As Paula and I brainstormed ideas for this special edition, we reviewed our CSI mission statement to see what we, as an honor society, had to say about excellence: “CSI's mission is to promote scholarship, research, professionalism, leadership and excellence in counseling, and to recognize high attainment in the pursuit of academic and clinical excellence in the profession of counseling.”

Every edition of the Exemplar offers evidence that our mission is lived out through the accomplishments of our members. We were intrigued to learn more about our colleagues' personal stories. We invited contributors to this edition to muse about the concept of excellence: what examples or mentors have inspired them; what quotes have stirred them; what experiences have aroused their sense of excellence. In the following pages, we believe that you will nod your head in agreement, shake your head in amazement, and bow your head in honor and respect as you are invited into these refreshingly candid stories.

**My Own Snapshots**

I'd like to begin by sharing a few snapshots of my own developing sense of excellence. I began my master's work tentatively about 17 years, and five children, after earning my bachelor's degree. During my second semester at the University of New Orleans, I attended a CSI chapter meeting. I made myself useful by fussing over the refreshment table. Several days later Dr. Larry Burlew summoned me to his office saying only that he wanted some help. My natural assumption: he needed my hostessing skills at another event. Dr. Burlew always made it clear that his academic intention was to teach to the brightest students, encouraging all to raise the bar. Can you imagine my surprise when he invited me to collaborate with him on a journal article and presentation?

In 1990 I was chosen as a CSI fellow and intern. I had the privilege of interning with Dr. Tom Sweeney and organizing an Oral History project that included video tapes of Gilbert Wrenn, Donald Super, Clement Vontress and seven other CSI Scholars. Dr. Sweeney invested a tremendous amount of trust and responsibility in me. I distinctly remember him telling me that when I told him I would do something, he expected me to keep my word. I appreciat-

(continued on page 2)
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**Worth Doing Poorly? (continued from page 1)**

Connie Fox

Worth Doing Poorly?

Connie Fox
ed his candor and directness, and I
have replayed that message many
times when assuming responsibility
for professional projects.

**A New Understanding of Excellence**

In my early professional years,
striving for external (recognizable)
excellence was paramount. Howev-
er, I have experienced a gradual
shift. Recently, I had an aha
moment when I came across this
quote by G. K. Chesterson: “Any-
thing that is really worth doing is
worth doing poorly.” This idea res-
onated in me. For years I dreamed
about becoming a yoga teacher. I
never seemed to have the time.
With Chesterton’s words reverber-
ating in my soul, I enrolled in the
course and month by month com-
pleted the training. The final, writ-
ten test required knowledge of
ancient yogic philosophy, ayurvedic
practices, and biomechanics. I
knew that I had not studied enough
to master the concepts. We graded
the paper tests ourselves and my
stomach twisted as I x-ed out
wrong answers. I tallied my mis-
takes, marked the number on the
top, and drew a bold circle around
my total. I believed I had made the
lowest grade (although my expec-
tation of myself was always to
make the highest). As I stretched
out on my mat for the follow-up
practice I was flooded with a
sense of shame, not realizing my
expectation of excellence. I had
allowed myself to do something
poorly and I abhorred the visceral
and psychological feeling that fol-
lowed my self judgment. Gradual-
ly, my yoga practice brought a
sense of wellbeing and I stretched
through the inner condemnation
to self acceptance.

When I thought of sharing my
new (to me) ideas of doing things
poorly I wondered how that fit with
the concept of excellence. I was
reassured as I read the contribu-
tions of the other articles for this
special edition. Over the years,
excellence has come to include
the process of constant rebalanc-
ing . . . something that I also do
on my yoga mat. If I strive for
maximum flexibility but don’t
develop strength, I will fall. If I
devote all of my energy to profes-
sional goals while neglecting my
health or my family, my life col-
lapses. The excellence that I
strive for today is not performing
at the very highest level. Personal
excellence is asking the most of
myself in all areas of my life, while
maintaining a healthy balance.

Dr. Connie Fox is an eating dis-
order specialist and has a private
practice in Oklahoma City, Okla-
homa. She is completing a yoga
teacher’s certification program
with the intention of including
yoga stretches and breathing
exercises in her work with this
population.
I’ve been thinking lately about excellence and what it means. If you were to utter the word excellence in front of most groups of people, they would probably react positively. They would like the concept of excellence. Who wouldn’t want to be excellent at something or a lot of things?

I have known some people, however, who have mixed feelings about excellence. I’ve asked them why, and they tell me it is because the word seems like a straight jacket or an absolute sum. Excellence to these individuals is a standard imposed from the outside, defined so rigidly, that many people may never attain it. It also is a product that often is associated with the worth we attribute to others. They say that there are many people who could never reach the externally imposed standard because of factors beyond their control.

A person with a mental or physical disability may never be able to perform at an excellent level on some tasks. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may have more difficulty performing at an excellent level due to lack of opportunity or lack of support from others around them. The vicissitudes of life can be so distracting that we may just do “an ok job” on something we ordinarily excel at.

Excellence as a Product

Excellence can be seen as a product, an attitude, or a manner of approaching tasks. A person can produce an excellent product but does that mean it exemplifies excellence? What if the product is submitted late? What if the “excellent” product was completed but the person who submitted it neglected more important assignments they had been given? Creating an excellent product is just one aspect of excellence. It’s the sum product and meets an externally imposed standard.

Excellence as an Attitude

Another way we might define excellence is our attitude toward a task. Even if we do not create an excellent end product, we might show excellence in the tenacity with which we tackle a challenging task. In this case, a person with a disability or disadvantaged background or someone who just has less natural talent or ability can show excellence in progressing toward a goal, even if he or she falls short of an “excellence” standard. We might ask whose achievement is more excellent -- a bright person who produces an excellent paper without having to try very hard or a hard working, less talented person producing a product beyond what others thought he or she could do, but does not quite make the excellent mark? Excellence, in this instance, would be characterized by endurance, resilience and continued improvement. This is rewarded less in our society.

Excellence as a Manner of Approach

Excellence as reflected in how we approach a task means that we show excellence in the care we take with the task. We don’t just want to finish a product but we want to develop a deeper understanding of our task, contribute to the larger circle of

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Excellence: Its Ins, Outs, and Whereabouts

Samuel T. Gladding
CSI President 1989-90

When I was growing up, I would occasionally, sometimes frequently, have unfocused moments. In response, my father used to say in a kidding yet serious way:

“Sam, you can’t be a promising young man forever.”

Though that was many years ago, his words still sound in my mind. I believe the reason I remember that so well is because of the emphasis he was giving me in a light-hearted way about the nature of life. His message, although delivered with a smile, was sobering. He simply pointed out that time is limited and that if I were to use my talents, I needed to get started. In essence, he was talking about excellence. He could have basically said something like: “There is no time like the present to maximize your ability. After all, you have no promise of tomorrow.”

Over the years as I have reflected on my father’s words in regard to excellence, I realize that excelling is something that many people have the potential to do but only a few accomplish. I believe the reason is that to be excellent requires vision, dedication, and sacrifice. People have to see who they can be, give of themselves in a focused way, and give up going down dead-end streets or frivolous paths. They have to bring out of themselves internal qualities and abilities as well. While individuals can be encouraged to do all of these things, it is easier to avoid doing them. Ultimately, whether one excels is in the individual’s hands, heart, and head. It requires purposefulness, choice, and effort but in a more positive way than illustrated in the following fable.

The Power of Life: A Tale of Choice

Long ago in a far away kingdom, a youth, wanting to make a name for himself, decided he would appear before the king and fool him. He captured a small bird and put it behind his back. He decided he would ask the king if the bird was alive or dead. If the king answered that the bird was alive, the youth would quickly squeeze and kill it. If the king said the bird was dead, the young man would open his hands and let the bird fly out.

The day came when the youth had an audience with the king. Approaching the ruler, the young man said, “Your majesty, I am holding a bird behind my back. Tell me, is it dead or alive?”

The king, who was wiser than the adolescent imagined, pondered for a moment and then answered, “The decision is in your hands.”

So it is with excellence. Whether we strive for and engage in living qualitatively is up to us. It is a choice. However, if one chooses this pursuit, there is a price to pay! The cost involves becoming more sensitive to oneself, others, and environments. Further, it demands continuous improvement. Finally, it requires the realization that one can never go back to being content with the mediocre.

Many Kinds of Excellence: Looking Within

In counseling, some of us have abilities in the clinical domain, some of us with spoken communication, and yet other write extremely well. Then there are individuals who can organize, those who can visualize, and a few who are so interpersonally warm and inviting that they draw people to them and the projects in which they are engaged. The point is that abilities are distributed in the population. “Wishing does not make it so” but cultivating what we have the potential to do can have a positive impact even when it might seem initially we will not be successful. For example, take the 5 foot 3 inch former National Basketball player Mugsy Bogues. On the surface, there would be few expectations that a person less than 6 feet tall would play college, let alone, professional basketball. However, Bogues defied the odds because he realized early in his life that he had speed, coordination, flexibility,
and determination to dribble, shoot, and scoot past bigger men. He sweated to develop these traits. Eventually, he became a team leader on the court and he specialized in handing out assists rather than garnering rebounds in the game of round ball.

In the profession of counseling, we can look at the life of Nicolas Vacc as an example of excellence. Dr. Vacc was a mild-mannered academic who used his abilities in assessment and advocacy to further the counseling profession. He realized that while he was a good speaker, this platform was not his forte. Likewise, he did not try to be a family therapist or an exemplary group worker. Those were not his talents. In short, he did not pretend to be what he was not. Rather each year he became stronger in what he had an interest and ability in because he consciously focused on what he did best. Thus, he became a leader in the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE), a division of the American Counseling Association. In addition, he was a contributor of questions to the National Counselor Exam, a site visitor for counseling programs seeking CACREP accreditation, and a president of Chi Sigma Iota where he focused on carefully evaluating how the honor society was doing. He was a person and a professional who merits emulation.

**Finding Excellence: Bringing It Out**

How do we find our excellence like Dr. Vacc did? I think there are at least two steps. First, I believe we need to acknowledge that we have some talents and abilities that if cultivated will grow. Modesty is becoming, but in excellence one must first become the best one can be before displaying humility. So, if a pattern of engaging in interests does not emerge as you think of your life, ask those with whom you associate and who know you best what they have observed. Chances are they will have some insights into your skills. Interest and career tests may also be helpful.

Second, once you come to the realization that you have some special talents, improve them. Refining talents means associating with professionals who have similar interests and who are actively involved in upgrading themselves. It involves taking continuing education courses as well and practicing or displaying what you know in a calculated risk-taking way, such as writing a manuscript, giving a speech, or working with a group to organize an event.

**Excellence in Multiple Settings: The Whereabouts**

The good news is that excellence is within us, can be brought out if we work at it, and is multidimensional. It is where we choose to use it and when. For some of us, that will mean working and contributing locally. For others, the concentration will be on a state, regional, national, or even international level. The display of our proficiencies will be in different forms and at various functions.

That being the case, it is important to realize that excellence is a way of life and may be developmental. For instance, take the life of Bono (Paul Hewson), the lead singer in the band U2. He went from being just a rock star to being an advocate and fund-raiser for the plight of African nations and their people. In his work as a humanitarian, he has reached out to political figures such as George Bush, and to prominent journalists, such as NBC Evening News anchor, Brian Williams. His striving for excellence in the world, especially the relief of poverty and the promotion of education, has made a significant difference in

(continued on page 6)
Excellence
(continued from page 5)
the lives of people everywhere.

Counselors who have chosen to be excellent will feel a bit of pressure to stay on the path of doing extremely well whenever the opportunity arises. That may mean studying longer than others, just as a master musician may practice more than one who is mediocre. Yet, the rewards of being the best we can be leave a legacy. In counseling we think of outstanding professionals, such as Mary Thomas Burke and Gilbert Wrenn, as those who have contributed to our own good and well-being. That is the dividend of investing in excellence over time. It outlasts us. Our clients, colleagues, and new clinicians benefit as does society.

On Excellence
(continued from page 3)
humanity, or perhaps solve a problem that will benefit others. Maybe we want to improve ourselves and reach a higher level of performing or understanding than we ever have before. We aren’t out to create an excellent end product to impress others or to gain some reward or approval. We are intrinsically driven to achieve something at an excellent level with the end product being a sense of commitment or justice or personal achievement.

Personal Lessons on Excellence
To me, excellence is complicated and not so neatly or easily defined. I know that I was exposed to excellence growing up on a small farm. I watched my relatives display some traits I would consider to be those of excellence: They completed what they began, were conscientious about the quality of what they did, were self-disciplined and did not need external pressure to complete something, and kept growing by thinking about how things could be improved.

As a 11 and 12 year old I had plenty of opportunities to learn about the importance of following through and being conscientious when taking on a task. I remember one day my mother asked me to plant two long rows of tomato plants and then water them. It was late in the day and I forgot to water them. The next morning when I went out to check on the plants I had put in the ground, I saw they were wilted and lying on the ground rather than standing up. My mother said they looked like that because I forgot to water them.

What I learned from this is that there are real consequences to not following through on something. I put in a great deal of work to dig the holes and place the tomato plants in them, and I had nothing to show for it. I didn’t focus on the disappointment my parents felt or the extra money it would take to buy new plants. I was disappointed in myself because I thought I had done a good job at something and later found out I had not. I had many experiences like this growing up on a small southern farm. My parents didn’t have time to sit down and explain to me what could be learned from the situations I encountered. I just learned from logical consequences that it felt better doing things well rather than doing them poorly. It mattered inside of me.

So, when I think of excellence, I like to think beyond a product, like a perfect or extremely high SAT or GRE score or an A+ grade, or even the outstanding financial performance of a company. It seems to me that it is important that we recognize all forms of excellence, whether it be the arts enhance our lives, enrich all of those it touches. Just as the arts enhance our lives, excellence does as well. It excites us and invites us to aspire to be more than we have ever been before.

The last of the greats in our profession has yet to emerge. As my father used to remind me, life goes on and if we focus we can cultivate our potential. In the process, we may develop a healthy way of life and add to the lives of others. Thus excellence brings forth action and contributes to the greater good. That is why we should pursue it on whatever level we can and never take our eyes off it. After all, we have promises to keep!

Dr. Gladding is Chair and Professor of Counseling in the Department of Counseling at Wake Forest University. He is also a Licensed Professional Counselor in North Carolina, a National Certified Counselor, and a Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor.

Conclusion
Nothing stays the same in life. Change is inevitable and if handled well, it is growth producing. It often challenges us to be better yet than we may have even imagined. At such times of transition, excellence can come forth and enrich all of those it touches. Just as the arts enhance our lives, excellence does as well. It excites us and invites us to aspire to be more than we have ever been before.

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The Habit of Excellence

Gary Williams
Zeta Chapter

Gary Williams

When asked to write about “excellence,” I quickly realized that, for me, it was hard to formulate a finite definition of this word used so commonly in so many different contexts. Before addressing what excellence means in the context of our organization (excellence is used not once, but twice in our mission statement!), I decided to first search the collective wisdom of the great philosophers to see if they offered some clues and clarity to my own implicit beliefs regarding the word. I connected with the following quote by Aristotle:

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Doing the Right Thing

While Aristotle did not really define the word to my wishes, he brought forth two elements of excellence that I find essential. The first is that excellence is achieved by doing the “right thing.” Surely the best use of “excellence” is not to describe when people do a wrong thing: “It was sheer excellence the way in which he consumed seven martinis and skillfully drove home without killing anyone.” While we are amazed and grateful that no one was injured or killed, he did not perform an act of excellence. I believe that the word is reserved for people who not only do extraordinary things but also do extraordinary things that are right.

Repeated Consistently

Aristotle makes another point about excellence which crystallizes my beliefs about the word. Excellence is not necessarily achieved in one swift act but is realized over time by doing the right thing repeatedly with great consistency. While I am in awe of the major leaguer who can hit a homerun against a skillful fastball pitcher, I probably will not even notice this particular player unless he distinguishes himself as a regular homerun hitter.

Excellence as Counselors

These thoughts seem to translate well into the context of the counseling profession. What could be more right than choosing a profession which is centered on the mission of helping other people? Further, in order to serve people well, and certainly to make particular efforts to avoid harming them, one must practice with a pristine sense of ethical consideration. Ethics, the very cornerstone of our profession, is really nothing more than “doing the right thing” as stated by our governing codes and closely examining ourselves and our actions and doing what we know is moral and right.

What about the element of consistency? Frankly, I am not in the mind to think of someone as being an “excellent” counselor if they are only helpful to people once in a while, even taking into consideration that the process can only be as effective as the client is willing to work. True excellence in counseling is demonstrated when practitioners take seriously their responsibility with every client and when they seek to constantly learn the craft in an earnest way. So to me, an excellent counselor is one who is highly ethical and works hard to consistently deliver solid services for those they serve. I have a belief that if these counselors are congruent and healthy individuals, they will facilitate many significant positive changes for many people in their career.

Excellence in CSI

What does all this mean in terms of Chi Sigma Iota’s mission statement? I can honestly say that most all of the counseling professionals I have met who exude excellence in the profession were not only members of Chi Sigma Iota but also were often serving the organization at the chapter or national level. Further, most of those who come to mind have a history of serving a number of other counseling organizations as well.

Finally, to wildly paraphrase the above Aristotle quote, excellence in counseling is not so much a virtue but rather is won by proficient, consistent and ethical service to clients and to the counseling profession. Certainly, Chi Sigma Iota is filled with emerging and seasoned professionals who demonstrate these qualities…par excellence!

Mr. Williams is a Licensed Professional Counselor who maintains a private practice in Birmingham, Alabama. He is past-president of the Alabama Mental Health Counselor Association, and was honored to receive the “National Outstanding Practitioner Award” from CSI in 2002.

Thoughts on Excellence

Excellence is the best deterrent to all barriers of race and gender. Always do your “homework” (personal and professional) and make ethical decisions. It is usually the small details that make the difference between average and excellence.

Cooper Rose
CSI President 1991-92
A recent fellow graduate of a school counseling program and I were sitting at a local bistro in Montreal, Canada at the American Counseling Association conference when I asked her what she thought excellence in counseling meant. She stared at me as if I had just asked her to define Einstein’s law of universal gravitation. We discussed presentations, awards, conferences, workshops and all that appeared to be demonstrations of counseling excellence. Trying to strictly define excellence proved itself to be comparable to putting a genie in a bottle. Were we approaching it from the wrong angle? We'd been discussing counseling excellence as something that existed externally, seen solely from without, when it might be better explored as something that grows from within. When I shared my thought with her she replied, “I think you have your article.”

Seeds of Passion

Once a person discovers the seeds of passion planted in his or her being, it is natural for excellence to expand in all areas.

Thoughts on Excellence

After pondering the meaning of excellence and sifting through a variety of quotes, I found one by Jerry Moran that sums up what excellence is to me: “There is a distinction between excellence and perfection. Perfection has to do with the end product, but excellence has to do with the process.”

June Williams
CSI President-Elect

Kelly Kozlowski

Speaking for myself, I have found what I believe I was meant to do in this lifetime; this awareness makes it nearly impossible for me to settle for mediocrity in any aspect. It is not out of ego or pride that I find myself voraciously pursuing knowledge and ways to become involved. It is out of joy and gratitude that I enter into these tasks. I have been blessed to find what makes my heart sing. How can I silence that song? I feel a sense of stewardship regarding this gift, a need to return to the universe that which has been freely given to me. Mediocrity will not complete the cycle or satisfy the passion. I have tried to pinpoint when this passion for the profession of counseling seemed to take root and I believe it began with attending conferences.

Excellence Exemplified

When I entered my graduate program, it was made clear that attendance at one professional conference was a requirement for graduation. I wondered what I would get from a conference that I was not already getting in class. The answer to that question was answered quickly at my first ACA conference.

I sat in the keynote address and listened to leaders in the field whose books and theories I had studied. I listened to presentations by Krumboltz, Ellis and Glasser. I wiped away tears from my eyes as I realized I was a member of this gathering of counseling professionals. It would have been enough to leave with only that experience tucked away amongst my memories but the encounters continued. Later that day, with books in hand, I stood in line to shake hands with theorists and authors who signed their various publications. I was like a groupie waiting for an autograph. I walked away with my books, staring at the inscription, feeling like a fan with a prized autograph. On another day I happened to sit down next to Sam Gladding and he struck up polite conversation for a few moments. I was chatting with a man with whom I held the highest regard, a man who for me was a vision of counseling excellence. I have no idea when it struck me that these legends were just people, though not ordinary counselors. They had propelled themselves into the forefront of counseling as leaders, authors and examples of excellence. While I was inspired by the accomplishments of these leaders of the profession in the form of their publications, positions, and awards, I was more impressed by their passion, humility and genuineness of soul.

The indicators of excellence are seen by the world through such outward things as awards, recognitions, and even dare I say writing articles like this. I would be lying if I said that these indicators have no meaning. We honor those who have done great things and rightly so. But if these physical plaques are taken away, does that change...
the meaning or importance of what those who received them represent? It is the inner manifestation of excellence that inspires me. It is something that can be felt internally when in the presence of counseling excellence.

**Personal Glimpses of Excellence**

Passion for our profession is not limited to those counselors found on the back cover of books. I have also found it in my own university and community. Once I knew what I was looking for, examples of excellence seemed to manifest around me. For example, the counseling director in my school district has an unquenchable passion which drives her to advocate tirelessly for school counselors. She does this not only with the district administration but also with state representatives and senators. Because of her efforts, the counselors within our district do a better job and, more importantly, the students and families we serve are better off. I saw yet another example of excellence when I attended a workshop presented by a local community counselor whose love for her area of counseling shone through every word she spoke. She might have a wall of honors that she has seen in me and the encouragement she has provided me in awakening my own heart and soul as a counselor and fellow traveler. This quality of mentorship is something that seems to stem from a genuine love of counseling. Whether the time spent with an exemplary counselor is like the three minutes spent chatting with Sam Gladding or three years with my mentor, there is a feeling of a hand being offered in encouragement to those of us new to the field. I feel enthused and empowered in the presence of these individuals who exude a passion for counseling.

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**Thoughts on Excellence**

My favorite quote on excellence is from Colin Powell, who said, “If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude.” My rather less pithy interpretation is, “Do whatever you do as well as you can do it, and excellence will follow.”

*Larry Loesch*
*CSI President 1990-91*

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**Balancing My Own Passion**

The funny thing about the seed of passion and the desire to be a part of the profession is that it led me to a bountiful table. I placed my plate on the table and pulled up a chair to have a look. There were committees, organizations, presentations, articles and research, mingled with the advocacy, awards, leadership roles and countless other new and interesting possibilities. I gave a quick glance at my plate containing two kids, a husband, a job and a graduate program. I scooted them aside to make room for what was before me. Before I knew it, I had a serving of this, a dollop of that, a helping of this and my plate was more than full. I love this profession and want to be involved with others who share that passion. That is what excellent counselors do, right? But with my plate piled high, I felt stressed and out of balance. It was at that time the universe saw fit to place me at a Chi Sigma Iota Leadership Workshop where I listened to Coutland Lee speak about the need for balance in life. At the same meeting I heard Judy (continued on page 12)

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**Thoughts on Excellence**

Excellence in counseling is a process and not a final outcome. We continuously work toward excellence, and continued efforts are required to maintain the high levels of excellence we’ve achieved. Remarkably, counseling excellence is also something that must fit our individual uniqueness. Each of us will accomplish this goal in a fashion different than everyone else.

*Geoff Yager*
*CSI President 2002-03*
To me, excellence means achieving a level of performance that is far above and beyond basic expectations. When I was a student, excellence meant getting the 4.0 average. When I was in retail management, excellence meant breaking sales records for my department and retaining the best part-time cashiers. When I was an executive recruiter, excellence meant making more placements than anyone else in the office. As a counseling professional, excellence begins when my clients actually get better (which may or may not feel good to them in the moment), when I facilitate their growth and individualization vs. their dependence on me or the therapeutic process, and when I behave ethically and professionally—especially when no one is watching.

A Continuing Process

The definition and measurement of excellence in counseling is less clear than in my earlier careers. It is more of an internal process of constantly checking my responses and interventions and client cues as opposed to an external process where my achievements are public. Maintaining this standard of excellence requires consistent participation in professional development activities, consistent participation in peer supervision and consultation, and consistent evaluation of the progress of my clients as well as my role in their progress. Excellence means that I maintain an effective blend of well-honed and proficient counseling skills, along with an open mind to continue learning from my clients. It means truly empathizing with my clients, and trusting them enough to maintain appropriate therapeutic boundaries, ensuring that I win the “battle for structure” and they win the “battle for initiative.”

Life and professional experiences have taught me that excellence is not about having a brilliant mind. Excellence comes about from first making errors, recognizing areas for improvement, and not being discouraged by those realizations. In place of potential discouragement, excellence emerges from the excitement and energy of the continuing search for improvement.

Richard Hazler
CSI President 2005-06

Through presenting or writing or supervising others. It means participating in professional organizations and assisting with leadership responsibilities, even though “time is money” for those of us in private practice. It means supporting my local community by doing some “pro bono” work, volunteering my services, or helping community helping agencies in training some of their volunteers.

Advocating for the Profession

As a professional in the field, maintaining excellence comes with a responsibility to advocate for the profession. This means that to truly be “excellent” I must not only provide the best of care for my clients but also contribute to the profession by teaching others what I learn as I learn it through presenting or writing or supervising others. It means participating in professional organizations and assisting with leadership responsibilities, even though “time is money” for those of us in private practice. It means supporting my local community by doing some “pro bono” work, volunteering my services, or helping community helping agencies in training some of their volunteers.

Thoughts on Excellence

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CSI President 2005-06

Excellence means that I confront my clients when they are ready yet remain non-judgmental and still demonstrate unconditional positive regard.

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Monitoring Myself

Excellence in counseling means that I strive to live my life in the same way that I help my clients strive to live theirs. It means making efforts to balance my time so there is room for work, play, relationships, spiritual development, exercise, rest, and personal development. It means tending to my own self-care and asking for help when I need it. Excellence means ensuring that I am monitoring my own issues so that I don’t get in the way of a client’s progress.

The toughest thing about achieving excellence in counseling, especially in private practice, is that my clients and I are the only ones who really know what I’m doing in the therapy room, and I’m the only one who really knows what I’m doing the rest of the time. Excellence means that I am consistently mindful of and attentive to the degree to which I am delivering on my own definition of excellence.

Ms. Neuer is a Licensed Professional Counselor who provides corporate consultation services as well as personal counseling and coaching from her private office in Birmingham, Alabama. She has served as President of the Alabama Mental Health Counselor Association.
While the word “excellence” has a specific definition, it is also one of those words that conjure up unique meanings for each of us through the memories it elicits. When I sat down to write about this topic, the first memory to come forth was an image of my father. For as long as I can remember, my dad was always reminding us to “do your best.” You see, he always gave his best to anything he did, particularly to being an incredible father and a wonderful human being. Instead of asking what grade I made in a class, he would ask, “Did you try your hardest?” He always told us we could do anything if we worked hard enough and if we gave our best--that was all anyone could ask. As an adult, I have learned over and over how very important these values have been in allowing me to achieve things I never thought I was capable of achieving.

Important Womentor

The second image that appeared when I was thinking of excellence was one of my life womentors whom I met in my doctoral studies at the University of Florida. I had always been an excellent student and never really had to try very hard to achieve good grades. One day, after a great deal of thought, I made an appointment with a female professor who had just returned to her alma mater after becoming a nationally recognized expert in her field, gerontological counseling. Before that meeting, I really had not decided what I wanted to do and certainly did not think I had what it took to obtain my doctorate or to be a professor. In preparation for the meeting, I did some research on this new faculty member. To say I was impressed with her accomplishments would be an understatement. She had already achieved excellence in her field and was the president-elect of the American Counseling Association! I couldn’t believe she would even want to meet with me. However, I had decided I wanted to work with older persons and that I wanted to work on my doctorate in Counselor Education, so I thought I would keep the appointment and hopefully receive some guidance on what I needed to do in order to accomplish my goal. When I arrived for my appointment, Dr. Jane E. Myers invited me in and listened intently while I explained my goals. Much to my surprise, she seemed to think I was a good candidate for a doctoral program and spent a great deal of time talking to me about what I wanted to do. A few days later, I was stunned to receive a letter, which I still have, from Dr. Myers saying how much she had enjoyed meeting me and that she was looking forward to working with me if I chose to pursue my doctoral studies at UF. From that point on, Dr. Myers has been my life womentor.

She never let me settle for less than my best. She was the first professor I ever met who returned an assignment to me and said while it was a good paper, she knew I could do better. In far more ways than I could ever recount here, she has always been there to serve as a model of excellence to me and to many, many others.

Images of Excellence

There are so many images of excellence that flood my thoughts: my incredible husband and children who inspire me to be the best mother and wife I can be; my adopted mother, Fitzallen Eldridge, who has helped me heal my wounds and has served as a constant source of inspiration and model of excellence; my guardian angel who has always been there in the toughest parts of my life’s journey; my students who push me to continually evolve as a teacher and counselor; my colleagues who support me and who help me achieve levels of professional accomplishment I never thought I could; and my clients who trust me with their stories and teach me how to be a better counselor and person.

As a profession, counseling also is very fortunate to have Dr. Tom Sweeney. His foresight and commitment to excellence are realized in our international honor society, Chi Sigma Iota International. Each chapter of CSI is an extension of our professional commitment to achieving excellence in all areas, not just in the area of academic achievement.

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Reflections on Excellence
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Miranti share her experiences of juggling many responsibilities. She made it quite clear we need to safeguard ourselves from overlooking the significant relationships in our lives. As a member of a profession that specializes in relationships, I seemed to be on the fast path to neglecting those important people in my life. I took a deep breath and remembered that I must practice healthy living in order to help my clients pursue their own healthy lives. I have not met a person, including my mentor, whom I thought personified excellence who has not shared with me the importance of relationships and balance in their own lives. So, as important as passion is, I have had to learn not to load my plate too full with delicious but demanding pursuits.

Passion for counseling is the foundation of excellence. Counselors who embody this passion lead, guide, inspire, and encourage us simply as an extension of who they are. It is something that can be challenging to define, but I have certainly known it and have been blessed by its presence.

Ms. Kozlowski is in her third year as a middle school counselor in Fort Worth, Texas and is working toward her doctorate in Counselor Education at Texas A&M–Commerce. A CSI Fellow in 2005, she received the ACA Ross Trust Scholarship for outstanding emerging school counselor and CSI's Outstanding Service to the

Thoughts on Excellence
Excellence is a commitment to yourself, others, and the world in which we live to choose a lifestyle of optimum wellness in all areas. It is in the myriad of daily decisions we make that we empower ourselves toward positive growth and change. Excellence is defined for me as succinctly as possible in the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” That charge to “be” is all encompassing.

Jane Myers
CSI President 1987-88

Excellence
(continued from page 11)

Coming Full Circle
What I realize as I reflect on my own life and “excellence” is the awesome impact others’ belief in me, many times when I didn’t even believe in myself, has had on me. I have now come full circle in my life. As a person in midlife, I am now in Erikson’s stage of generativity. I have reached the point in life where I realize the value in finding and promoting excellence in others. I recently attended ACA’s Annual Conference in Montreal, Canada. During this trip, I had the privilege of presenting with Mr. Paul Jones, a graduate student in our school counseling masters program. I have never been more proud to be a part of something than I was that Saturday when Paul presented his theories of working with adolescents through pop culture. Watching him begin to see himself as the amazing person and young professional I have always seen him to be was truly a moment I will count among my most honored and treasured memories.

The privilege of actively trying to be the person in others’ lives who inspires them to “do their best” and the person who sees excellence in them even when they can not is an amazing gift. Perhaps that is what excellence truly is—holding ourselves to that high standard as human beings. We first focus on giving our best in all we do and secondly focus on helping others to see the best in themselves. In our profession, we have the opportunity to walk a small part of life’s journey with our clients. I am continually struck by the lack of messages individuals have been given in their lives that they can achieve anything, that they are worthy. My life has overflowed with an abundance of individuals who have believed in me and taught me the power of excellence in who I am and in what I can achieve. So I would like to close with this thought, in the immortal words of Bill and Ted, “Be Excellent to Each Other!”

Dr. Valerie Schwiebert is a professor of counseling at Western Carolina University and maintains a small private practice. She is currently the president of AACE, past Chair of the North Carolina Board of Licensed Professional Counselors, and faculty advisor to the Chi Beta Chi chapter.

Thoughts on Excellence
Ralph Nader has said, “I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.” To me, this is the essence of excellence—what we are able to inspire, encourage, and celebrate in others.

Jamie Carney
CSI President 2003-04
I first encountered excellence in counseling as a client. Though I did not know it at the time, I received a gift that permeates my entire life and professional being. All of the theories, techniques, etc. that I learned in graduate school had special meaning because of my truly wonderful experience as a client. For me, excellence in counseling is about ownership, proximity, and trust.

Learning through Group

My first meeting with “Helen” was a screening session before entering a therapy group dealing mainly with anxiety and depression. Before I left the session, she gave me a contract and asked me to read and sign it. It was a “Cooperative Contract” containing the rules for interaction in the group and, subsequently, much more. As I read the document, I realized that the “rules” were essentially descriptions of interpersonal skills I did not have—but ones I longed to possess.

From the beginning—introductions in my first session, goal setting in the second, on to the end when we said our good-byes and reflected on our gains—I worked within a process and structure that was programming me for therapeutic success. My fellow clients and I worked in an interpersonal laboratory: questioning, experimenting and struggling with the philosophy, spirit, and demands of the contract each of us had signed. We were a flock of individuals searching for ourselves and our place among others, and Helen was our shepherd. She cared, guided, and challenged—but not too much. With just the right amount of pressure, she held us accountable to the terms of the contract. While doing so, she modeled all of the skills we were so eager to acquire.

A Model of Excellence

Helen understood the concept of proximity and the importance of personal boundaries. Never rescuing, she knew that we had to learn how to fend for ourselves. She was a master of demanding encouragement. She respectfully required that we own and articulate our position and ask for what we wanted. At the same time, she facilitated a cohesive group, willing and able to provide the necessary sensitivity and support. Through her modeling, structure, and presence, she supported us in learning how to assume and express ownership of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Helen trusted the process, the rules, and the clients. Trust is the essence of excellence in counseling. Too often, we focus on trust as a function of client to counselor. We talk about clients trusting counselors, but we don’t talk enough about counselors trusting clients. Throughout my counseling process with Helen, I never doubted that she trusted my ability to make a difference in my own experience. Her professional and personal presence and the process she facilitated were embedded with her conviction that I could acquire new tools and learn how to use them effectively. I was acutely, yet comfortably, aware of her confidence and therefore encouraged to observe, assess, and modify my thoughts, feelings, and perceptions appropriately in the course of my daily life. Because she trusted me, I learned how to trust myself and the significant people in my life.

Trusting Myself—and My Clients

The following is a poem I wrote, somewhat in tribute to Helen, for a theories class that focused on person-centered counseling.

The Mirror

Growing up was not much fun – almost surreal to some degree
All the images were distorted, like in a funhouse by the sea
Reality and me, you see, were never partners much
Until I saw a mirror, void of the funhouse touch
The person in that mirror was straight and tall and able
I was afraid to believe that person could be me – I remembered all the fables
But no matter how I bent or moved, the mirror never wavered
Now reality and me, you see, have a relationship I savor

As a counseling professional, I strive to trust my clients in much the same way Helen trusted me by structuring, managing, and facilitating a process that allows them to question, reflect on, and explore new patterns of interaction with other people and within themselves. Just like Helen, I know they can do it.

Mr. Daniel is Director of Counseling Services at Greensboro College, Greensboro, North Carolina.
From External Praise to Internal Excellence

Cathy Woodyard
CSI Exemplar Editor

I am reluctant to admit it, but I believe my desire for personal excellence began out of my need to please others. I’m not sure when I first became a people pleaser, but undoubtedly I was very young. I know by age five I was focused on making a special pie for my dad, eager for his praise and approval. At age eight I was helping in the church nursery and listened carefully for the nursery workers’ complimentary words of “mature” and “helpful” as she told my mother of my work. In seventh grade a teacher wrote a note on the report that I turned in: “Excellent work.” I still have the little scrap of paper. I relished hearing words of praise, and I had an enormous fear of disappointing anyone.

My early start at people pleasing continued into adulthood and it brought with it many rewards. I was respected, honored, and recognized for my excellence in teaching, being a friend, and for taking care of others. My diligent attempt at pleasing my parents, teachers, and anyone in my circle of acquaintances eventually cost me, of course. What appeared externally to others as my “personal excellence” was internally for me a constant attempt to figure out what would please others and a desperate attempt to be it.

While I heard words of praise from others, internally I had no concept of my own excellence.

This need to please others led me to counseling, to codependency meetings, to self-help books, and to group sessions. I found it hard to peel my fingers from the grip they had on the need to please others. It was terrifying to think of letting that go.

An Internal Shift

The shift from an external focus on pleasing to an internal desire for excellence began with a simple interchange during my prepracticum class. The class was taught by a senior member of the faculty who was revered in the department. Practicing in front of the two-way mirror with my fellow students and professor watching, I struggled with enormous difficulty to hear what my “client” was saying. My mind was consumed with trying not to ask “why,” not to ask a closed-ended question, and not to talk through silences. As a person who could usually talk easily, I struggled as if I were uncertain of the meaning of each and every word. I worked to focus on my client, on my body language, on my responses. The challenge was so consuming I could not even consider whether my performance was pleasing to the students and professor watching from behind the glass. I was merely trying to survive through the seemingly eternal ten minute session.

When class ended, I felt weariness and relief as I was leaving the lab. My professor asked me to wait, and then he said, “Cathy, I’d like to recommend a practicum site for you next semester because I really want you to get a good one. I’ve been watching you, and I think you are going to be an excellent counselor.”

An Excellent Counselor?

What was he talking about? I wasn’t even trying to be excellent. I was simply struggling to put one word in front of the other. I was dumbfounded. I didn’t have the skills necessary to “please” in this area. What could he possibly have seen that would lead him to see me as having the potential for excellence?

It was in that experience of being seen in all my awkwardness, uncertainty, and imperfection that was borne a seed of personal excellence. The professor saw something in me—not in my performance, for it was minimal at best—but something in me that led him to believe I could be...
External Praise
(continued from page 14)

an excellent counselor. I didn’t have the skills to “please,” but somehow, he still saw potential in me for excellence.

Suddenly, it was like I had found “my place.” Not a place where I needed to perform and work to please others, but a place where who I was was going to help me be an excellent counselor. My actions from that point on may not have looked different externally from the actions I would have taken previously. I studied hard, worked diligently on learning my counseling skills, and eagerly sought out all types of learning. But internally it was different. Now these choices were not made to impress or please others—they were made for me. I felt a need and desire to do well because I felt a responsibility to myself to be the best me I could be. To have done less would have felt dishonoring to me.

More and more I have learned that when I take the time to make choices that are true to who I am, I am pleased and I feel a sense of excellence. It was in my act of not being able to perform and please that I was set free from the consuming need to always please. I can’t say that it still doesn’t feel good to receive praise or commendation, but my sense of excellence is now far more connected to my own voice and being.

Inside Out

When I work with clients who are struggling with an aspect of themselves they don’t like, I often use the metaphor of the glove. I describe a beautiful beaded glove which looks elegant and perfect on the outside. If you turn the glove inside out—and there is always an inside out to a glove—it looks quite different. The stitches, knots, and erratic patterns are not beautiful at all, but they are hidden and unseen. For many years, I only wanted people to see the outside of my glove and enjoyed the praise I received for it. But, it was in an instance of having the inside of the glove seen and exposed that I was set free from that intense need to perform and please and began to experience an internal yearning for my own personal excellence.

Dr. Cathy Woodyard is in private practice at Counseling and Consulting Associates in McKinney, Texas. She has served as editor of the CSI Exemplar for over 10 years.

Passing Excellence On

Donna M. Gibson
Upsilon Sigma Chi Chapter

In my brief experience as a counselor educator, there are moments that I categorize as “excellence.” It comes in the form of a few students thanking me for time that I took in providing them feedback and constructive remarks on their work. It may sound a little strange that they are thanking me, but I learned that an effective teacher is one that models how to put time, energy and thought into her students. Specifically, I learned excellence in teaching from my mentor Jane Myers. Dr. Myers is a person who exemplifies “excellence” in several ways, and many know her as a scholar and leader. As one of her many former doctoral students, she has modeled excellence in all of these ways and I have tried to follow her example. Most importantly, I attempt to follow her model of passing “excellence” on to others by encouraging them to be the best that they can be or strive for their own personal level of “excellence.” My mentor passed her “excellence” on to me (and to many others), and I learned that it is my role to pass this “excellence” on to my students.

Thoughts on Excellence

The quality of distinction comes to mind when I reflect on excellence. The unique characteristic of a person of excellence is one who has distinguished himself/herself by making significant contributions to the enhancement of the profession of counseling. A person of excellence stands out, but not apart, from his/her professional colleagues.

Judy Miranti
CSI President 1994-05
As a doctoral student working toward completion of my degree, the word “excellence” conjures up many thoughts. Often, the primary focus of the graduate student is to excel academically; grades determine excellence. However, as human service professionals, we acknowledge that all necessary work cannot be achieved within the walls of the classroom. It is through these outside experiences that I have felt the excellence. My most rewarding experiences in life and education have been through service to others.

As counselors, we are taught to see each person as unique, meet clients “where they are,” identify an individual’s strengths, and meaningfully “connect” with others. The best way to accomplish these goals can be to assist someone in need. In serving others, we benefit. In my experiences, there has been nothing more satisfying than knowing I have touched and assisted another human being. To raise others up has been inspirational to me. When counselors move into the world to assist, we are simply bringing the office to the client.

Feeling the excellence is finding inspiration through others, enriching our life purpose, and assisting in finding meaning within the world. I am thankful to have had opportunities to serve others through Chi Sigma Iota at the University of Florida. It is through these experiences I been able to evolve into a truly caring leader, scholar and professional.

Thoughts on Excellence
Michael J. Fox has said, “I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence, I can reach for; perfection is God’s business.” It has been my experience over the years that striving for excellence motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing.

Dick Percy
CSI President 2001-02