as we grew and started to head toward [CACREP] accreditation...we [faculty] started to look at what the literature was saying about disposition.” Micaela stated “CACREP gives us a lovely framework” when learning to set standards of assessing disposition. In addition, Jacob noted the importance of CACREP on disposition learning, “CACREP sets the groundwork...through the research.” Continuing on, Mary described how she has learned from the counseling field, “We’ve [Faculty have] looked at what other universities have...or anything that’s public.” Paul described learning about disposition, “I think we're always influenced by what's the best practice, but that's a basement

setting.” and also, “I think there's best practice from CACREP, but there's also standards within the industry.” Lastly, Olivia added to the consensus of the participants regarding personal learning of disposition from experience in the field, “I think going back to code of ethics, professional standards of what is commonly accepted within our profession” and “I think pragmatically a lot of it was influenced by being trained and in CACREP programs.” Overall, counselor educators learned about disposition from the counseling field.

### ***Education***

Another way counselor educators learned how to define, assess, and manage CIT disposition is from education which includes faculty mentors. Participants noted the importance of their own education playing a role in their personal learning. Jennifer stated, “my understanding of professional dispositions would be from my doctoral training, but before that, being a licensed professional counselor laid down the foundation.” Jacob shared, “I’m pretty thankful that the program that I was at for my grad program... [that] had a strong value for disposition already, so I got to learn and really take them on for myself through training.” Olivia learned about disposition “as a doctoral student, becoming aware of how the process works.” Heather explained how her education contributed to her learning process, “we were required to do a lot of this in our doctoral work and we were really integrated within [the process] especially like our second and third year within supervision and teaching.” Continuing on, Stacey described her disposition learning:

I did my doctorate at XXXX, and we're pretty intense about those kinds of things. And so, as a doc student, one of the strengths, I think, of the program was, I was involved all the way through as a doc student in all of that student evaluation process. I had that experience all the way through my doctoral training, to be able to then take to my work.

Education plays a major role in how counselor educators learn how to define, assess, manage CIT disposition. At this point in the learning process, doctoral students are given the opportunity to watch and even take part in the disposition management process.

Lastly, participants mention that faculty mentors directly discussed disposition management and demonstrated a professional disposition for participants. Micaela discussed learning disposition by “having a really strong clinician to mentor and guide me into becoming the kind of professional I knew I could be...[and] having a model of how to have very clear, honest conversations with students.” Mollie described a part of her learning, “I think my own relationship with my faculty members and the kinds of feedback that I received from them.” In addition, Mollie summarized her learning, “I would say probably my own training, my mentoring relationship, [and] my clinical supervisor.” Continuing on, Jacob stated, “I really learned through positive role modeling...or even through vulnerable conversations with a mentor.” Doctoral students learning around disposition benefited greatly from counselor educators who invested time and energy into future professionals. In the end, personal learning consists of experience with employment and education.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provide a look into how current counselor educators define, assess, and manage disposition. It starts with personal learning of disposition, which is done through education and experience. The definition of disposition has two parts which includes internal characteristics and external behaviors. Assessing disposition starts with early disclosure to CITs and consists of both informal and formal assessments. Managing disposition starts with informal remediation and moves to formal remediation if necessary. Formal remediation can end if successful or continue if unsuccessful or end with CIT dismissal from the program. In the end,

barriers consisted of the complex nature of disposition and lack of faculty and administrative support. Supports consisted of faculty and administration that understand the process and follow through with disposition. Overall, the data provides a detailed look into how counselor educators define, assess, and manage CIT disposition (See Appendix F for additional participant quotes).

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to explore how counselor educators define, assess, and manage counselors-in-training (CIT) disposition. Participants did answer the primary question of the study and provided insight into defining, assessing, and managing disposition. In addition, personal learning was a factor in how counselor educators currently define, assess, and manage CIT disposition. Lastly, the participants provided experiences on barriers and supports when defining, assessing, managing CIT disposition. The following chapter provides a discussion on the central contributions of the study and the significance of findings. In addition, this section will also provide a comparison of findings to current research, limitations of the study, and transferability. Lastly, future implications for practice and research in counselor education will be presented.

### **Defining Disposition**

Defining disposition is one of the central areas surrounding disposition in this study. Seventeen participants were interviewed to explore disposition. The resulting theme is that all counselor educators have a definition of disposition and that two main characteristics make up the definition. The two-part definition of disposition includes internal characteristics and external behaviors. Internal characteristics consist of values and beliefs. External behaviors are the manifestation of those beliefs and values and should match the counseling profession. In the end, the emergent themes of this study share the same theme with current definitions in the field.

Current research states that there is not one universal way to define disposition (Miller et al., 2020). Continuing on, Landon et al. (2021) stated “there is limited research informing a consensus definition of PDs [professional dispositions] or guidance in identifying specific counselor PDs that are fundamental to effective practice” (p. 145). Despite the lack of a universal

definition, participants did all have a definition that consisted of the same elements. The adopted definition of this study is the “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 97). Landon et al. (2021) developed a working definition for professional dispositions as a result of a qualitative research study with rehabilitation counselors which is, “the counselor’s temperament, mood, attitudes, personal characteristics, interpersonal abilities, and ethical behavior when engaged in professional counseling situations” (p. 152). The current definition provided by Landon et al. mirrors the two main areas participants noted when defining disposition. The internal characteristics in this definition would be attitudes and mood. The external behaviors that would be observed would be personal characteristics, interpersonal abilities, and ethical behaviors. In turn, all participants matched the core elements of this definition to include in internal characteristics and behaviors to become a professional counselor.

Continuing on, the following disposition definitions in the counseling field have behavioral elements and internal characteristics such as beliefs or values. A central pillar in counselor education is The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). In turn, CACREP (2016) defines disposition as “the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors that influence the counselor’s professional growth and interactions with clients and colleagues” (Glossary). Another counselor education definition consists of nine factors which include, cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal, personal wellness, personal–professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness, self-control, and suitability for the profession (Miller et al., 2020). In the end, both of these definitions describe internal parts of a person, such as values, beliefs, personal wellness, and self-control. Additionally, both definitions describe qualities or

actions that are observable behaviors, such as, interacting with clients and colleagues, ethical behaviors, boundary setting, and responsiveness. The two-part definition found in this study are the same themes that were found in counseling education literature.

### *Significance*

It is encouraging that all participants had a working definition and that the definition compliments counseling research. This shows that counselor educators are aware of the importance of disposition. In addition, the emergent theme shows that there is agreement on the core elements that make up a definition of disposition. The two-part definition can assist counselor educators in defining disposition as they manage this complex concept. Not only can the current findings assist counselor educators now, these findings can contribute to a universally accepted definition of disposition as future research is conducted.

Additionally, disposition definitions are used to create formal assessment tools used to evaluate CIT disposition. Disposition assessments will be discussed in the next section, but for the purposes of defining disposition, it is important to note that all formal assessments operationalize and define disposition to create a disposition assessment. In turn, as we move toward a universal definition we know that psychometrically sound assessments will follow.

In the present study, participants mentioned the Counseling Competency Scale (CCS) most when evaluating disposition, which is modeled and defined after CACREP standards and the ACA code of ethics (Swank et al., 2012). This is significant as it shows that counselor educators are mostly using the same definition of disposition based on the chosen formal assessment. In turn, the field of counselor education may be closer to a universally accepted definition of disposition, when compared to previous reports in current research. The counselor

education field may need to officially or formally adopt the CACREP or ACA definition of disposition to guide the counseling field and create consistency during assessment creation.

### **Assessing Disposition**

Assessing disposition is another major component in understanding and managing disposition. The results showed that participants first disclosed the evaluation process to CIT. Following disclosure, is the informal assessment and formal assessment of CIT. Each theme found in this study will be compared to previous research and significance will be discussed.

### ***Disclosure***

Disclosure of disposition evaluation relates to the informed consent process in counseling. Essentially, CIT should be aware of disposition standards, expectations, and evaluations processes. Participant themes showed that counselor educators inform CIT of how they will be evaluated throughout their program of study to set expectations and requirements. The emergent theme of disclosing evaluation requirements and process compliments CACREP standards (2016) that students are informed of program expectations and requirements. On the other hand, Martinez et al. (2020) found a theme of a “lack of transparency in gatekeeping, in that students were surprised by the gatekeeping processes” (p. 574). The results found by Martinez et al. (2020) could be contrary to current study results as the participants in each study differed. Martinez et al. (2020) participants were all doctoral students as the participants in the current study are all counselor educators. In turn, the differing experience levels could contribute to the results of each study being at odds.

### ***Informal***

All participants consistently use informal assessment by observing CIT in daily interactions that include all forms of communication, as well as, in-person interactions with

peers, faculty, staff, and clients. In addition, participants note that they use their personal therapeutic intuition when informally assessing CIT. This therapeutic intuition is informed by training and clinical experience. Informal assessments can consist of interviews, role plays, and even formal meetings to assess disposition and interpersonal fitness (Garner et al., 2020; McCaughan et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). Other ways counselor educators informally assess disposition is interactions with peers, supervisors, and faculty, which can include classroom and clinical settings (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). In sum, the emergent theme of informal assessment and strategies reported by participants are consistent with previous research that counselor educators use daily interactions to assess CIT disposition.

### ***Formal***

Continuing on, formal assessment was found to be an additional way of assessing CIT. A formal assessment consists of using tools built to measure CIT disposition. As mentioned earlier, the emergent theme found that counselor educators formally assess CIT, and the CCS was the most mentioned assessment used. A theme emerged that formal assessments are used according to CACREP standards throughout a CIT program of study. Current research notes that there are few disposition assessments that include psychometric testing (Garner et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2020). Current results of this study support previous research as there was not many assessment tools discussed and only one tool was mentioned more than once throughout data collection. While there is lack of full agreement from participants on using the same disposition assessment tool, it is important to note that assessment of disposition is occurring. Miller et al. (2020) note that the lack of a universally adopted definition can potentially lead to no assessment of CIT disposition. Compared to the results of the current study, counselor educators are both assessing informally and formally. In turn, previous research is not in agreement with a potential for not

assessing CIT disposition. The differing results are likely due to the fact that participants are interested and aware of the importance of disposition as this topic continues to be researched and measured, as required by CACREP.

### ***Significance***

The emergent themes of participants using both informal and formal assessments is encouraging for the counselor education field. The patterns found related to informal assessment are consistent with all counselor educators which is important as this is the first step to assessing disposition. Informal assessment starts the process of ensuring that competent counselors graduate from counseling programs. In addition, previous research noted the difficulty and likelihood of gateslipping and these counselor educators follow through with gatekeeping responsibilities. This is very encouraging as counselor educators are intentional to use formal assessments to support disposition evaluation. This will support students who need growth and allow for dismissal of students who are not fit for the field. More specifically, CIT disposition growth is supported by the use of formal assessments as formal assessments will have clear feedback and guidelines related to disposition areas in need of growth. On the other hand, counselor educators are supported by clear formal disposition assessments in the case of student dismissal. It is also important to note that counselor educators gravitate toward assessment tools that are psychometrically tested as the most used assessment tool is the CCS. This shows that counselor educators are attempting to use researched evaluations to best serve CIT.

### **Complexity**

While emerging themes found agreement on the same core elements of a definition and that counselor educators assess for disposition, the complexity of disposition was noted as a barrier for all participants. All participants referenced a difficulty with defining and assessing

disposition. Participants mentioned the difficulty in defining an attitude, value, or belief. In addition, participants noted the difficulty in defining disposition because a part of it is relational, which can be hard to operationalize. Participants noted that behavioral components of disposition are easier to measure when compared to values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Previous research agrees with participant themes that disposition is difficult to define and assess. For example, Rapp et al. (2018) found disposition to be the most difficult domain to measure when compared to clinical and academic domains. In addition, gateslipping is attributed to a lack of evidence in assessments (Olsen et al., 2016) and a lack of accurate assessments (Rapp et al, 2018). Additionally, counselor educators report feeling more comfortable evaluating academic and clinical competencies and find disposition to be “nebulously and abstractly defined” (p. 191). Lastly, disposition was found to be variable and subjective when compared to academic and clinical competency assessment of CIT (Lambie et. al., 2018). Previous research aligns with emergent theses, as participants found disposition to be difficult to define and assess.

### ***Significance***

While emergent themes support that participants, both define and assess disposition, it is important to note that disposition is still a difficult concept to pin down. A disposition definition is not universally agreed upon, therefore, assessments will all be slightly different. In turn, the potential for confusion during the management phase of disposition is still possible. If there is not agreement from the counseling field on how to define, assess, and manage disposition, it is possible that certain areas may not be assessed or managed by certain programs. Based on these findings, it is our responsibility to be mindful of potential confusion related to disposition and use assessments that are psychometrically tested. Lastly, if all counselor educators used sound

assessments, a definition could be adopted as there would be a definition tied to each formal assessment.

### **Managing Disposition**

Managing disposition is a vital part of the gatekeeping process in counseling programs, which can include remediation. CACREP (2016) states it is, “the ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to monitor and evaluate an individual’s knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required by competent professional counselors and to remediate or prevent those that are lacking in professional competence from the becoming counselors” (p. 45). To be sure that CIT are becoming competent counselors, both informal and formal remediation emerged as themes to manage disposition for participants. Participants reported that they start with informal remediation, which is one-on-one conversations to address the issue or concern and give CIT a chance to make changes. If the CIT makes changes based on counselor educator feedback and the informal remediation process is successful, students will continue in the program as normal. If the CIT does not make changes, the faculty moves on to formal remediation. Formal remediation was described by participants as a written contract that the CIT agrees to complete. Formal remediation can be successful or unsuccessful and lead to continued remediation or dismissal from the program.

CACREP (2016) requires counseling programs to evaluate and remediate students lacking competency. The results of the current study align with CACREP standards and remediation requirements. Previous research states, that despite CACREP requirement to gatekeep, there is not one framework that guides the counseling profession (McCaughan et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). In turn, there are several gatekeeping models proposed by counselor educator researchers. One gatekeeping model proposes four stages which includes,

preadmission, postadmission, remediation, and remediation outcome (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2010). The gatekeeping process is an ongoing process throughout the program. Counselor educators can assess formally or informally as needed to support CIT growth. In addition, participants will informally or formally remediate as needed to support CIT. In turn, previous research on gatekeeping models does complement the process that participants described.

Additionally, previous research states that the lack of clear guidelines can confuse counselor educators as they may understand gatekeeping policies, but misunderstand application (Schuermann et al., 2018). This was not found to be a barrier to managing disposition as participants demonstrated an understanding of remediation application. All participants gave examples of how they or their program applies remediation. This could be due to current research and continuing education as this article was written in 2018 which is shortly after the CACREP standards changed in 2016. This current study could be different as counselor educators have adjusted to new standards in the counseling field.

Another factor outside of misunderstanding application is counselor educator reluctance to fully embrace the gatekeeper role. This reluctance to accept the gatekeeper role is likely related to the humanist nature of counselors (Schuermann et al., 2018). All participants noted the importance of managing disposition as a part of their job description. Participants did note that managing disposition can be difficult, time consuming, and involve conflict. Despite the difficulties in managing disposition all described the responsibility to gatekeep as a counselor educator to protect clients from harm. This difference between results and previous research could be due to the type of people who volunteered to participate in research about disposition. These participants are passionate about gatekeeping effectively which would outweigh humanistic tendencies.

### *Administration*

A barrier that participants reported related to management is lack of administrative support. Participants noted that without the support of administration, the responsibility of managing disposition becomes very difficult. It is important to note that participants noted administration as possibly a support or barrier depending on the administrator. In turn, there is little research discussing administration support related to managing CIT disposition. For example, Martinez et al. (2020) note the importance of administrative support in research to develop a curriculum for teaching the gatekeeping processes. In the end, there is simply not enough research in this area as it relates to disposition.

### *Significance*

All participants have a way of managing disposition. This is important for the counseling field as it shows that created standards do assist counselor educators in upholding standards. In addition, counselor educators take their role as gatekeepers seriously to overcome any difficulties related to managing disposition. Despite the lack of clear guidelines to manage disposition, counselor educators have developed guidelines that are consistent across participants. This shows consistency in training, standards, and application.

Administration is a factor that should be discussed more often as a sound management process could be stifled if there is not support from administration. Counselor educators need to move beyond the development of a sound remediation process and involve administration to get buy-in and support. This would strengthen remediation processes and likely encourage counselor educators to walk through the remedial process knowing that they will be supported.

## **Personal Learning**

A key result in the current study revolves around how participants learned to define, assess, and manage disposition. This study found that participants learned to define, assess, and manage disposition in two main ways: education and employment. More specifically, educational learning occurs in the classroom, mentorship, and observation. For example, participants learned about the process while in their doctorate program where they learned and then applied the process through supervision and teaching opportunities. Observation or mentoring was learning from the modeling of counselor educators. Participants noted that they observed how their professors behaved professionally and even carried out remediation.

In addition, learning from employment includes job training, the counseling field, research, accrediting bodies, and clinical work. For example, participants described yearly trainings or meetings to discuss disposition and how to manage it. Participants described learning how to manage disposition by working in the field as a professional counselor. Also, the counseling field provides research, conferences, and standards to assist in personal learning about disposition.

### ***Define***

Overall, current research is limited when exploring how counselor educators learn to define, assess, and manage disposition. More specifically, there is a lack of research related to how counselor educators learned to define disposition. Previous and current research discusses the variable nature of definitions, proposed definitions, and the need for a universally accepted definition (Landon et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2020). As it relates to current themes of the study, participants used literature, the counseling field, and experience to develop a disposition

definition. In turn, counseling literature was found to assist participants in learning about disposition.

### ***Assess***

Research is also limited when exploring how counselor educators learn to assess disposition. One example is provided by Garner et al. (2020) as they note that training videos are used to increase rater-reliability when using disposition assessments. The prevalence and use rates of video training was not reported and in the current study no participants reported using video training for disposition assessments. This does relate to an emerged theme in the current study as participants noted that they do learn from the counseling field. Continuing on, previous and current research focuses on the need for psychometrically tested disposition assessments and proposing assessments for disposition evaluation (Freeman et al., 2017; Garner et al., 2020; Garner et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2020). Participants did learn about assessments from the counseling field and literature.

### ***Manage***

As for managing disposition Bodner (2012) stated “faculty and supervisors may receive little guidance on how to implement such procedures in a highly ethical manner and/or how to approach complex and challenging gatekeeping dilemmas” (p. 60). In addition, Martinez et al. (2020) created a way to teach doctoral students the gatekeeping process and “with limited publications centered on doctoral preparation and a generally minimal focus on pedagogy, the instructional approaches to prepare doctoral students for gatekeeping are largely unknown” (p. 563). Current research states that we lack a formal way to teach and prepare counselor educators for managing disposition. Additionally, current research highlights the difficult nature of managing disposition (McCaughan et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2020; Rapp, et al., 2018;

Schuermann et al., 2018). Compared to the current study, participants learned from clinical work, education, and the counseling field. This is different from previous research because there is no specific research that answers how counselor educators learn to manage disposition. Instead, there are models of gatekeeping in counseling literature to assist counselor educators.

### ***Significance***

The emergent themes of personal learning are helpful to better understand how counselor educators learn about disposition. The learning process is multi-faceted and includes education and employment. On the other hand, research is limited as it relates to the overall learning process. The counseling education field can take this opportunity to be more intentional to provide systematic learning opportunities related to defining, assessing, and managing disposition.

### **Limitations**

The methodological integrity is threatened by researcher biases. To avoid this concern the researcher collected several points of data, conducted members checks, and an external audit. To be sure the data can be trusted the researcher followed methodological parameters throughout data collection and analysis.

Continuing on, the two-part definition of disposition found as a theme is encouraging, but it is still lacking. The broad nature of the results related to a two-part definition of disposition leaves the need for further refinement and narrowing. Landon et al. (2021) stated that continued refinement is needed on the definition of disposition, even after proposing a working definition in their qualitative research which only focuses on defining disposition. Another limitation is part of the collected sample. For example, mostly women participated in the study, which limits

perspectives from other genders or orientations. Lastly, the study was limited to only two ethnicities which narrows the cultural perspective on disposition.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation of the study is related to the sample. For example, experience levels of counselor educators varied from 1 year to 30 years of supervision experience, which could potentially influence perspective on disposition. In addition, all interviews were limited to virtual interviews due to COVID. Virtual interviews can make some people disconnected from the interviewer. In addition, virtual interviews can have potential tech issues, which did occur in the current study as one interview recording was lost and several video links did not work, while audio capability functioned.

Lastly, another delimitation of the study is that only participants from CACREP programs were enlisted to participate. Non-CACREP accredited schools will not be accounted for and yet those counselors continue to serve clients in the field. It would be important to understand if non-CACREP schools are defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition.

### **Transferability**

Qualitative research is not meant to be generalizable therefore these results cannot be compared to other counselor educators. The results only contained counselor educators from CACREP programs. Therefore, these results would be difficult to transfer when accounting for non-CACREP accredited counseling programs. Instead, these results should be used to further research dispositions and guide future research. In turn, these results could be used to support counselor educators as they define, assess, and manage disposition. More specifically, counselor educators at CACREP accredited programs could use these findings to assist in the definition adoption process as previous research and current findings agree that definitions consist of

internal characteristics and external behaviors to describe professional disposition. Additionally, counselor educators can bolster the assessment process by ensuring a combination of both informal and formal assessment tools. Lastly, counselor educators should be better able to develop intentional remediation plans for CIT because the student and educator have clarity on disposition definition and assessments. The gained clarity of disposition definition and assessment tools should allow for clearer conversations around disposition and thoughtful remediation plans. In the end, current findings are transferable to counselor educators as they continue to gatekeep in counseling programs.

### **Implications**

Implications for counselor education practice includes more intentionality when defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Counseling programs can adopt a definition and assessment for disposition and ensure that CIT are aware of expectations. In addition, a management process that includes informal remediation, formal remediation, and remediation outcomes can create clarity for CIT and counselor educators. These steps will create a culture that promotes professional dispositions and ensures that CIT grow or are dismissed. Overall, the findings have the potential to assist counselor educators in defining, assessing, and managing disposition.

### **Defining**

Counselor educators can use the current study to examine current definitions and/or help in the disposition definition adoption process. It is important that counseling programs have a clear disposition definition to create clarity for counselor educators, CIT, and administration. Counselor educators can use the two-part definition found in the current study to assist in developing a definition or adoption process. When adopting a disposition definition it should consist of both internal characteristics and external behaviors. While a universal definition would

be helpful for the counseling field the flexibility to highlight or focus on certain characteristics of disposition could be helpful for all universities. For example, a tier one research school and a small private Christian school may want to focus on specific characteristics that are relevant to their program or mission. With flexibility in mind, I propose a frame work to defining disposition to guide the definition adoption or creation process. A proposed disposition definition framework based on the findings of this study would be: Disposition is the internal characteristics and external behaviors that contribute to becoming a professional counselor. In turn, all universities would have a standard and guidance when adopting or developing a disposition definition, which will create consistency across the counseling field. Lastly, a strong definition would then contribute to a clear disposition assessment, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **Assessing**

The current findings provide an approach to disposition assessment in counselor education. First, adopt a disposition definition to provide a clear understanding of what characteristics or behaviors are being assessed. Next, ensure that both informal and formal disposition assessments are occurring. Informal assessment should be used to assess how CIT are interacting with peers, faculty, and supervisors. Additionally, counseling programs should adopt a formal disposition evaluation. The formal evaluation will describe and operationalize disposition, which will provide counselor educators with clarity when assessing CIT disposition. In then end, counselor educators will have more confidence to assess when it is clearly defined and operationalized.

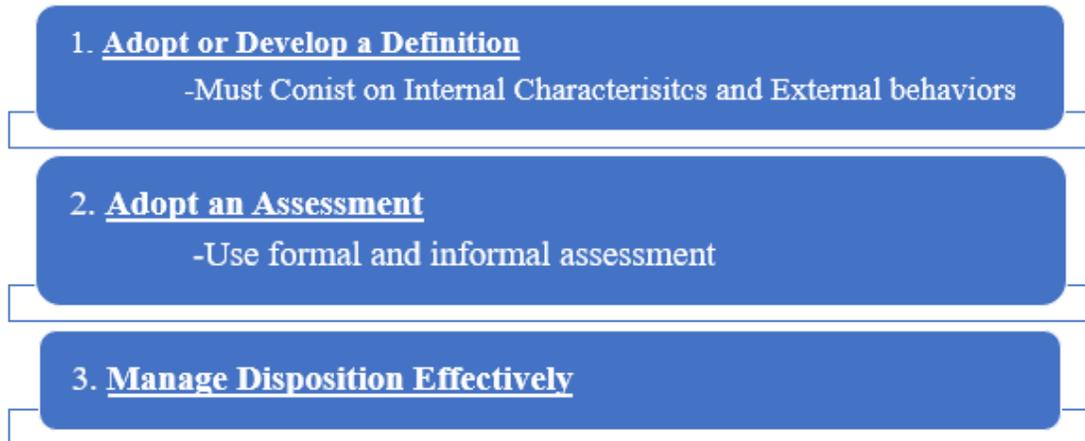
### **Managing**

After counselor educators have a clear definition and way to assess disposition the next phase is management. The creation of common language through an adopted definition and assessment could assist with conversations around disposition between faculty and CIT. In addition, the greater clarity around disposition could aid counselor educators as they create more comprehensive and disposition specific remediation plans. In the end, the common language and clarity has the potential to make the disposition management process easier and more effective.

### **The Gatekeeping Disposition Model**

In the end, these findings provide a model of how counselor educators can gatekeep disposition effectively. Disposition is complex and difficult to measure and the following three steps can guide counselor educators and universities as they gatekeep disposition (See Figure 1). First, adopt or develop a two-part definition which consists of internal characteristics and external behaviors as this is consistent with the current findings and the counseling field. Second, adopt or develop a psychometrically sound formal assessment to operationalize disposition, set expectations, and provide clarity for CIT and counselor educators. Lastly, manage disposition with a focus on the adopted definition and assessment to promote growth in CIT. In the end, this three-step guide can increase confidence in counselor educators when gatekeeping disposition. Lastly, the clarity of gained by using these guidelines could potentially lower anxiety in CIT as they have a better understanding of disposition. Overall, this model provides a process to gatekeep disposition effectively.

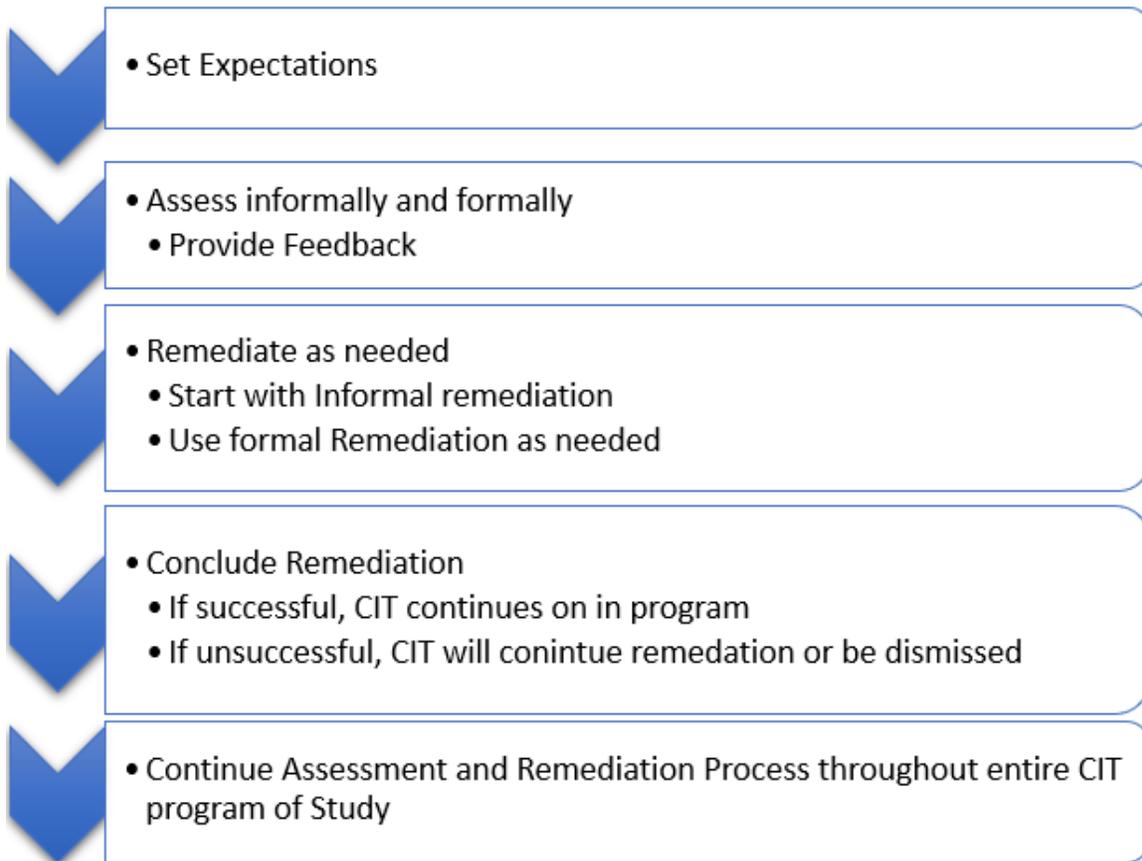
Figure 1. The Gatekeeping Disposition Model



### **The Disposition Management Model**

The gatekeeping disposition model provides a framework for establishing a gatekeeping process for disposition. The disposition management model provides guidance on how to practically gatekeep throughout a CIT program of study (See Figure 2). First, set expectations for CIT by defining disposition and disclosing how assessment and management will occur. Then counselor educators assess informally and formally throughout a CIT program of study. After assessing disposition, provide CIT with feedback on professional and unprofessional dispositions. Following feedback, a counselor educator will remediate as needed based on unprofessional disposition of CIT. Remediation may start with informal remediation to give a chance for CIT to make necessary changes. If informal remediation is unsuccessful, move on to formal remediation to grow the CIT. If formal remediation is successful, the CIT will continue on in their program. If formal remediation is unsuccessful, CIT may be dismissed or continue on formal remediation. In the end, this assessment and remediation process will continue throughout a CIT program of study. Overall, the gatekeeping disposition model and disposition management model can assist counselor educators in building a gatekeeping process and managing disposition effectively.

Figure 2. The Disposition Management Model



### Future Research

Research implications include definition needs, assessment needs, management needs. Disposition definitions need further research to further narrow and solidify a universally accepted definition. A Delphi study could be used to develop a universal definition as a consensus on disposition could be found by disposition experts in our field. Once a universally accepted definition is accepted, an assessment based on that definition could be created to assist in the gatekeeping process. The created formal assessment tool would then need to be psychometrically tested to ensure that it is reliable and valid. Future research should consist of tests of inter-rater reliability to be sure all counselor educators are assessing disposition accurately. This research could be done by having counselor educators rate CIT disposition

based on the same case study and then compare scores. Beyond assessing disposition, research related to the effectiveness of specific interventions to manage disposition would be helpful for counselor educators during the remediation process. In the end, all three main areas of definition, assessment, and management of disposition need further research.

Another area of future would be to exploring how counselor educators learn to define, assess and manage disposition. This exploration could ensure that there is consistent training and future application around disposition. Lastly, current disposition research does not fully and explicitly address the role or impact of social and cultural identities on disposition and gatekeeping. In turn, research on how disposition relates to social and cultural identities would be needed ensure for inclusivity and equity.

### **Conclusion**

Professional disposition is an important characteristic to CIT development. Disposition is required to be assessed and managed as needed in CACREP accredited programs. The importance of disposition is clear but yet the counseling education field faces some hurdles. Previous research notes that defining disposition is complex and there is a lack of a universally accepted definition in the counselor education field. Additionally, there is a lack of formal assessments to measure disposition. Continuing on, counselor educators are required to gatekeep and remediate and yet there are not clear guidelines on how to manage disposition. In turn, this study aimed to explore how counselor educators define, assess, and manage disposition.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the definition, assessment, and management of disposition. More specifically, a constructivist grounded theory was used to explore disposition. Grounded theory provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of counselor

educators. Counselor educators from CACREP accredited programs volunteered to participate in the study and completed semi-structured interviews.

The findings of the study consisted of emergent themes around defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition. The first theme found was that participants have a definition for disposition and it consists of two parts: internal characteristic and external behaviors. Continuing on, participants use both informal and formal assessments when evaluating CIT disposition. Another theme is that participants manage disposition informally and formally. Participants then noted that they learned about defining, assessing, and managing disposition from education and employment. Lastly, participants noted barriers and supports that contributed to defining, assessing, and managing disposition. Barriers included the complexity of disposition and lack of administration support. Supports included other faculty members and administration.

In the end, the findings of this study can potentially help counselor educators to better define, assess, and manage CIT disposition. For example, counselor educators can adopt a definition that consists of internal characteristics and external behaviors. Additionally, a clear definition can assist in adopting a formal assessment or creation of a disposition assessments. Lastly, a clear definition and assessment could assist in the disposition management process. While CIT disposition needs future research related to definition, assessment, and management, participants can be proud of the work they have completed as they have overcome many complexities and a lack of assessments related to disposition and continue to still assess and manage disposition to produce professional counselors. In the end, counselor educators have developed an effective process to define, assess, and manage disposition, but we can continue to grow and refine our processes.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

My name is Ryan M. Cowell and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Under the advisement of my dissertation chair, David D. Christian, Ph.D., I am conducting research regarding the experiences of counselor educators related to professional dispositions of counselor-in-training.

The focus of this study is to better understand how counselor educators define, assess, and manage professional dispositions of counselors-in-training. My hope is that the results of this study support counselor educators in the gatekeeping process by better understanding how professional disposition is defined, assessed, and managed.

Individuals who participate in this study will be asked to complete one online confidential interview. Interviews are expected to last between 1 to 1.5 hours and will be audio and video recorded via GoToMeeting.

**I am seeking counselor educators who are currently serving/employed in a CACREP accredited counseling program.**

If you are eligible and willing to participate, please follow this *link* (updated link to informed consent and demographics on Qualtrics will be added after IRB approval). If you have questions or concerns please contact me at rcowell@uark.edu or 831-801-8935. If you know anyone else who fits these criteria and may be willing to participate, I would greatly appreciate if you passed this message along.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan M. Cowell, M.S., LPC  
Doctoral Candidate  
Counselor Education and Supervision  
The University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

### **Information sheet about participation in a research study**

**Study Title:** Exploring How Counselor Educators Define and Manage Student Disposition Throughout the Gatekeeping Process

**Investigators:** Ryan M. Cowell and Dr. David Christian

#### ***Purpose of the Study and your Participation***

You are invited to participate in a study to explore how counselor educators are defining, assessing, and managing student disposition throughout the gatekeeping process. By completing this research, I hope to assist counselor educators in the gatekeeping process by gaining a greater understanding of Counselor-In-Training (CIT) disposition.

#### ***Participation in the research study***

If you take part in this study you will be asked to participate in one, online, audio and video recorded interview and at least one additional follow-up consultation that can take place on in an online format, via phone or email. The initial interview will be approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The post interview follow-up consists of a short interview or email exchange that allows you to add or modify any information from the initial interview. Additionally, the post interview follow-up allows the researcher to clarify information and be sure he is interpreting the information you provided in the way you meant it to be understood.

Participation is completely voluntary, you can choose to discontinue participation at any time with no consequences.

#### ***Benefits of participation***

A potential benefit of participating in this study could be the solidification or development of your personal approach to gatekeeping. In addition, the knowledge gained from this study may help counselor educators better define, assess, and manage disposition.

#### ***Risks and discomforts***

Risks of participating in this study may include discomfort as discussing the gatekeeping process and disposition may be distressing. However, these risks are not likely to cause any serious harm to your mental or physical health. You may consider not participating if you feel this is a serious risk for you.

### **Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study**

#### ***Costs***

There is no financial cost to the participant for taking part in this study.

#### ***Participant Privacy and Research Record Confidentiality***

You will choose a pseudonym upon consent to participate. That pseudonym will be used to identify your information. Your pseudonym will briefly be linked with your first name and contact information, so that the primary investigator can contact you for a member check and follow up interview. This information will be stored in a secure file on an encrypted flash drive.

Once follow up interviews have been completed, this information will be destroyed so that the data you provided cannot be linked back to you.

Your interview will be audio- and video-recorded and reviewed only by the principle researcher. An external auditor or other affiliated researchers may read the de-identified transcript of the interview, but will not have any access to identifying information. All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. While the data resulting from your participation may be used in publications and/or presentations, your identity will not be disclosed.

***Contact information***

If you have any question prior to or during participation please contact the principle researcher, Ryan M. Cowell, at rcowell@uark.edu or 831-801-8935. You may also contact the dissertation chair, David D. Christian, at ddchrist@uark.edu.

In addition, this research is being overseen by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, you may contact them at:

Iroshi (Ro) Windwalker, CIP  
IRB Coordinator  
Research Compliance  
109 MLKG Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
Ph. 479.575.2208  
Fax 479.575.6527

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### Start:

- Introductions
- Review Demographics

### Opening

- Thinking back to your experience with students, what are some important factors or characteristics that are important for defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition?

### Define

- *Disposition*: The “core values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs needed to become an effective and competent professional” (Spurgeon et al., 2012, p. 97).
- Tell me about your understanding of professional disposition as it relates to counseling and counselor education and supervision?
- How do you define CIT disposition?
  - What factors have contributed to that definition?

### Assess

- How do you assess CIT disposition?
  - What factors contribute to your assessment of CIT disposition?
  - Do you use formal or informal disposition assessments?
- How have you learned to assess CIT disposition?
  - Examples: Education, experience, conference, workshops, readings, or program

### Manage

- How do you manage CITs who exhibit unprofessional disposition?
  - What factors contribute to how you manage unprofessional disposition?
  - Do you remediate CIT’s for lack of professional disposition?
  - Do you use informal or formal remediation?
  - Where did this process originate/develop?
- How do you respond to CITs who exhibit appropriate professional disposition?

### Barriers and Supports

- As you look back at handling disposition, what barriers, if any, have you experienced when defining, assessing, or managing disposition?
  - What contributed to those difficulties?
- What supports, if any, have you experienced when defining, assessing, or managing disposition?

- What contributed to feeling supported?

**Last Question**

- Is there anything else important to defining, assessing, and managing CIT disposition that you would like to share? (If participant asks I would provide examples: cultural factors, religious background, SES, sexual orientation, etc...)

## Appendix D: Demographic Survey

1. What is your age? (fill in the blank)
2. What is your identified sex? (fill in the blank)
3. Please list your ethnicity? (fill in the blank)
4. Are you licensed by your state to offer counseling services?
  - a. If yes, list licensure type (LPC, MFT, School Counseling, CRC, etc...)
  - b. If yes, are you currently practicing? (fill in the blank)
  - c. If yes, how many years of clinic experience do you have? (fill in the blank)
5. Are you licensed by your state to offer clinical supervision? (Yes or No)
  - a. If yes, how many years of supervision experience do you have?
6. Does the university you work for hold CACREP accreditation? (Yes or No)
7. What is your current title at the university you are employed? (Select option that best apply)
  - a. Professor of practice
  - b. Instructor of Counseling
  - c. Tenure Track
  - d. Lecture Track
  - e. Clinical Track
  - f. Other (Fill in the blank)
8. What is your current rank at the university you are employed? (Select options that best apply)
  - a. Assistant Professor
  - b. Associate Professor

c. Full Professor

d. Other (Fill in the blank)

9. How many years have you worked for your CACREP accredited program? (Fill in the blank)

## Appendix E: Approval Letter



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**To:** Ryan Cowell  
**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 01/26/2021  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 01/26/2021  
**Protocol #:** 2012305204  
**Study Title:** Exploring How Counselor Educators Define and Manage Student Disposition Throughout the Gatekeeping Process  
**Expiration Date:** 01/11/2022  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data. cc: David D Christian, Investigator

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## Appendix F: Participant Quotes to Support Themes

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### Defining Disposition

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**To:** Ryan Cowell  
**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 01/26/2021  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 01/26/2021  
**Protocol #:** 2012305204  
**Study Title:** Exploring How Counselor Educators Define and Manage Student Disposition Throughout the Gatekeeping Process  
**Expiration Date:** 01/11/2022

Sara:

- “were looking at values and what it takes to be a professional counseling.”
- “Values and beliefs are going to lead to dysfunction of a person versus functionality.”

Sandi:

- “Openness to new ideas...adaptability, collaboration, particularly wit others, but also collaboration with faculty...the willingness to accept and use feedback, awareness of a person’s own impact on others.”
- Ability to accept both personal and professional responsibility...the ability to express feelings in an appropriate kind of manner, and to also to deal with conflict, as it comes, and then self-reflection.”
- “I agree that values underlie all of that. But, I think what we observe is the behavior.”

Micaela:

- “I would define a professional disposition as, um, kind of the qualities, the skills, the attitudes, and even the values that are associated with a particular profession or an occupation.”
- “So I think that there's just kind of like this knowing, doing, and then being, are also becoming process that's associated with developing the disposition that's necessary for counselor work”

Mary:

- “I look at student dispositions as students graduating, with the ability to be professional counselors, to follow the code of ethics and to be able to treat all clients with dignity and worth.”

Jennifer:

- “what are the things that we want to see our students demonstrate across the program, not just academically, but also...their relationships with their peers, with your faculty, with your advisors, with administrators... and that gives us a little bit of an insight about potentially, maybe, not all the way, but potentially what it might look like in the field”

Hannah:

- “And it is that one part beyond just the skills you demonstrate, the knowledge you learn, but then who you are and how you can be as a professional, is what I say is professional disposition.”
- “so really what I'm looking for in professional dispositions, in particular, are those attitudes, the values, professional demeanor and behaviors of a counseling professional.”

Paul:

- “we have a set outline of probably 10 or 12 dispositional actions or behaviors that we provide feedback too for students. And part of that starts when they interview.”
- “I think there's probably 10 or 12 behaviors that we look at, like, you know, professionally.”

Erin:

- “So when a professional dispositions I think about traits, I think about attitudes. I think about personal characteristics, also I think about behaviors. It can be things, ranging from, professionalism, values, beliefs, it can also relate to ethics. It can also relate to, you know, cultural competency. It can also relate to when we think about professional dispositions is for is that professional orientation and identity amongst other variables when I think about dispositions. I can add receptivity to feedback and being able to honor diversity.”

Lizzie:

- “For me, it's about the values, beliefs and behaviors that are needed to become effective and competent counselors. Those are demonstrated through verbal and non-verbal cues and my mind is either not always directly visible, but are inferred by one's actions.”

Olivia:

- “looking at those intangibles, when you think about a counselor within the Counselor. Ed. Program aside from the academics, what are those qualities that make them prepared to

be in our profession? Yeah, so the values, the behaviors, yeah, Spurgeon had a great definition, I completely agree with it”

Stacey:

- “So, when I think about dispositions, I think about things like an ability to empathize with another human being and ability to be compassionate, to engage flexibility and adaptability to be non-judgmental, all of those and I could probably go on. Our program has kind of come to a list of responsibility, integrity, emotional maturity.
- “those internal elements of who we are, that oftentimes, of course, hopefully manifest themselves behaviorally”

Mollie:

- “their attitude toward you know, themselves, their clients, their workplace. Being able to look at how they are understanding their own beliefs and values, and how that gets brought into the session in a helpful or unhelpful way. Looking at different ways they engage and interact with their clients, and also their co-workers. Like, so, not just with clients, but their general behavior in the workplace setting and, you know, how they respond to their co-workers, their supervisors, their bosses, their clients. And then looking at how all of those things like fit together, and affects their way of being.”

Heather:

- “I think it's important to you, like, how you respond to your professors, how you respond to your classmates.”

- “I kind of look Like how are they interacting with their classmates? What are their social skills? What are their critical skills? Like, what, what am I noticing about their ability to properly engage within the environment and within the coursework.”
- “there is, like, interpersonal, personal, academic, and emotional, you know, I think all of that encompasses it.”

Angie:

- “I think about do they have appropriate boundaries? Can they accept feedback? Do they know when to seek supervision? Like, do they know, is there some meta knowledge about knowing when they don't know? And, if they make a mistake, which students always do...can they like, be open about that versus kind of like trying to hide it or gloss over it, or not bring it up?”
- “having attitudes of openness and self-reflection.”

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### **Assessing Disposition**

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Jacob

- “the CCS-R is a counselor competency scale-revised that’s an assessment that we use for practicum or for counseling in general.”
- “I think the big thing is just a collaboration. I want to talk to other faculty.”
- “it is some sort of behavior that has occurred that is not in alignment with values, or ethics, or whatever.”

Sara:

- “so we use a CCS-R, which is the competency evaluation tool.”
- “it’s laid out, its very black and white...and evaluations from supervisors are formal.”
- “How we talk to each other, and how we interact with each other...verbal to non-verbal...and really evaluating behavior.”

Sandi:

- “But it does open the door for some pretty good discussion around what's going on with students, particularly those students that may be struggling with those dispositions.”
- “I would just say that it's a work in progress....as we talk about revision and revision of process and form.”
- “a student's going to get at least six, sometimes seven different evaluation opportunities throughout the course of the program. So, in an ideal world, of course, those will grow and develop over time. And hit “meets or exceeds” and in each of the areas.”

Paul:

- “We do an evaluation form, we have an evaluation form that’s done at multiple points throughout the program.”

Erin:

- “When I’m trying to assess disposition, it can be both formally and informally.”

Stacey:

- “Sometimes is a very informal discussion around concerns about this disposition or this lack of disposition.”

- “We actually have a dispositions evaluation...[and] its on every syllabus so students are aware that these are things that you’re being assessed on.”

Angie:

- We have a formal assessment...we’ll use in different classes and that instructor uses it for every student in the class.”

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### **Managing Disposition**

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Jacob:

- “dispositions are often used in gatekeeping...[and] remediation plan[s].”
- “a disposition assessment is kind of a trigger for a remediation plan”.
- “we have a formal assessment now that is built into every syllabus. Its not necessarily used automatically for all students, but it is included in the clinical courses and can be triggered for remediation type issues.”
- Regarding informal “I think there is some intuition to it...[and] is often spurred by negative examples.”
- “as things elevate certainly remediation informally or more formally.”
- “CACREP has it built-in with clinical courses”
- “I like to be realty intentional” to disclose “I’m going to evaluate you, we have dispositions built-in.”
- We’re able to say this was a violation and this is what we want to see to see it changed.”

Sara:

- “which sometimes means working with them one-on-one.”
- “Yeah, I think it’s very relational and psychoeducational.”
- I believe you have to teach them that, you have to start at the bottom...I think you do a lot of feedback...I start with conversation.
- “Being very clear in the evaluation process.”
- “You do have to get formal if things are not lining up the way that they need to for that student to be able to grow and learn.”
- “That is a really important step to make, if it's necessary, because I don't want somebody going forward into a program, and that's that gate keeping piece.”
- “it is formal, it is a write up, it is a conversation with the school, it is an agreement to: this is what we expect within the school, or this is what to expect at my organization or this is what I expect in the field.”
- , through great critique of a paper... and you encourage them to continue doing it.”

Sandi:

- “And then for those students where there are problems with the dispositions we insist on a meeting, the others can opt to have a meeting or not.”
- “the students are informed of the of the dispositional process in their very first semester and it's in the handbook. And then in our course, our orientation to the profession course, there is time spent on, what we call a PPR, a professional performance review.”
- “So, that kind of verbal feedback process, that goes on, that's part of the management of it. The other part of the management, is being consistent about the releasing of results [feedback].”

- “So, if a student isn't at least developing in a dispositional area, what we say we do is sit down with that student and talk with them about it and try and we have developed remedial plans specific around those dispositional areas, written remedial plans.”
- When we have places where the development of dispositional areas have not developed as we would like them to over time. We have created formal written remediation where students have had to reflect on the dispositional area, study it a bit and write something to us about what that means to them, how they would intend to improve. So, we've done written remediation like that. And then we've also had situation where we've we revisited that written remediation a second time, because it didn't rise to the level satisfaction of the faculty that student had actually, really understood even with a fully written paper basically on several dispositional areas. What they had ownership of in not meeting those dispositions.
- “we would respond by meeting with them and cheering them on...we are constantly interacting with our students... So, I think they have a pretty good sense, that they are doing well.”

Micaela:

- “what I do or the links to intensity of my intervention is going to vary depending on the intensity of the unprofessionalism or the intensity of the dispositional issue.”
- “So, for a student who has a relatively minor thing going on... like, hey, can I borrow after class for just like a second, just real quick conversation.”
- So, for a relatively minor thing, just a quick conversation and, and what I do next would really depend on how the student received that information. And so, I would say, probably, and this is a rough estimate, probably 75% of the time, or maybe even 80, that

goes really well. Oh my gosh, Dr. M., I didn't even realize I was doing that. Thanks for letting me know. Usually it's like that, it's very well received most of the time.

- “If I have kind of an, I've given some kind of feedback to a student, that is not well received. I usually, like to contextualize how I am interpreting that by reaching out to my colleagues.”
- “Yes, so some of that depends on where they are programmatically. So, like, if this if I am working with a second semester student and they're like not about to go into practicum and potentially hurt clients that may be and more informal kind of mentorship conversation that I have with the student. I don't typically unless it's like time for a formal dispositional evaluation unless something rather egregious has happened.”
- “So, if we're at the beginning of a programmatic experience and there's less urgency, I would prefer for that to me, a more informal kind of a mentorship process. If a student is exhibiting significant dispositional issues and they're about to be approved for a practicum, that's a completely different ballgame because then that point my professional responsibility shifts from counselor educator to protecting a client from potential harm. And so that might necessitate a more formalized experience of a kind of here's your remediation plan. Here's how we're going to be assessing. That you're moving in the right direction professionally before we will release you to enroll in this class.”

Mary:

- “moving from informal to formal is that we're noticing that informal is not actually producing the results that we want...so, we need to have it formal so, we can document and measure the progress.”

- “an informal talk to your advisor. That's what we're doing now currently. You know, if I'm the advisor, then they meet with me.”

Jennifer:

- “based on what our assessment plans are, like now, where we're at? We try to, you know, make contact with at least...once a year to check in, like, hey, we think you're doing, and we have dispositions that we're looking at and then we, you know, try to let them know how they're doing with those. Or, if there have been some conversations in our faculty meetings, or another place where we're assessing for dispositions.”
- “I'm going to start with the students that are doing well. Because I think those students often get left to the side, which, I mean, it's like, like the kid that's in the classroom, that the behavioral problem, they get all the attention, because, you know, they, they were the behavior student. They needed a little bit more support, whereas the children who are probably behaving, they don't get as much attention.”
- “everyone got a letter, but depending on, if you're doing well, or if there were areas that we wanted, that we were faculty were concerned about”
- “My kind of thing that I do for students is in my all my classes I say, I go over it, and I say it. For me if there is something that I'm concerned about the form will not be a surprise for you...You will know, and the form is a way for us to provide, like, a formal way, of giving you some kind of support.”
- “I think that the more we have conversations around the feedback we're giving to students around professional disposition, I think the easier it becomes if something bigger comes up.”

Kendra:

- “I strongly encourage you to look at X, Y, and Z or consider this or that and if you would like to schedule a time to talk through this, I'd be happy to process it further with you. That's sort of the first level of where I'm, I'm pushing back, I'm letting them know. Or, I'll even go to, If I disagree with this statement, I think this might have more to do with this, and I encourage you to give me a call, or schedule some, you know, if it's not to the point where I need to intervene. I lay it with them, and I say, you do something with this.”
- “Then there's the actual student remediation cases, so I believe the philosophy that I have is that this, if you're my student and I'm seeing these things, it's my job to correct it.”
- “So, then the real compartment issues that are really heavy, that I've worked with over the years, our direct student contact, they're given a remediation plan. As the director of doing remediation, oftentimes it was my job to with a committee to assess what the student needed, what the level of remediation was needed, and then assign them to a faculty, but I would meet with them first. That was probably the toughest. So, you know, to me, everything else is easy, because, once you, once, you're signing students telling them, Oh, by the way, you're now you have a remediation plan, because you did this, this, and this. And you're going to have to do this for, you know, three months, and meet with this faculty member, and pass this. Otherwise, you will be subject to possibly being, let go from the program”

Hannah:

- “So, I'm open, honest. I'm transparent. And when things, when I have a sense that this is something of a struggle for a student, I work with them in a developmental manner to

help them move forward with gaining more awareness of self, gaining more of a perspective on what evaluation is, if there are little, if, if it's hard for them and they become defensive.”

- “it would be a faculty discussion about whether or not we wanted to remediate the student and whether or not we wanted to pull in that process, or whether we felt that the advisor should just talk to the student and kind of mitigate going to remediation. And that's been very, that's very healthy, right? Faculty have noted a problem and said, we'd like this change, we see this is unprofessional behavior, recognizing it, discussing it, moving forward, and if you persist and continue with go to Remediation.”

Paul:

- “if a student struggles on something, then we put them on a growth plan. So we have, we use the form, but there's more things that we add to the form on specific issues that come up.”
- “It's about the student, and I hope they make a change, and I'm always hopeful, and I say that I'm concerned, I hope you decide to do this, but you need to know what's coming, and if, if you can't turn it around here, you're tying our hands.”
- [if a student is doing well] “it's the same process, except there's not a growth plan component to this.”

Erin:

- “we have that informal meeting. I invite the other faculty member, we confer, next thing. We may refer their students for assessment points So, we may, you know, refer that person to the committee before we get to remediation, like this is designed to help you.

You know, this is the next step so that when we're like, this is not punitive. So that way, we have been like, we put all of these things in place.”

- “So, we'll do that and then after that part we complete the plan and let's say, for example, they are non-compliant. Then we move towards remediation. So, let's say you do remediation and remediation is not successful, then we meet again as a committee and the student has the right to bring whomever they choose. You know, we set a date. And then from there, determine what's going to be the necessary course of action.”
- [When students are doing well] “So, I try to acknowledge the work that they're doing.”

Lizzie:

- “We have a step by step process where, you know, first, you know, we bring to the student's attention...So, this is what's going on, I would like, you take some time to reflect on that. You know, I'm sure that's not necessarily how you intend things, but this is how it's impacting. I'm wondering what you think about that. And, if they're not responsive, then it kind of goes to faculty, and the head of our department. The person who's our chair, might meet with a student one-on-one. And, then, it goes from there into, like, it goes on and on, until if there's still no, um, no addressing of it, or changing of it, it can turn into remediation pretty quickly. But I think a lot of it is, is handled through relationship. Some of it doesn't need to be formally addressed at all. Some of it just needs to be, you know, meet with a student, talk with a student.”
- “I'm pretty transparent with my students. So, I have a student who has been well ahead of their game... being able to recognize when someone is sort of the ahead or even where they need to be and being able to give that feedback.”

Angie:

- “the student meets with the instructor, or maybe the instructor and the advisor, or maybe sometimes the program coordinator kind of depends on what's going on, and we have a conversation about it. You know, this, this is the situation. Here's the problem, This is what we need to happen differently, Here's how I'm documenting it.”
- “You have to have documentation of some of these things, so that, if the problems continue to occur, we have, we have documentation of it. So, that's how, and then, depending on what it is, there could be a remediation plan. So, it could be, you know, that the student needs to, you know, demonstrate for a semester that they're able to show up to class on time, and stay for all of class, or something like that. Or, it could be something more specific, in terms of like, um, needing to meet with an instructor, you know, a few times over the course of a semester or two. Um, talk about or kind of get some supervision on whatever the thing is, in order to keep moving through the program. So, it kind of depends on what the problem is, but there could be some sort of remediation plan.”

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### **Barriers and Supports**

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Jacob:

- “one of the barriers is its complexity.”
- If no administrative support “that makes it really tough to do anything for managing.”

Sara:

- “some of the barriers have been not being listened to. So, you bring up a problem or a struggle, a challenge that you had with a student... and I got the, it could be a problem later down the road, I don't see it as a problem now. And so, with that student, you know, that didn't support me. Because it leaves me to still deal with it.”
- “Another where I did have support... So, I reach out and I went up the level, and I got immediate response.”

Sandi:

- “And then I will also tell you that are the number of our, the number of dispositions that we have were deemed to be too many. So, we're looking to try to bring them back to maybe 5, 6, 7, that are really... I think we can consolidate some of the areas.”
- “the barriers we've encountered are try to be too complex as a program. There are many dispositional areas. Probably assessing too frequently although we kind of like the every semester thing.”
- “when students have challenge just around the dispositions, we have had the support of our Provost's office and an understanding of professional dispositions and what that means, which I highly value.”

Micaela:

- “sometimes the person who's supposed to be gate keeping with you should have been gate kept out of this role in the first dang place.”

Jennifer:

- “I would say, institution, chair, kind of whoever is the next step up. Whatever that looks like, yeah. I think that can be a barrier if they are not on track.”
- “I think also having other faculty who are on the same page, about how we're managing disposition process as much as possible though we all have our own different styles at the same time.”
- “other barriers would be faculty that think it's not their job or it's too much work to do that.”

Kendra:

- “the first one is that we have counselor educators who have dispositional concerns, right. So, when you have a leader in our field who's struggling with these dispositions that's a barrier because they're not going to want to be assessed themselves or self-assess or utilize these working definitions and whatnot in their own professional lives.”
- “Then you have some that that are well, we know all about this, but they're really not applying it, so there's this sort of definition of, OK, CACREP requires it. We know about it, but we're really not applying it in our curriculum development, our faculty and student assessment protocol or, even, in our grading or whatever.”
- “If you're going assess accurately, which is the barrier itself, you have to be willing to get into conflict because you're going to have students complain.”

Hannah:

- “We don't have, is a good set of, you know, reliable, and measure, measured the valid techniques or strategies to measure these things.”

- “if your Dean and chair of your department do not support remediation, and for dispositional traits, then as faculty, you have less tools in your bucket to work with.”
- “So dispositional traits, I think are hard. Not just as a faculty member but they're hard when you're trying to navigate with chairs and deans and things that might not be in the field.”
- “Exactly, because we had everything in place for CACREP. I mean, it was a CACREP accredited credit program. Everything was in place it looked beautiful and how times was it actually enacted? None.”
- “Yeah, it was, we were as a group, a team. Our program was a team.”

Paul:

- dispositions tend to be talked about, like, problematic and when students are struggling And that it's all about, if you're either hitting this mark or you're not, and... that's, it's one of the things that I think gets in our way, as a profession.
  - “the faculty feel supported in how we interact with students.”
  - “But we at least find commonality about any concerns or any things that we want to recognize, like what are we looking for when we bring in students.”
  - Ryan: “So defining it can be somewhat ambiguous, potentially assessing it, There's several forms out there, but which one or does it have the right psychometrics? Managing, right? They say you have to do it, but they don't give you a clear way to do it. I've heard some people mention an administration not quite understanding disposition”
- Paul: “I think all of those are true probably less so for the administration... I think the college gets it.”

Erin:

- Well, I guess, definitely some supports when trying to define and manage dispositions has been way professional networks. So, definitely relying on elders within the counselor education and supervision community. In addition to that, some of my colleagues in the workplace, studying, and then also being able to rely on my professional organizations.”

Lizzie:

- “But more than that, I’m connected...I have some great connection with faculty members at other universities who really are sort of helped me have a backbone with this stuff when it's hard. And they share their experiences with me and assure me that, you know, this stuff happens all the time dispositional issues and that that we are doing the right thing for the right reasons. And those connections to me are probably the most important part of it for me, support wise.”
- “I think another barrier that I think of for myself is that I’m new and so, sometimes, I don't know if it's like it's not like an outside barrier, it's an internal barrier. Sometimes when the dispositional issue comes up, I immediately go to self-doubt.”

Tony:

- “We have all slate of obligations we have chosen, willingly. They take up more time than we think. And probably dispositions are the hardest, grades are easy.”
- “I think what makes it easier, obviously, is having colleagues who agree.”
- “The third one is obviously faculty that don’t give a crap. What do you think? they're all fine. Can you be more helpful on that note? No. You know, you would like to think that we are collegial, but were not. There's always going to be a hierarchy.

- “I guess the other barrier would be, if you decide that there is a student who ought not be in the profession, making sure that the people higher up the line who don't understand the role of dispositions. Don't say, this is crap, just graduate them.”

Olivia:

- “Then also having the CACREP support, you know, like if we're going to get pressure from, like I said before, administration, you can say: Hey, if you want us to maintain accreditation like this is something we're required to do and because I do think the gate keeping piece isn't always understood depending on what background the administrator's coming from.”
- “I think colleagues really have been the most supportive, as you usually were, everywhere I've ever been. We're kind of all on the same page when there's an issue. We might not completely agree on how we need to handle it, but, you know, being able to recognize.”
- “sometimes, administration can be a barrier, when we're concerned about numbers. And so, maybe, sometimes, there's some pressure to admit students who maybe aren't prepared. And so, that's kind of constant. Or, you know, the, not wanting to dismiss a student because then, our, you know, our retention looks bad. And that's one of the good things about CACREP is, we can say, you know, CACREP has the expectation that we will remediate and dismiss when we need to and so it's helpful to have that backing.”

Stacey:

- “It's really challenging because the message there is, you know, do what you need to do to get them through and not, no, create any sort of exposure for us [administration]. so, I

would say though, that's the biggest barrier that we experience is people caving in even the slightest little threat of any sort of legal action.”

- we [faculty] talk regularly, like I said, if there are any sort of issues or concerns, um, there is an open space to discuss

Mollie:

- “And I think that Counselor educators run into problems with administration. At least in my experience, can run into problems with administration and students and professional disposition because there's a concern about um, liability.”
- “Your colleagues can be helpful and unhelpful, you know, your consultation can be helpful and unhelpful, you know, I think, like it's a double-edged sword, it could be a barrier.”
- “I think the literature can be helpful now. I think looking at that, and I think that there are a lot of resources, you know, using professional groups, using your ethics board, using, you know, like ACA, and posting on CESENT.”
- “But I think what we need to do is help our administration understand that, so that they can support us better”

Heather:

- “the biggest barrier appears to be, and I think it was at my previous institution as well a lot of kind of apathy. And what I've noticed, and I had this conversation this morning, is that the junior faculty are the ones who are doing the brunt of the remediation, with little support from faculty or guidance from senior faculty.”

- “in my previous institution, it was very much a degree mill, right? And then, and so people who are either they're like, the faculty either just wanted to stay under the radar, because it was also a very abusive place.”

Angie:

- “it's just been really helpful to have a program faculty that I feel like we're on the same page on a lot of these things.”
- “I don't always think above us, administratively, people understand that...So, you know, and so then to not get support about any kind of bigger remediation for that student. Sometimes it feels like your hands are tied. And you know, and I understand, I mean, I work at a small university, enrollment is important, you know, the numbers, I mean that's just a reality. And I think the people above us, that's their concern.”

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### **Personal Learning**

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Jacob:

- “I was privileged enough to be brought in on [developing remediation plans] as a doc student.”

Sara:

- “It was a part of the program on assessments. We did a whole class on assessments of counselors in training.”
- “I think you learn from self-experience”

Micaela:

- “I think that some of this, I would say, comes from my experience as a grad student... and my PHD were CACREP accredited programs.”
- My understanding of dispositions has really evolved, as I, myself, have evolved through different student roles and its really becoming solid in my identity as a clinician...and my identity as an educator.”
- “By having good professional mentorship as a doc student, especially when I took my clinical supervision class and like you get your own set of baby Masters students to supervise the fine having a really good framework for how to do that well, as well as kind of getting the experience in my clinical supervision class.”

Hannah:

- “I think a lot of it was kind of that acknowledgement and I think my acknowledgement kind of flowed along with the profession... there was always an acknowledgement that it was just more than the skills you demonstrate with your, and it was more than the knowledge you learned. But it was also how you comported yourself.”

Paul:

- “I did my first training at the University of XXXXX, so, I mean, you know, if you weren't Carl Rogers efficient after that, then forget about it.”

Erin:

- “my worldview and my perspectives, and my own lived experiences. As far as my training, in my own counseling, my Masters Counseling Program, and my Doctoral Counselor ed., and in supervision program that held in the now, my current experiences in the academy that also helped with being able to define professional dispositions.”

- “I think role modeling and mentoring, so I'm one of the things that was helpful for me was I was a graduate assistant in my doctoral program, I was I was both practicum internship GA and I was also Program coordinator GA. So, I was able to sit in quite a few Remediation plan meetings, and so I had firsthand access to those forms, and I had to do a lot of recording of those meetings and then one of the professors That was like my direct supervisor.”
- “one of my early experiences, I used to work for XXXXX... And so, I got to see more hands-on process”
- “I did a lot of reading, but then also talking to other people about what they did...and I'm also in a peer professional support group.”

Kendra:

- “well, it was all of my own disposition first, right? So, I didn't know what they were, but I knew like I was struggling sometimes with, you know, being a student, so having just safe faculty, I had a couple of safe faculty who, you know, I would had a rapport with, so I was able to go to them when I was struggling.”

Lizzie:

- “my own experience in both Master's Program and in a doctoral program, and a lot of the mentoring.”
- “from watching it. And my master's program, for sure, saw some of my doc program. But also, I think, it's part of who I am”

Tony:

- “this is just me speaking, I guess, out of my experience.”

- “The CACREP standards, say that everybody has to be assessed at multiple times throughout the program, so we assess, after the first, our program starts in summer.”
- “And we make sure our faculty meetings, every month, there's a category, it's students of concerns. We are really saying, you know, what are we learning about each one of these people are.”

Olivia:

- “I think probably in my doctoral program, it became more apparent of my role as a gatekeeper”
- “But then, add on the job training as a faculty member of writing up a remediation plan, having those meetings”

Stacey:

- “Well, certainly, literature, research on, such as what you're describing, is Spurgeon's work. I have a colleague, who spent a lot of research around Um, gate keeping. Um, one of my mentors was engaged in research, around dispositions, at XXXX.”

Mollie:

- “Well, in a very, like, concrete way. the clinical counselor competency scale.... Because it's a CACREP accredited program and so, you know, I think in a very concrete way that helped me to figure out the definition of disposition. But, in another way, I think it, um, to a degree, sometimes intuitive, it's learned, It's observational.”
- “I think that there's a way to look at professional disposition from an on paper, journals, textbooks, you know, objective scales. Yes, that's all very important in terms of understanding how to assess students. But then also, there's the piece where there's like

the training, the knowledge that comes from being in the field, in terms of interacting with other professionals.”

Heather:

- “I experienced like professional dispositions and a very strong counselor education identity within my doctoral program.”

Angie:

- “I guess it's come, it's more come up when there have been problems. So that those are the times like I'm trying to think about, you know, my first, I'm sure, when it first came up, was when I was doing doctoral supervision.”
- “I've been at the same university since I graduated. And so, this is my fourth year there, and so I would say like, you know, just kind of like adopting what they've, what the university uses, or what our program uses, I guess? And then, conversation with colleagues. I mean, so we have a program meeting every week, and, you know, if there are student concerns, we've talked about them in that meeting every week. And so then hearing how other colleagues also kind of like conceptualize. Whatever it is that's going on, that's how I've learned. So, I'd say it's all mostly been pretty informal.”