

## "Words of Wisdom" As You Prepare to Take the Plunge Into a College Counseling Center Career

CCAPS Newsletter  
December 2010

We asked CCAPS members what they know now that they wished they had known then. This is what they had to say:

### David Gilles-Thomas, University at Buffalo

- Go to regional and national conferences. You will learn that there is great diversity in how professionals approach this career. Sometimes we come out of graduate school with fairly narrow views about what it means to be a counselor. There is in fact great creativity and variety in the field, and therefore wonderful room for you to develop your own unique professional identity.
- A counseling center career means you can wear multiple hats: individual/couples/group counseling, crisis intervention, programming & outreach, training & supervision, consultation, administration, research.
- Collegial support and consultation are valued in this profession. You do not work in isolation.
- My private practice friends tell me I could make a lot more money in private practice.
- My private practice friends are jealous of the collegial support I always have and the variety of activities I am engaged in. And of the laughter at my office's staff lunch table.
- Visit the Counseling Center Village for info on training, jobs, and more! <http://ccvillage.buffalo.edu/>
- Check out an article entitled the "Seasons of a Counselor's Life" in the Fall 2003 edition of the CCAPS newsletter.



### Merril Simon, California State University at Northridge

- As Search Committee Chair, I like to see (and do not often see!) applicant's names on each page of their documents and a reference to where they saw the position advertised. I also expect that those applying should read and respond to my specific position description needs AND look at my college's website and include something that indicates that in their cover letter. Little things like that make a difference to me. I'm not looking for 'just anyone' and they should not be looking for 'just any' position.
- If you are considering a career in college mental health, I feel strongly that you should read and learn about theories of college student development. A great starting place is *Student Development in College*, by Evans et al. (2009).
- I would also encourage you to speak with multiple counselors employed in various college settings.
- I would also suggest you read *Where you Work Matters*, a book by Joan B. Hirt (2006). It discusses various types of college campuses and the role of student affairs in each.

### Michael Brown, East Carolina University

- Don't overlook the importance of career decision issues in providing a platform to better understand students who come to you for assistance. If you are in a graduate program, take some courses in career development even if you don't have to. Career issues are often an indicator of other problems, but successfully resolving these issues can help students move

 [What is this?](#)

forward developmentally. The other thing is that many campuses may have career assistance in making a resume, practicing interviews, but not in sorting out a career or life preference.

- Get to know faculty across your campus. Learn about faculty governance and about how decisions are made in academic areas. Don't fall into the trap of being critical of "faculty." Faculty members do have a different perception of things academically, and we need to align with this as much as we can. Faculty members can be great allies in helping a student, in being the "eyes" on campus to identify students in need of assistance, and a friendly faculty member can get you into places that you might not be able to get in easily on your own.
- Don't stay in the office all the time. Try to schedule some time for outreach and prevention work. Be a part of other campus activities. Otherwise you'll get isolated and you won't know what else is going on around campus!

### **Jane Bost, University of Texas at Austin**

- First, I would have become involved a lot earlier in CCAPS! :)
- Second, I would encourage folks to attempt to "start out in a way they can hold out". There is a tendency with new professionals to want to "take on the world". This passion is great and we always want to keep that strong....but what can happen is to quickly become unrealistically over-committed. Learning how to balance all of this is an ongoing process.
- Being authentic to yourself and others is extremely important.
- Noticing and expressing gratitude to others is quite rare, in my experience. Gratitude does not have to be reserved for the "big stuff"; in fact, sending a brief email, "thank-U-gram", handwritten note or even a phone call about the small "everyday" things can be just as important. It really takes so little time and makes such a difference.
- Cultivate your sense of humor--especially your ability to (gently) laugh at yourself!
- Stay connected with your grad school and/or internship contacts. I still send Christmas cards (30+ years later) to several grad school faculty and internship site contacts. Why? From a personal standpoint, it's incredibly satisfying to stay in touch with people who had a positive impact on my life. Professionally, these contacts have been invaluable as job references, consultants, ongoing colleagues in various projects, etc.
- Know that your learning has just started and it continues forever! After internship, my first position was as a counseling center director at a small liberal arts university. After I'd been "on the job" for a year or so, I remember thinking, "I think I've seen everything now" ; that day, a client came in with something totally new and I quickly realized how inaccurate my "conclusion" was...and I've been seeing "new things" ever since!
- Opportunities will come along...some will be obvious, others are more subtle ....you can't take hold of all of them...but take a risk, try something new. Even if things don't "work out" like you'd hoped, you'll learn so much. In 2000, I decided to write a large federal grant to establish a counseling center program addressing interpersonal violence. I'd never written a grant before and it truly felt like I was "falling off a cliff"! But, the grant-funded program we created, Voices Against Violence, has become an extremely strong and successful program (with lots of "detours", changes of directions, and "failures" along the way).
- Finally, relationships are crucial, both personally and professionally. It is those relationships which help keep us going through the difficult, stressful times that we will inevitably have. Cultivate and maintain those relationships. Get to know the garage parking attendant, the front desk staff, staff in other departments as well as our own colleagues. Collaborations are so much effective if we create and maintain those relationships!

### **Beth Kinkade, Indiana University of Pennsylvania**

- When you are interviewing for a position remember that you are also interviewing the position and the center. Consider if it is a good fit for you both personally and professionally. Take note of how collegial professional staff appear to be. Do people appear to enjoy working in the office? Is there laughter during your interview? Do people respond to your sense of humor? Is this a place where you can envision not only spending your professional career but also growing as a professional?

### **Claudia Carroll, St. Edward's University**

- The two things I wished I had known more about in graduate school were (1) the business/financial aspects of our business including insurance, marketing, professional budgeting and (2) leadership development for those going into college and university counseling centers--particularly how to manage other professionals.

My recommendation for new folks would be to explore these things in the literature and talk with more seasoned professionals about their experiences. The money stuff is easy to read about and learn practically. The leadership really requires a mentor to develop that administrative brain that can often conflict with the therapeutic brain.

#### **Sarah Porter, St. Edward's University**

- Stay in regular touch with your former colleagues, supervisors, and classmates. Not only will those relationships keep you connected with your counseling center community and identity, but they may also prove to be an invaluable resource for mentorship, networking, and learning about career prospects. On a more practical level, take a gander at the [Positions in Counseling Centers \(PICC\)](#) website regularly to see what opportunities are out there and to get a sense of sought-after skills, hiring trends, and competitive salaries. Oh, and don't forget that your career trajectory may take you in directions you never anticipated - stay open to the possibilities and enjoy the ride!

#### **Harriet Singleton, Grand Valley State University**

- Diversity is real so please refuse to settle into a "cookie-cutter" mode of counseling.
- There is a lot of paperwork and it must be completed within a short amount of time, so time management is crucial. When I began the profession there was very little paperwork.
- At the beginning of my career I had many fears that I would take my clients' problems home with me. This fear does diminish and the reality is some people you will not even remember until you review their file a second before their scheduled appointment.
- Frequently, just being present in the moment is more important than what you say in that moment. So do not plan your response to horrific information; a simple nod is enough.

---

*Special thanks to Yun-Jy Yeh, Ph.D., University at Buffalo, for assistance with Chinese translations*

[Next Article](#)