Chi Sigma Iota
Professional Advocacy Tips

Excerpts compiled by the CSI Advocacy Committee from the *Exemplar*
(click on the items below to go directly to the responses for each question)

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Learning more about Counselor Advocacy

What is Counselor Advocacy and Why is it Important?

What is counselor advocacy and why is it important? To advocate for counseling is to promote counseling as a profession. Such advocacy is important because our very careers depend on public perceptions of ourselves as capable educators, providers, researchers, and helpers of our clients. Six advocacy themes (i.e., counselor education, intra-professional relations, marketplace recognition, inter-professional issues, research, and client wellness) were identified in the CSI-sponsored Counselor Advocacy Leadership Conference (Sweeney, 1998, 1999).

Getting Started

After participating in the summer and winter sessions of the 1998 and 1999 Counselor Advocacy Leadership Conferences, I felt inspired to get busy advocating for my chosen profession. I started by developing a class assignment that I use each semester with my students. The details of this assignment are available at http://www.csi-net.org/ on the CSI web page under Advocacy-Marketplace Recognition. This assignment has generated approximately 20 small group advocacy projects since fall semester, 1998. First, students are introduced to the concepts of counselor identity and advocacy during class discussion within the context of the six advocacy themes.

Continuity

We continue dialogue on advocacy adventures that are being done already at local, state, and national level and students are directed to resources to tap into these projects. Students are also provided with a list of ongoing projects that other students have begun in previous semesters. Some of the students involved in earlier projects are still in the process of evolving what they started. Two semesters ago, for example, several students began a project of informing insurance companies of the value of utilizing mental health counselors trained in CACREP programs and how this will benefit them and their clients.

They picked up another student in the following semester and three more this semester, each assisting in the project in their contracted way. They have conducted pilot phone research, improved their survey instrument, brochure, and letter and plan to do a mass mailing to insurance companies sometime in the near future. Given that several of these students are members of the Beta Upsilon Chapter of CSI, they have taken their ideas to the chapter and have obtained a grant to pay for mailings to these insurance companies.

Do Something Tangible

For class credit, students are told they must actually do something tangible to advocate for the counseling profession, not just talk about it. Students are encouraged to let the rest of the profession benefit from their efforts by submitting their ideas for publication in one of the counseling venues. Students are required to email their final projects to me so as to provide continuity by allowing me to pass them on to the next class of students.
Promoting Professional Counselor Advocacy: How Can Your Program do More?


An advocate is someone who argues a cause, supports, or defends something in which he or she believes. In counselor education programs, discussions related to the topic of client advocacy are not uncommon, but unfortunately, advocacy on behalf of the counseling profession is not as often addressed.

Counselors’ livelihoods rely on a strong counseling profession. The question becomes: What can counseling programs (i.e., students and educators) do to facilitate increased conversations on the topic of professional advocacy within their programs, and thus support the profession?

The answers to this question are complex and multifaceted, yet some basic steps can be taken towards increasing professional counseling advocacy initiatives and education within counseling programs.

The following list provides practical, concrete suggestions that students and faculty might consider as they move ahead in increasing professional counseling advocacy initiatives:

- CSI chapters and faculty advisors, faculty, and students can serve as leaders in local, state, and national professional advocacy efforts; this active involvement in professional organizations can convey a spirit of advocacy.
- Faculty and students should be aware of the advocacy function of CSI and use the vast array of resources available on the website (www.csi-net.org).
- Whenever possible, highlight and discuss the counselor identity, or what makes us unique from other helpers; whether it be with students in the program, field placement sites and supervisors, various publics, advisory boards, the campus community, etc., our unique identity should be highlighted.
- Infuse discussions of professional advocacy into class papers, presentations, and curriculum.
- Increase curricular activities that address professional counseling advocacy.
- Increase conversations with the faculty and students about the importance of strengthening and supporting counselor identity and professional advocacy on campus (e.g., campus community, in classes with students) and in the community.
- Ensure that the reading materials and assignments used in your department’s courses are reflective of the counseling profession and that they incorporate professional advocacy issues - e.g., ensure that at least some required scholarly readings are written by counselors/counselor educators as opposed to those from other helping professions.
- When advertising your program (e.g., flyers, brochures, etc.), promote a counselor identity and address how this identity may be unique from other helping professions; starting this conversation early with applicants to your program can create an advocacy spirit.
- When hiring adjunct/full faculty members and interviewing potential students, determine whether their philosophy fits with a counselor identity philosophy. Beginning these conversations early on can send a message about your program’s value of these considerations.

References

During orientation for students, make students aware of the underlying philosophy of the counseling profession (e.g., wellness, developmental model, prevention, and empowerment) and the value of professional advocacy.

Ensure that students understand how the CACREP standards function to define the profession.

Ensure that students understand the history of the counseling profession in general.

Ensure that students understand the history of professional counseling within your state – e.g., the development of your state’s counselor practice acts, the history of your state’s counseling associations, etc.

Ensure that your students aware of legislative issues at the state and national level that impact counseling. A student listserv to communicate about counselor advocacy issues can convey a value of advocacy.

Make students aware of the various leadership roles that are available to them within professional organizations and facilitate a department culture that promotes these activities.

Counselor educators can challenge themselves to measure students’ learning and understanding of professional counselor advocacy.

Promote and support activities on campus and in the community during Counseling Awareness month (April).

The above mentioned ideas are just a few of many possible ways that you can encourage professional advocacy. It is our hope that these ideas will help you initiate conversations and foster action related to professional advocacy initiatives.

**Call to Advocacy for New Members**


The following was submitted by Dr. Becky Willow, a newly initiated member of Chi Sigma Iota, Gamma Upsilon Chi chapter, and a new faculty member in the Community Counseling Program at Gannon University in Erie PA.

We counselors have not been adept at self-advocacy. The mere idea of advocating for ourselves offends our moral sense. We like the idea of advocating for our clients and students and working for political and social change for the sake of others, but advocating for our profession seems distasteful and un-magnanimous. The fact is, however, that unless we promote our profession, our clients and students will be the ones who suffer.

In a profession whose purpose is the healing service of others, such professional advocacy is not self-centered, but is, by its very nature, mutually beneficial. Unless we resolve to harness our political power, we can expect that it is our clients who will eventually suffer. The challenge for all of us is to become more intentionally aware of opportunities to promote our profession starting in our daily sphere of influence. It seems that in many everyday ways, advocacy is attitude. It is being intentional about inviting the world to see what we do and why.

In 1998, the Executive Council of Chi Sigma Iota, decided to make advocacy for counselors a sustained commitment. Twice, an invited group of leaders in the profession met to share, discuss, and compare perceptions on a common vision for the advocacy of counselors and the services that they provide to others. The reports of both conferences and the strategic plan for advocacy are provided in full on the Chi Sigma Iota website. Also on the website are advocacy materials, presented along six advocacy themes arrived at through these conferences. Our national and state counseling associations also have advocates working for us. It is a simple and important process to join list-serves and check websites to
stay updated on opportunities that those associations provide to be “point and click” advocates. Updates from these sources allow us easy and effective ways to make our voices heard in the legislatures by emailing letters of support.

Keeping ourselves informed about who is advocating on our behalf and empowering those bodies with our membership and full support is a way that we can take part in the professional counselor advocacy movement. Helping to champion these initiatives is critical and is, for most of us who are on the receiving end of all of the electronic updates, a simple task.

Lastly, what we often fail to realize is that advocacy is just as important close to home, where we live and work. We may not want to wait any longer for others to organize, or leave it to someone else to speak up, to design policies and procedures that streamline processes for clients and counselors, or wait until next year to join an organization. We need not wait any longer.

**Advocating for Counselors of Tomorrow (ACT)**


The things we do today often have an impact on what tomorrow will look like. Whether you are an individual, part of a small group, or a member of a state/national association, you can make a difference. This is an integral part of the “20/20: Vision for the Future of Counseling” initiative co-sponsored by ACA and the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB). Thirty counseling organizations are represented, including Chi Sigma Iota (the international honor society for professional counselors). As members of Chi Sigma Iota, your commitment to promoting excellence in the profession of counseling and involvement in the policy formation process that advances our profession is vital. The work of the CSI Advocacy Committee focuses on improving the public’s perception of professional counselors by advocating for issues that will strengthen the profession.

Although many of you are aware that the Mental Health Parity legislation finally passed after six years, there continues to be a great deal of work that lies ahead for professional counselors. For example, this year the director of ACA’s Public Policy & Legislation office, Scott Barstow, called upon all professional counselors to engage in a grassroots effort to amend Medicare to include professional counselors as service providers. Under the current law, only licensed Psychologists and licensed Independent Social Workers are allowed to provide non-medical mental health services to Medicare recipients. Therefore, Medicare recipients have restricted or no access to mental health care especially in rural and semi-rural areas which are often underserved even when there are competent licensed professional counselors in their own communities. Additionally, many of us are aware that there is still a need to attain professional counselor licensure portability legislation. Portability would provide the public confidence that regardless of the state they are in; they are entitled to meet with competent professional counselors who possess the appropriate educational and experiential foundation.

Each and every one of you has the opportunity to own your profession and advocate for the services you believe to be relevant for the clients you serve. We want you to feel comfortable in this process. We want you to TAKE ACTION! By sustaining a vocal and noticeable presence throughout the policy-making process, professional counselors can ensure that vital mental health programs and services are protected and supported - both fiscally and politically. There are several avenues to get involved and help chart the direction of policy. Therefore, we are pleased to announce that in the upcoming editions of CSI’s Exemplar, there will be an Advocacy Tips section to assist you in the advocacy process to promote the profession of counseling.
Dr. Tom Sweeney, the CSI Executive Council, and the CSI Advocacy Committee actively support and rigorously advocate on important mental health issues throughout the year. We need you! Your participation would help because legislators listen to what their constituents have to say, as constituents are their first priority. The Advocacy Tips section will provide you with all of the information and resources you need to contact your policy makers and be successful in your advocacy efforts.

**Let’s Go to the Community, Counselors!**

Onedera, J. D. & Paez, S. B. (2006, Spring). Let’s go to the community, counselors!. Exemplar 21(1)

**Who Should Be Involved?**

This counselor advocacy tip is for all professional counselors. It can also be used as an assignment within particular counselor education courses.

**Who or What is the Focus?**

In order to advocate for the counseling profession, it is important that we not preach to the choir, so to speak, by directing all of our efforts toward counselors themselves. We must make sure our advocacy efforts are conducted within the community to potential clients and support networks.

**What Should Happen?**

1. Make contacts with the owners, managers, or facilitators of local community businesses or organizations (i.e., banks, child-care facilities, senior citizen clubs)
   a) Provide a brief summary on who professional counselors are, their training, and what they do (brochures can be used to highlight information)
   b) Educate the contact person about how professional counseling services within the community might be helpful to persons within this organization
   c) Inform the contact person of local counseling agencies within the community that might best serve the demographics of the clientele
   d) Provide a few websites for individuals to search (i.e., American Counseling Association, State Counseling Association)

2. Offer to speak to the contact person’s clientele briefly during a scheduled time
   a) Talk about the benefits of counseling (i.e., for the first fifteen minutes of the weekly senior citizen’s club; on the first Friday morning of the month to banking clientele)
   b) Leave persons with a tangible reason to consider seeking counseling if they should need (i.e., conclude with a brief psychoeducational presentation on incorporating cognitive reframing into their daily life, conduct a stress management and relaxation activity with the clientele)
3. Follow-up with contact person
   a) Thank the contact person
   b) Offer follow-up presentation if they should wish

Advocate for Best Practices in Supervision

Clinical supervision is fundamental in preparing counselors-in-training and newly licensed counselors. Yet, the standards and requirements vary by state and specialty area (e.g., school, mental health, rehabilitation) for what constitutes appropriate clinical counseling supervision and appropriate training requirements to become a supervisor. Sadly, clinical supervision standards may represent minimal standards rather than ideal standards for best practices in counseling supervision. Some states require only that a clinical supervisor be licensed in their discipline and assume that this is sufficient preparation for providing clinical supervision. In some states counseling practicum and internship students may be supervised by members of other disciplines such as psychology or social work. Although these supervisors may be excellent, they are not likely to speak the language of counseling and therefore students in these supervisory relationships may not be mentored adequately in their counselor professional identity.

Counselors-in-training face the difficult challenge of finding a field experience that will provide them with the experience they need and the clinical supervision necessary to ensure that they develop as counselors and professionals. The results of a recent survey of supervised mental health counselors in Ohio (LPCs) by suggest using the “senior author” vs. Dr. Daniel Cruikshanks suggested that even when the requirements for the clinical supervision experience were robust, supervisees often failed to receive adequate supervision. Ohio requires that LPCs receive one hour of face-to-face supervision for every 20 hours of client contact. Forty seven percent of respondents reported that they rarely or never meet with their supervisor for supervision. Moreover, one role of a good supervisor is to foster ongoing development of counselor professional identity. These results suggest that nearly half the time clinical counseling supervisors in Ohio do not actively engage in best practices in supervision activities, which includes work on professional counselor identity. Counselors-in-training may not recognize that their supervision needs are not being met. They may trust that their supervisor understands the requirements of supervision or they may not feel comfortable discussing their supervision needs with their supervisor. Becoming a counselor dedicated to excellence is best supported by being paired with a clinical supervisor dedicated to excellence.

Supervision is increasingly recognized as a sub-discipline of counseling rather than as an inherent counseling skill. There is a need to improve the credentialing standards and the training requirements for those who will provide clinical counseling supervision. An essential function of good supervision is to foster the ongoing development of the professional identity of counselors-in-training and newly licensed counselors. Members of the field should provide counseling supervision to emerging counselors. School counselors should be supervised by professional school counselors and not teachers, school social workers, or school psychologists. Mental health counselors should be supervised by other mental health counselors and not psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers. Finally, supervision should be performed by those with experience and specific training in clinical counseling supervision.
So what can you do, right now, to advocate for better counseling supervision in your state? First, you can advocate for licensure and standards for clinical counseling supervision. Second, if you are or will soon receive counseling supervision, you can advocate for better clinical supervision for yourself. If you provide supervision to others, you can seek out additional training in counselor supervision.

**Advocating for Standards**

What are the current standards in your state for your specialization area? Contact your state counseling association, your counselor licensure board, or your department of education to learn more. If you do not have licensure requirements for clinical counseling supervision, work with your state counseling association to change the standards. State counseling associations are likely the best entities to propose and lobby for these kinds of standards.

**Advocating for Good Supervision**

If you are or will be clinically supervised, the best way to get good supervision is to know what good supervision is, to know what you want and need from supervision, and to ask for it from your supervisor. Choose your supervisor well. Make sure that she or he is a professional counselor with a strong counselor identity – someone who speaks the language of counseling. Make sure that your time in clinical supervision is spent working on your client cases and not primarily focused on administrative issues.

Of course there are many additional ways to improve supervision for yourself and others. As you think more about these issues based on your own experiences, you may discover other possibilities as well.

**Defining Counseling**


In 2005 the American Counseling Association (ACA) began what it called the 20/20: Future of Counseling project. In the intervening years, over 30 organizations have participated in electronic and face-to-face meetings of representatives to reach consensus on fundamental issues of substantial importance to professional advocacy. The process has been more protracted than many hoped. Nevertheless, with patience and diligent efforts, progress has been made.

The Executive Council was sent the following ACA Committee request:

> “Dear President Carney,

> On March 31, the Oversight Committee of 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling sent you an e-mail letting you know the exciting news that your 20/20 delegate helped make history at the ACA Conference in Pittsburgh. Delegates representing over two dozen major counseling organizations (including yours) reached consensus on a common definition of counseling:

> Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.

> We also let you know that we would be following up with this request to endorse the definition approved by your delegate.

> It is important to note that the delegates made clear that all participating organizations were welcome to expand upon the definition by adding statements about their specialty or area of
interest before or after the definition. In other words, the definition is a starting place. It provides a basic description to the public of what those in our profession do with the understanding that it can be expanded upon with statements about the counselor’s or organization’s primary focus. ….

This endorsement comes with the understanding that Chi Sigma Iota is welcome to expand upon the definition by adding statements about their specialty or area of interest before or after the definition.

Request

The Oversight Committee respectfully requests Chi Sigma Iota’s endorsement of the consensus definition of counseling."

As a consequence during its May meeting, the CSI Executive Council offered its endorsement of the consensus definition of counseling within the following statement:

**CSI Endorsement of a Common Definition of Counseling**

“Professional counselors hold their highest graduate degree in counselor education from a nationally accredited preparation program, are credentialed by authorized state and/or national agencies, and adhere to its competency standards on matters of ethics, diversity and behavior in order to contribute to the realization of a healthy society by fostering wellness and human dignity. As a consequence, counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals”.

**A Need for Context**

A context for the ACA statement was considered essential since defining counseling simply as a professional relationship left it to interpretation as to who would be the provider of such services. Certainly many practitioners in other professions would ascribe to such a definition within their scope of practice.

Professional counselors, as is true of other professions, are defined by their preparation. In our case, professional counselors’ core identity is defined and verified by the minimum national standards of counselor education promulgated by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Adherence to expectations for counselor credentialing, continuing education, professional ethics, standards of care and best practices, competencies in matters of diversity, and affiliation with professional organizations all seemed essential to context as well.

In addition, the unique goals of counseling outcomes seemed important to emphasize, i.e., in order to contribute to the realization of a healthy society by fostering wellness and human dignity (CSI Vision statement). More than helping others adjust, adapt, or overcome life circumstances, professional counselors strive to help those whom we serve to live well.

**What Purpose for Professional Advocacy?**

CSI prides itself in its advocacy for the profession. Professional identity within CSI is uniform, consistent with the above definition, and unequivocal. Its ultimate goal is more than recognition and parity for counselors’ services. The betterment of society as a whole is our ultimate goal regardless of specialty, setting, or population served. We advocate as we do because we fervently believe in the need for professional counselors’ services in order to help create a healthy society.
We do so with full knowledge of who we are professionally and for what we stand. As a consequence we hope by participating in the ACA efforts that more initiatives going forward will be toward legislators, policy makers, and state credentialing agencies that shape marketplace practices and opportunities for counselors.

**Annual advocacy heroes and heroines interviews and awards**


There have been some exciting developments on the horizon. First, your chapter can now highlight a counseling student, counselor educator, or professional counselor each year from your chapter who is actively engaged in professional counseling advocacy efforts by submitting an article created from a structured interview that will be posted on the CSI website. A protocol has been developed to help your chapter organize, interview, and write advocacy Heroes and Heroines articles. You can find this information and an example interview write-up at www.csi-net.org/advocacy.

Second, the advocacy Committee and the CSI Executive Council have created a Certificate of appreciation for Community Service and advocacy. Please visit www.csi-net.org/awards to find the award criteria and script. You can blend these two pieces together and present the individual that your chapter interviews for the advocacy Heroes and Heroines article with the Certificate of appreciation for Community Service and advocacy at your induction ceremony and have the article available for viewing at the event. In this way, your chapter can recognize individuals at your induction who have significantly helped the chapter to promote the profession of counseling. Further, your chapter could also publish the advocacy Heroes and Heroines article in your chapter newsletter. The interviews with Dr. Tom Sweeney and Dr. Courtland C. Lee found in the Advocacy Heroes and Heroines Interview Forum serves as an example.

**Advocacy and wellness: Engaging counselors and clients in positive life change**


Most counselors would say we entered the profession to help others. As a consequence, when we think of advocacy social justice and the needs of clients often comes to mind. CSI leaders have emphasized the importance of advocating for both clients and the profession (csi-net.org). We advocate for the profession for many reasons, not the least of which is to assure that our training is recognized and respected, our credentials are meaningful, and we are empowered through laws and policies to speak and act on behalf of our clients.

CSI sponsored two national conferences attended by leaders from counseling organizations who were brought together to develop a plan for advocacy by professional counselors for the profession and those we serve. Six advocacy themes were identified (see csi-net.org/advocacy), including theme F: prevention and wellness. This particular theme emphasizes the goal of “promot[ing] optimum human development across the lifespan through prevention and wellness” (p. 1). Although wellness has been defined in various ways by different professions, a description of wellness proposed from the field of counseling is “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being, in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community. Ideally, it is the optimum
state of health and well-being that each individual is capable of achieving” (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000, p. 252). Advocacy through wellness can be achieved by counselors incorporating wellness methods into their work with clients, research, and client advocacy. Further, advocacy for wellness entails educating counseling students in practicing a wellness lifestyle and supporting counseling professionals and counselor educators in the maintenance and pursuit of positive change throughout the lifespan.

Wellness advocacy occurs at multiple levels; however, the foundation begins with counselor education. Wester, Trepal, and Myers (2009) studied levels of wellness and perceived stress among counselor educators and found that the well-being of counselor educators was higher than the norm group who have taken the Five Factor Wellness Inventory (5F-Wel). These results suggest progress toward the wellness advocacy objective of counselor educators adopting a wellness lifestyle. Since perceived stress was the strongest predictor of wellness outcomes, it merits further attention from the field. Pre-tenured faculty may experience strain due to several factors ranging from a lack of connection in and out of the workplace to misperceptions about working in academia (Hill, 2004).

Recommendations for advocating for the wellness of new counselor educators include creating a wellness plan, partnering with colleagues in research, writing, and wellness-related activities, and infusing wellness concepts into the structure and atmosphere of counselor education programs (Hill, 2004).

Similar to counselor educators, counselors in training also scored higher on the Five Factor Wellness Inventory than the normed 5F-Wel general adult norm sample (Myers, Mobley, & Booth, 2003). However, counseling students must cope with the stress of navigating the transition to working with clients and balancing school with other life roles. The wellness of counselors in the field is negatively affected by secondary traumatic stress from working with clients coping with trauma, a stressful work environment, an imbalance of helping others rather than oneself, self-blame if clients’ problems persist, and working with a high frequency of clients on a daily basis (Cummins, Massey, & Jones, 2007). Counselors and counselors in training can improve their holistic wellness by engaging in practices that increase their spiritual, physical, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal well-being (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007).

Advocating for client wellness can be done within the confines of the individual and group counseling process. Wellness counseling offers a strengths-based perspective to addressing client concerns in which clients can identify areas in which they seek to grow as well as parts of their lives in which they feel well (Sweeney & Myers, 2005). Moreover, since the areas of wellness are interconnected, counselors can help clients to improve weaker areas by mobilizing a client’s resources and abilities, rather than focusing solely on deficits (Sweeney & Myers, 2005). Wellness counseling is not limited to the “worried well” and can be implemented effectively with clients with severe mental health problems (Ivey & Ivey, 2005).

Counselors can advocate for clients outside of the counseling office. Awareness of the existence and impact of oppression and discrimination on the well-being of clients is critical (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). Counselors not only refer marginalized clients to community resources, we can also educate others who may be in position to reduce discriminatory behavior in the future (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). Examples of outreach to improve community wellness include 2010-2011 CSI Excellence in Counseling Research Grant recipients from the Chi Theta Chapter of Jacksonville State University, Kelli Lasseter, Melanie Wallace, Nancy Fox, and Tommy Turner who researched service learning as a vehicle for increasing counselor competency (csi-net.org). Studies such as this provide the benefit of both meeting the needs of members of the community while raising new counselors’ consciousness about how the wellness of clients and persons in the community is impacted by discrimination and how to advocate for social justice.
Advocacy through prevention and wellness is thus a venture that starts with nurturing ourselves as counseling students, professionals, and educators and extends to promoting the wellness of our clients, the community, and the counseling profession.

References


**Advocating for the counseling profession: A five year review (2006-2010)**


Many professional counselors understand the importance of our advocacy for clients and society; however, advocacy for our profession is a prerequisite to helping others. In order to promote the welfare of others and society, we as a profession are called upon to bring awareness and understanding to what we do and the benefits of the counseling profession. According to the aCa Code of Ethics (2005, a.6.a), advocacy is defined as the “promotion of the well-being of individuals and groups, and the counseling profession within systems and organizations. advocacy seeks to remove barriers and obstacles that inhibit access, growth, and development.” Additionally, CSI outlines the importance of advocating for the counseling profession (csi-net.org). The mission statement says “[CSI] values academic and professional excellence in counseling. We promote a strong professional identity through members (professional counselors, counselor educators, and students) who contribute to the realization of a healthy society by fostering wellness and human dignity.” To uphold this mission, CSI has created a committee for professional advocacy as recommended in a 1998 meeting. The group outlined six central themes for the professional advocacy committee: counselor education, intra-professional relations, marketplace recognition, inter-professional issues, research, and prevention/wellness (See csi-net.org/advocacy for
more details regarding the six themes). Throughout all of these themes, professional advocacy and a strong professional identity are crucial in order for counselors to help clients.

As the field moves towards a strong professional identity and professional advocacy, the literature published should reflect this movement. Therefore, this article highlights literature published regarding professional advocacy in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals during the past five years. Although most professional counselors agree advocacy is important, guidelines for how to do so are less clear. Hof, Dinsmore, Barber, Suhr, and Scofield (2009) agreed that counselors promote their work to bring awareness to our profession. More concretely, professional advocacy focuses on two primary goals: promoting a positive image of the counseling profession and publicizing the services counselors provide (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002). Hof et al. (2009) summarized a formal set of professional advocacy competencies to address four categories of advocacy intervention found in previous literature: promoting professional identity, enhancing the public image of counseling, developing inter-professional and intra-professional collaboration, and promoting legislative policy initiatives. These authors created a model, T.R.A.I.N.E.R., to achieve both professional and social advocacy, which involves the steps of (a) targeting advocacy needs of an underrepresented client group and their associated professional advocacy requirements, (b) responding to the needs, (c) articulating a plan, (d) implementing the plan, (e) networking, (f) evaluating the training, and (g) retargeting to address unmet needs.

What little exists in the current literature on professional advocacy focuses on the role of the school counselor. School counselors are called to advocate for their roles as leaders in the school, critically analyze their profession, help other counselors to find their professional authority, collaborate with others, and become actively involved rather than passive consumers (Lewis & Borunda, 2006). In addition, school counselors are highly encouraged to educate their administration on their role in the community as outlined by ASCA (Dodson, 2009) and collaborate with state and national legislators to promote effective practice policy and implementation for school counselors (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009).

Although the literature has not explicitly stated these goals for the counseling profession, in general, the Code of Ethics (2005) calls on all counselors to understand and implement their roles as counselors more clearly through advocating and collaborating with others to benefit the profession as a whole. Given that professional advocacy is a large part of our role as counselors, future researchers and all counselors should strive toward becoming professional advocates. Despite an understanding of the importance of advocating for one’s profession, with little literature to emphasize the concrete implementation of this goal, many counselors may not know how to implement advocacy initiatives. To become involved in professional advocacy, visit www. csi-net.org/advocacy for advocacy resources such as advocacy tips, legislative letter writing tips, chapter advocacy forums, and the advocacy Heroes and Heroines forum.

References


**Life Coaching: Why Professional Counselors Should be Concerned and Take Action When Appropriate**


During a story aired on NPR’s All Things Considered, Robert Siegel asked a life coach for her definition of the difference between life coaching and counseling. Her response:

“Counselors try to help people by focusing on their past, childhood events; life coaches help people by focusing on their problems now and what they can do differently.”

Although it is true that some counselors ascribe to past focused models, the majority of counselors today utilize present-focused, goal-driven models that represent the current thinking in the field. Thus, the life coach interviewed on NPR described professional counseling when defining what she does.

Based on the definition provided to Siegel by that life coach, she clearly is practicing professional counseling. A review of on-line directories of life coaches revealed a range of professionals providing this service, but most of them had no more than a bachelor’s degree, no specific graduate training, and no license to practice. Our concern is that if she is not trained and licensed as a professional counselor (or related mental health professional), then she may be practicing illegally. Since life coaching is unregulated, there is no way to know whether she is competent to care for the needs of the clients she serves.

**So, what exactly is life coaching?**

According to LifeCoaching.com, “Life Coaching is a new and rapidly growing profession that is profoundly different from consulting, mentoring, advice, therapy, or counseling. The coaching process addresses specific personal projects, business successes, general conditions and transitions in the client’s personal life, relationships or profession by examining what is going on right now, discovering what your obstacles or challenges might be, and choosing a course of action to make your life be what you want it to be” (emphasis added). This sounds like counseling to us. Indeed, it sounds very much like the definition of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). Lifecoaching.com continues: “Life Coaching is a designed alliance between coach and client where the coaching relationship continually gives all the power back to you, the client. We believe that you know the answers to every question or challenge you may have in your life, even if those answers appear to be obscured, concealed or hidden inside.” This too is consistent with SFBT approach to counseling.

The implications here are significant. As licensed professional counselors, we receive extensive graduate training in order to be considered at least minimally competent to practice our work. There have always been those who believe that because they are naturally good listeners, they should be able to do counseling without any special training. It was largely because of such attitudes, beliefs and practices, that our field developed standards and pursued licensure more than 33 years ago. Prior to that time, anyone could hang out a sign and claim to be a counselor. Now, with life coaching, we have a new generation wanting to do counseling without doing the hard work of graduate training, which poses risks to consumers.
In many states with counselor licensure, it is unlawful for anyone who is not licensed to provide counseling services or services that fit the description of counseling. Life coaching is not a regulated, licensed discipline. In many states, anyone who identifies as a life coach and practices as described above, but who is not already a licensed mental health professional, is practicing outside of the law.

So what can we do? We believe that it is our responsibility to monitor and advocate on behalf of the field to protect client welfare and the counselor professional identity. As professional counselors, part of our charge is to protect the public from unscrupulous and incompetent practitioners and to protect the integrity of the field. Know your state law. If your licensure law restricts the definition and practice of counseling, your licensure board may well be interested in preventing those who are not properly trained and licensed from practicing counseling. In Ohio, calling it life coaching when it is by all evidence counseling does not preclude the practitioner from licensure requirements. Our licensure board will intervene with non-licensed individuals, such as life coaches, who practice counseling. Thus, if you are or become aware of individuals practicing as life coaches, especially if they have documentation (such as a brochure or website) which demonstrates that they are effectively practicing counseling, then your state board might like to hear from you.

Life coaching should neither be an escape from licensure law nor a backdoor into the mental health field. The burden to protect our license and our professional identity, however, falls on our shoulders.

Advocacy tips from chapters:

**What have you done to advocate for the counseling profession?**

The Counselor Advocacy Tips column is written to encourage members to share practical examples of counselor advocacy. The following tips respond to the question, “What have you done to advocate for the counseling profession?” A number of chapters provided the following tips and/or presented CSI Advocacy Poster Sessions during the American Counseling Association Conferences:

**Alpha Upsilon: Research, Creativity, and Action**

Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Summer, 2006)

Members Marisa White, Suzanne Gibson Semivan, and faculty advisor Dr. Robert Schwartz of the Alpha Upsilon Chapter reported that the chapter addressed three tiers in their advocacy project: research, creativity, and action. First, the chapter conducted a study to increase advocacy knowledge. Second, they created an ‘Advocacy Packet’ that contained a PowerPoint presentation, brochure, reference list, literature review, and a list of the ACES Advocacy Interest Network activities on CD to be distributed at a roundtable, CSI meetings, CSI induction ceremony, and at the CSI day in Montreal. Finally, they hosted a roundtable event that educated attendees about advocating and shared the results of their research.

**Beta Chi: Educate Counselors**

Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2004)

The Beta Chi Chapter presents an annual wellness conference with topics such as suicidology, keeping the counselor healthy, and counselors’ responses to the aging America. Additionally the chapter has participated in development of a counseling supervision consortium. A website, lectures and workshops provide support functions to the consortium. Beta Chi promotes educational achievement by offering an
annual scholarship to an individual who demonstrates excellence in scholarship, professionalism, research, and contribution to the chapter.

**Beta Phi: Provide a Range of Advocacy Activities**

Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Fall, 2004)

Denise L. Collings, Beta Phi president, lauds faculty advisor Nancy Sherman as being “wonderfully supportive and innovative.” The chapter has separate committees for workshops, community service, community agency counseling, and school counseling that partner with the community. The chapter is active in a wide range of advocacy efforts, including partnering with a mental health center doing depression screenings, topical seminars, and a book drive. The chapter provides information about the results of the screening and resources. Annually, the chapter sponsors and provides CEU’s on Hot Topics seminars utilizing chapter and community talent. Some of the volunteers include counselors, educators, psychopharmacologists, those who are in recovery of mental health system, and students who have done extensive research. They also hold a Licensure and Certification Workshop each year as well as collect journals and textbooks to send to the Higher School of Social Work and Social Pedagogy “Attistiba” in Latvia. Due to the countries previous restrictions of publications, Latvian students identified a need in recent publications on mental health issues.

**Beta Upsilon: Educate Insurers**

Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2003)

Sherron Newbery and Jim Hausler along with fellow Beta Upsilon Chapter members, Claudia Glaser and Maria Serra, began their advocacy project as an assignment for a class in legal and ethical issues in counseling. They obtained chapter support including a small grant and raised money for the grant by holding a bake sale. They have added new project members each semester and have weekly meetings.

Beta Upsilon’s project has been on-going for more than a year and has short, mid, and long-term goals. The group conducted telephonic surveys and internet research to develop a mailing list of insurance companies. The mission has been to educate key personnel within those companies regarding mental health counselors’ identity (as exemplified by mental health counselors trained in CACREP accredited programs) as well as to collect information on the practices of insurance companies in their use of mental health counselors as providers. Preliminary data suggest mental health counselors have a long way to go in convincing insurance companies to utilize their services.

**Delta Gamma: Promoting Collaboration**

McCurdy, K. G., & Gillig, S. E. (Fall, 2006)

Jonathan Ohrt, Chapter President, Sue Street, and Michelle Mitcham-Smith, Faculty Advisor of the Delta Gamma Chapter advocate student success through a program promoting collaboration between school counselors and principals. The program is offered during an educational leadership class for training school principals incorporating presentations by school counseling interns, mental health counselors, and career counselors. Future principals become familiar with the training, skills, and roles of professional counselors, and methods for effectively using these resources to promote student success. The objectives of this advocacy project are promoting students’ readiness to learn, supporting the school mission, supporting the goal of high academic achievement of all students and counselor strategies for closing the achievement gap.
The Beta Upsilon Chapter focused on counselor advocacy for gay, lesbian, bisexual & transgender students in a university setting. This project coincided with Theme D Inter-professional Issues as the chapter advocated for students to have free expression in the university environment. The mission was to raise awareness of the Gay Pride Fest within the context of human rights issues. While goal setting and striving to reach goals represent important milestones in advocacy, Lisa Bailey, Chapter President stressed that persistence and the importance of showcasing progress are essential ingredients to maintain advocacy momentum.

**Epsilon Kappa Upsilon: Promote Scholarship**

Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Summer, 2006)

Dawn Brislin, Epsilon Kappa Upsilon Chapter president, and Dr. Neal Gray, faculty advisor, reported that the chapter is collaborating with the Kentucky Counseling Association (KCA) to promote scholarship. This collaborative model includes support of CSI student travel, lodging, and registration, priority consideration of proposals for CSI presentations, and a complimentary booth for CSI state chapters. Additionally the organizations are working together to promote research and publish findings, to promote leadership development, advocacy, and recognition of leaders in the “Kudos” column of the KCA News.

**Eta: Conduct an Advocacy Week**

Gillig, S. E., & Paez, S. (Spring, 2005)

Rachel Hoffman, president, submitted Eta’s advocacy tip. The chapter conducts “Advocacy Week” held in January. The purpose is to educate future counselors about the importance of advocating for the field of counseling. Literature is distributed regarding important issues, and a computer with internet access is set-up in the Graduate Assistant office. Students are encouraged to visit the ACA website and send advocacy letters to their state representatives. Furthermore, the chapter officers give public presentations at local public libraries on issues relevant to mental health. Each presentation begins with a brief overview of the counseling field and roles of professional counselors. The chapter also conducts four workshops throughout the year which are open to both CSI members and non-members. CEU’s are provided and as an incentive to join the chapter, a discount is provided to those that apply for membership.

**Eta Tau Alpha: Service Announcement for Counseling Services**

McCurdy, K. G., & Gillig, S. E. (Fall, 2006)

Jessica Eaton, Chapter President, Meghan Fortner, Chapter Vice President, Jamye Loper, Chapter Membership, Laura Loychik, Chapter Treasurer, and Amber Stiles-Bodnar, Chapter Secretary of the Eta Tau Alpha Chapter put together a television and radio public service announcement that educated the public about counseling services. The chapter felt the message would be better received if given in a straightforward but creative way. They stressed that while counselors could help with mental health issues, counselors could also help people to live more fulfilling lives, experience more happiness, gain more joy from their families, and be more at peace with themselves.

**Gamma Upsilon Chi: Discuss Advocacy**

Gillig, S. E., & Paez, S. (Spring, 2005)

Jessica Kramarik, president, submitted Gamma Upsilon Chi’s advocacy tip. A two part lesson on advocacy is presented to first year students enrolled in a course titled “Community Counseling.” The first part requires students to read “Advocacy for Counseling and Counselors: A Professional Imperative” (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002) and discuss the different types of advocacy. They are asked to create a
list of possible topics that would be considered client or professional advocacy as well as, discuss the relationship between advocacy and empowerment. The second part requires students to become aware of various legislative actions by visiting list serves on the ACA and PCA websites and choose a topic of interest. They are asked to write letters of professional advocacy to their respective legislative bodies asking them to take an identified stance. The instructor supplies mailing addresses for the appropriate government officials and both the Community Counseling program and GUC chapter jointly mail the letters.

**Iota Omega Upsilon: Advocate for Children’s Mental Health**

Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Summer, 2006)

Iota Omega Upsilon President K. Elizabeth McDonald and other chapter members showed how their chapter hosted an advocacy workshop on “Principles and Procedures of Play Therapy.” The workshop advocated for children’s mental health through education and training of counselors, teachers, and lay persons. The chapter networked with several other organizations including the Indiana Wesleyan Student Government, the Indiana Play Therapy Association, Jurassic Sand, Wal-Mart, McDonald’s, and Burger King. CEUs were available through both the NBCC and the American Play Therapy Association. The chapter was able to earn a net profit of $3,500.00.

**Iota Omega Upsilon: Advocate for Victims of Human Trafficking**

Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Fall, 2004)

K. Elizabeth McDonald, president of the Iota Omega Upsilon’s chapter submitted information about their chapter’s activities. The chapter did their poster presentation on advocating for victims of human trafficking. The purpose of the presentation was to increase awareness of the modern day slavery in the United States. They developed an inclusive bibliography as a reference for counselors regarding counseling victims. Furthermore, they created a detailed handout addressing facts, legalities, and counseling implications that include what victims may experience, coping mechanisms, culturally sensitive counseling techniques, resources for PTSD, and advocacy organizations. Both the bibliography and handout educates counselors about the plight of victims of human trafficking and assist in counseling this unique population.

**Mu Tau Beta: Promote Professional Development**

Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2003)

Steve Snow submitted Mu Tau Beta’s advocacy tips written primarily by Barbara Hess. She defines advocacy in terms of promoting professional growth and development. Hess recommends taking an aggressive approach to partnering with regional mental health providers to produce free, convenient, high impact workshops. By co-sponsoring videotaped and live satellite programs on near death experiences with several agencies, the chapter is advocating by involvement in mutual relationships with other organizations. They also hosted two free seminars and awarded CEUs to participants.

**Mu Upsilon Gamma: Provide Seminars**

Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2004)

Michele Garofalo, Chapter Advisor of Mu Upsilon Gamma Chapter reported the chapter sponsors an annual educational seminar. Seminars have been presented on teen grief, multicultural issues, and coping with school violence. These seminars promote the field of counseling by providing valuable
training for counseling professionals and giving students an opportunity to network with these professionals.

**Pi Alpha: Marketing for Advocacy**
Gillig, S. E., & Paez, S. (Spring, 2005)

Dan Barnhart, past president of Pi Alpha Chapter, provided an advocacy tip. Chapter members enrolled in a course titled “Issues in Mental Health Counseling” gather pertinent statistics and information concerning counseling in North Carolina and create brochures and information sheets. This information is presented to various members of the North Carolina Senate and House of Representatives. From this initial experience, members of the Pi Alpha chapter created an advocacy presentation which includes practical and technical ways that counseling and related organizations could promote more accurate awareness about human services. These methods included creating brochures and information sheets and sharing them with key government officials; creating more user-friendly websites for national and local counseling organizations; creating a marketing plan, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; more attention to national awareness such as Mental Health Awareness Week and National Depression Screening Day; and more general public marketing such as public service announcements and commercials showing the efficacy of counseling as opposed to medication alone.

**Pi Sigma Upsilon: Integrate Advocacy into the Routine**
Gillig, S. E. (Summer, 2003)

According to Mark Stauffer of Pi Sigma Upsilon, “To make a lasting influence on persisting problems, it is important to integrate advocacy into the routine.” Stauffer indicates his chapter has created a new advocacy chair position in their executive committee whose duty is to be expert on political issues, to network, and to communicate with other groups. The chapter was recently advised about how to write a professional lobbying letter. Stauffer offers this tip: “If 50 individuals sign a letter, all names and addresses must be clearly written along with the signature. This makes the signature traceable, better validating and guaranteeing the authenticity of the signers.”

**Sigma Tau Sigma: Advocacy for At-Risk Youth**
Gillig, S. E., & McCurdy, K. G. (Summer, 2006)

President Laura Kahanek and representative Michele Riggs of the Sigma Tau Sigma Chapter indicated that their chapter studied advocacy for at-risk youth by utilizing miniature horses in a therapeutic process. The study provided evidence that the horses are able to communicate the internal state of at-risk youth. The study found nine horse behaviors that significantly mirrored the internal emotions of the participants.

**Tau Eta Kappa: Lobby for Clients**
Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2003)

The Tau Eta Kappa Chapter presented on lobbying for Medicare coverage for professional counselors. Rebecca Farrell recommends that CSI members join the ACA government relations listserv for updates on advocacy issues by contacting Christie Lum at clum@counseling.org (must be ACA members to join).
Upsilon Chi: Promote Advocacy
Gillig, S. E. (Summer, 2003)

Janica Lam and Vincent Geigel of the Upsilon Chi Chapter submitted their chapter’s advocacy tips. Lam indicated that the chapter introduced the concept of advocacy to new members and emphasized its importance. The chapter is working on a summer advocacy workshop for school counselors and students and previously has provided counselor advocacy websites to members and presented at the CSI Advocacy Poster Session in Anaheim, CA.

Geigel feels that the counseling profession is in need of stronger advocacy. For example, while many school counselors spend time doing administrative work; it seems as if much of their training and education goes to waste. He points out the necessity of counselors informing school administrators, legislators, and the community about all the services counselors can offer. Both Lam and Geigel stress the need for counselors to lobby for implementation of the ASCA national model. Incorporation of this model would assist school counselors to do what they are trained to do. Geigel sees that mental health counselors are in need of advocacy in order to survive in the marketplace. Both Lam and Geigel advise that counselors are being denied Medicare coverage and thus we need to write to legislators, join professional associations, and be willing to work hard to get our message across.

Both Geigel and Scott Barstow (during the March, 2003 Advocacy Committee Meeting in Anaheim, CA) advise that counselors visit the American Counseling Association’s website and read the articles in the Public Policy section. Barstow recommended going to ACA’s website at http://www.counseling.org/ and entering “Public Policy” to find out about the major federal policy issues that ACA is working on. To advocate for counseling, Barstow recommends that counselors capitalize on what ACA has already done and tap into those resources instead of reinventing the wheel.

Upsilon Nu Chi: Advocate for Wellness
Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2004)

Matthew Shurts, President, Casey Barrio, President-elect, and Dr. Jane Myers, Faculty Advisor, of the Upsilon Nu Chi Chapter submitted ideas specifically related to one of CSI’s Advocacy Themes that focuses on wellness. These writers suggest that as counselors, we often advocate for enhanced wellness for our clients but don’t do likewise for ourselves. To encourage client wellness, the chapter participated in the following: a walk for AIDS research funding, a bowl-a-thon benefitting Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the United Way, and sponsored Red Cross Disaster Services Training for students, faculty, and professionals. To educate members, Upsilon Nu Chi co-sponsored several seminars focused on integrating wellness strategies in counseling sessions and in daily life. To encourage counselor wellness, the chapter conducts an annual leadership retreat focused on wellness of the membership.

Upsilon Nu Kappa: Experiential Learning in Diversity
McCurdy, K. G., & Gillig, S. E. (Fall, 2006)

The Upsilon Nu Kappa Chapter focused on counselor advocacy through diversity. Their project entitled “Peace by Piece: Experiential Learning in Diversity” premised upon increasing awareness and respect for diversity, the program sought this advocacy goal through immersing participants in interactive, diverse learning situations including: Religion; World Oppression; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender issues; Physical Oppression; and Racial Discrimination. Brooke Wright, Kristin Steinbeck, Sarah Griess, and Faculty Advisor, Dr. David Hof, stated that CSI members elicited participant feedback following these
immersion experiences. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to understand these experiences within the context of broader social and political issues presently faced by oppressed populations.

**Upsilon Nu Kappa: Promote Client Advocacy**

Gillig, S. E. (Spring, 2004)

Jodi L. Petersen, Upsilon Nu Kappa President indicated that the chapter made efforts this year to promote client advocacy. The chapter held a conference focusing on developing counselors’ responses to diversity and justice issues related to persons of color and sexual orientation. The keynote speaker indicated that through relationships with others, counselors can find many opportunities to advocate but warned that advocating for social justice can come at a price. Another speaker addressed stereotypes and language barriers in working with Latino families. A third speaker and her family participated in a panel discussion about the coming out process. Participants were impacted by the family’s commitment to one another in the face of discrimination and acts of hate and cruelty. As a result of the conference, participants were challenged to develop a new way of interacting with and for people.

**Dr. David Hall: “If not you, then who?”**

Gillig, S. E., & Paez, S. (Spring, 2005)

In bringing this edition of the Advocacy Tips to a close, we would like to note the passing of a strong advocate of the counseling profession. Dr. David Hall, counselor educator at the University of Scranton passed away this fall from an extended illness. Those of us who had the pleasure to know, work with, and learn from Dr. Hall can attest to his love, commitment and advocacy for the counseling profession. His mark will forever be felt in Pennsylvania where he championed the licensure effort. Through his guidance and continuous efforts encouraging the Pennsylvania Alliance of Counseling Professionals, counseling students, and other counseling professionals in Pennsylvania, the LPC is a reality and well deserved credential in the state. One of the greatest advocacy tips he gave to those around him was the saying: "If not you, then who?" We each can do our own small part to advocate for the counseling profession, as Dr. Hall did for licensure in Pennsylvania. Through all of our small parts, we can become a formidable force, and make significant changes as a profession and remember, “If not you, then who?” Please submit you advocacy tips so that others can benefit from your creativity and share in the advocacy efforts for the counseling profession.
References


Other Resources: Although Counseling Advocacy Tips were not included in earlier Exemplar publications (prior to 2003), the following Volumes/Issues of the CSI Exemplar acted as catalysts for the focus on advocacy. The reader may consider reviewing these volumes available on the CSI webpage:

- Summer, 1998, CSI Exemplar, 13(2)
- Fall 1998, Counseling CSI Exemplar, 13(3)
- Spring, 1999, CSI Exemplar, 14(1)
- Summer, 1999, CSI Exemplar, 14(2)
- Fall, 1999, CSI Exemplar, 14(3)