

Updating the School Counseling Research Agenda: A Delphi Study

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The authors updated an earlier Delphi study identifying the research priorities for school counseling (Dimmitt et al., 2005). A 29-member expert panel selected research questions from the prior study, generated new questions, and rank ordered the combined set. The results provide guidance for prioritizing dissertation topics, targeting future research, and focusing the scholarly efforts of counselor educators.

Keywords: research, school counseling, best practices, ASCA National Model

The school counseling profession has embraced the power and importance of research to inform practice and to support both internal accountability and external legitimacy (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; Sink, 2009; Wester & Borders, 2014; Whiston & Quinby, 2009; Zigelbaum, Kruczek, Alexander, & Crethar, 2014). A Delphi study was conducted in 2005 to develop consensus about research questions that would most effectively “help counselor educators, researchers, doctoral students, and funding organizations target research efforts on the questions that would be of most benefit to the profession” (Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005, p. 215). In the current study, we aimed to update these findings and to reposition research priorities to reflect contemporary educational contexts. Additionally, we sought to support counselor educators, graduate students, practitioners, and researchers in their efforts to form collaborative partnerships related to specific areas of focus.

Before the original school counseling Delphi study (Dimmitt et al., 2005), there were impassioned calls for more research in all areas of school counseling (House & Hayes, 2002; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). The need for information about research-based school-based interventions and programs has been addressed by national clearinghouses such as the *Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning* (www.casel.org), the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (www.samhsa.gov/nrepp), and the Institute of Education Sciences’ *What Works Clearinghouse* (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc), but more studies specific to school counseling are needed. School counseling, like all professions, has continued to evolve. Over the past decade, the number of states with written school counseling models has increased (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009), more attention has

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been paid to evidence-based interventions (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007; León, Villares, Brigman, Webb, & Peluso, 2011; Webb, Brigman, Carey, & Villares, 2011; Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011), and more schools have been using the ASCA National Model for school counseling programs and attaining Recognized ASCA Model Program status (ASCA, 2012; Martin et al., 2009; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013).

In counselor education, related changes include greater focus on closing achievement and access gaps (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016), increasing the number of school counselor preparation programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; Urofsky, 2013), and providing more preservice training on the use of data (Hatch, Poynton, & Pérusse, 2015). The profession also has more sophisticated models of collaboration and leadership (Janson, Stone, & Clark, 2009; McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009).

In addition to these improvements, as well as changes in school counselor (SC) practice and preservice education, several significant national initiatives have impacted school counseling during the last decade. The College Board launched its National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, which “promotes the value of school counselors as leaders in advancing school reform and student achievement” (College Board, 2010, p. 7). The Gates Foundation funded a Public Agenda study of school counseling (J. Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010) that found many students had not received enough school counseling services; and in 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama launched the Reach Higher campaign (www.whitehouse.gov/reach-higher) calling for more college counseling for all students.

These national school counseling initiatives have improved visibility for the profession, and although there has been an encouraging increase in school counseling outcome studies, there is still plenty of scholarly work to be done in the profession. The research literature still shows little content related to the broader role of research in the school counseling profession, and there has not been an update about the research priorities of SCs or school counselor educators (SCEs) since the last Delphi study in 2005. Thus, in conducting this study, we had two main goals: (a) to update the research priorities for the school counseling profession, as determined by leaders in the field; and (b) to provide greater understanding of the role of research in school counseling.

Method

Research Team

The research team consisted of the first author, a female Caucasian professor who had graduated from a non-CACREP-accredited doctoral program and was teaching in a school counseling program accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the second author, a female Hispanic associate professor who had graduated from and was teaching in CACREP-accredited doctoral and school counseling programs. The

research team had an average of 12.5 ($SD = 2.12$) years of experience as counselor educators and 6.5 ($SD = 3.54$) years as professional SCs.

Literature Review and Codebook Development

Before recruiting participants for the expert panel, we reviewed the school counseling literature from 2005-2015 and found 85 publications that addressed the 2005 Delphi research questions. References for the published works were organized by research question and made available to the expert panelists as a point of reference (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). Next, we developed an a priori codebook that would likely be revised as data were collected (Hays & Singh, 2012). The codebook included operationalized definitions, examples, and themes that were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. At each phase of data collection, we engaged in consensus coding by independently reviewing the qualitative data, coding their findings, and then discussing any discrepant ratings until consensus was reached to ensure trustworthiness and reliability in the coding process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Krippendorff, 2004, 2012).

Expert Panel Participants

The individuals selected for the Delphi expert panel had a wide range of expertise in the field of school counseling (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009; Linstone & Turoff, 2011). We defined expertise as experience and knowledge of school counseling as demonstrated by the individual in the role of professional SC, SC leader (program, district, state, or organization), or SCE. We developed a list of possible experts from several sources, drawing first from the original expert panel (Dimmitt et al., 2005); then from the Evidence-Based School Counseling Conference (EBSCC) advisory council; and finally, from an author-generated list of individuals whose participation could ensure panel diversity regarding gender, race, ethnicity, geographic location, and work roles. Members of the EBSCC advisory council were approached because of their active involvement in researching and implementing evidence-based programs and interventions.

After institutional review board approval of the study, an invitation was e-mailed to 51 potential expert panel members, of whom 29 agreed to participate in the study. Eight of the original 21 experts (38%) from the 2005 study could participate in 2015; one person subsequently withdrew, so seven completed the study. Therefore, seven out of the 29 (24%) members of the new panel were from the original expert group. To remain on the panel, members had to complete at least one of the three phases of the study, since full panel involvement in every phase is typically not possible (Neuer Colburn, Grothaus, Hays, & Milliken, 2016). Consensus was reached at the end of each phase with all of the responses received by the deadline, and response rates were at least 83% for each round, which is higher than the recommended 70% response rate (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). The final panel included 13 (45%) male participants and 16 (55%) female participants. Of these participants, 28 (97%) identified as Caucasian and one (3%) as

Black. Twenty-five participants (87%) had earned a doctorate degree, one (3%) had earned a specialist-in-education degree, and three (10%) had earned a master's degree; 18 (62%) had graduated from CACREP-accredited degree programs, eight (28%) had graduated from non-CACREP degree programs, and three (10%) did not respond to that item. Twenty-two participants (76%) identified as an SCE and seven (24%) identified as a professional SC in a leadership role at the district, state, national, international, and/or professional organization level. Twenty-six participants (90%) were published authors of school counseling research. Of the 50 U.S. states, 16 (32%) were represented by at least one panel member. (A list of the panel members is available from the authors.)

Procedures

As for most Delphi studies (Higgins et al., 2013; Powell, 2003), we used 3 rounds of questions. At each phase, the expert panel members received an e-mail that provided directions for completing the survey for that round, a generic code to protect their anonymity, a link to the electronic materials, and a deadline for completion (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009). The surveys were designed in and completed through SurveyMonkey and were made available for 4 weeks in each round. To increase the response rates, we sent reminder e-mails after 2 weeks and a text message reminder 1 week before the deadline (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009). In Round 3, an Excel spreadsheet with the survey questions for Phase 3 was also provided via e-mail to give panelists a choice between completing that survey online or filling out the Excel spreadsheet and returning it via e-mail to the authors.

Data Collection and Analysis: Phase 1

In Phase 1, we provided panelists with an overview of the purpose of the study and the original set of 42 prioritized school counseling research questions from the prior study (Dimmitt et al., 2005) as well as a link to the electronic database with related research articles published since that time. We asked the experts to select the top 20 research questions from this list, based on their judgment of current importance to the field of school counseling. In addition, we asked the panelists to respond to three open-ended items:

Research Question 1: What is the purpose of SC research?

Research Question 2: What criteria did you use to evaluate each of the 2005 research questions on their level of importance?

Research Question 3: What additional research or evaluation questions do you believe are critical to address?

These open-ended questions were used for several reasons. Delphi methodology reliability and validity is strengthened by first-round open-ended questioning (Iqbal & Pison-Young, 2009), as that allows the panel to generate most of the initial data. Question 1 was intended to encourage participants to think about research as a global concept as well as the role of research in

determining practices, priorities, and theoretical components of a profession. A variation of this question was asked in the original study (Dimmitt et al., 2005) to frame its purpose. Question 2, which also appeared in the original study, was intended to confirm the reasons for the original rankings of research priorities and to determine whether any new reasons for rankings had emerged in the ensuing 10 years. Question 3 was intended to begin the process of expanding the field of new research questions to be subsequently ranked. To ensure that the questions were relevant, we engaged in a peer debriefing (Hays & Singh, 2012) before using them in this study.

Finally, in Phase 1 the panelists completed a brief demographic survey. The survey included items related to gender, race/ethnicity, highest degree earned, description of the setting where they earned their degree (i.e., CACREP approved—yes or no, setting, location); previous experience in education and school counseling roles (i.e., classroom teacher, professional SC, school counseling program director, school district leader, counselor educator, school administrator, counseling association/organization leader); and a description of their current employment setting (i.e., public/private school, size, location, number of counselors).

Content analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012; Krippendorff, 2012) was used to analyze the Phase 1 open-ended questions. We independently reviewed and coded the text data for Questions 1 and 2 (Krippendorff, 2004) using the existing organizing domains established in the original study (Dimmitt et al., 2005) and adding any new domains that were relevant. There was considerable overlap in both the data and the coded categories. Thus, to increase reliability in the content analysis, we collapsed the data for Questions 1 and 2 into seven summary domains that explained both the purpose of the research and the criteria used to rank the research questions (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Krippendorff, 2012).

The final seven domains identified at the end of Phase 1 were (a) Domain 1: Identifying best practices (work done in schools by practitioners)—interventions and programs; (b) Domain 2: Documenting SC effectiveness (evaluation and outcome research)—interventions and programs; (c) Domain 3: The role of research in effecting change (in the profession, for students, in education, in schools); (d) Domain 4: Identifying the most effective educational and supervisory approaches (preservice and in-service education provided by SC educators); (e) Domain 5: Informing state- and national-level advocacy and program and policy decisions (new domain); (f) Domain 6: Current trends in the profession and collaboration with school leaders (new domain); and (g) Domain 7: Research that will influence district and school systems and professional advocacy at the local level (new domain).

Next, we sorted the panelists' responses to open-ended research Question 3 into the seven summary domains. Domains also had subtopic areas, with a total of 29 subtopics in the question list (Krippendorff, 2004). The number of subtopics in any domain varied. For example, Domain 1: Identifying best practices, was the largest domain and included subtopics and research questions related to K–12 SC program organization (two questions); SC delivery

of services (15 questions); accountability (four questions); SC use of data (two questions); SC role and functions in K–12 buildings (seven questions); SC research (six questions); SC advocacy, informing state and national-level program and policy decisions (four questions); and SC partnerships, collaboration, and community and family involvement (six questions).

Once the content analysis of the open-ended items was complete, we used descriptive statistics to examine the new rankings of the 2005 questions. Each question was scored based on the frequency that panelists endorsed it as a top 20 question, resulting in a percentage of endorsement by the panel (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). To clearly identify ties in the ranking, we assigned the same rank number to questions that were endorsed by the same percentage of panelists (see Table 1). For example, the questions “What is the impact of enhancing school counselors’ ability to use data in planning and accountability on student outcomes?” and “What is the impact of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program on students’ personal/social development?” are both assigned rank number 6 because in each case 17 out of 24 panelists endorsed that question as a priority. These results then became the framework for questions asked in Phase 2.

Data Collection and Analysis: Phases 2 and 3

In Phase 2 we presented the panelists with the research questions gathered in the previous round, which included the newly ranked top 20 questions from the prior study and all the new questions generated by the panel in Phase 1. The questions were organized into the 7 domains based on the Phase 1 data. Panelists were asked to provide any additional research questions they thought were worth exploring within any of the identified domains and to identify additional domains or topics that did not fit the domains used (Linstone, 1978). At the end of Phase 2, we again used content analysis to identify themes in the research questions, to modify the domains based on panel feedback, and to ensure a good fit for the questions generated (Krippendorff, 2004). We combined questions to avoid redundancy and inconsistent wording, resulting in a list of 174 research questions (Krippendorff, 2004). Slightly different domains were developed (see Table 2) because of this analysis.

After consensus was reached, the Phase 3 survey was developed and sent to the panelists for their final round of input. During Phase 3 the panelists were asked to review the domains, topic areas, and related research questions generated in Phase 2 (Linstone, 1978) and to “select a total of 30 questions that you think should be considered a priority in the future research.”

Results

Twenty-four experts (83%) responded in Phase 1, providing a new ranking of the 2005 Delphi study research questions (see Table 1) and generating additional questions that need to be addressed by the profession. Twenty-eight (97%) panelists completed Phase 2, adding questions to the initial

TABLE 1
2015 Expert Panel (EP) Ranking of the 2005 Delphi Questions:
Top 20 Research Questions

2005 Delphi Question	2015 Response		EP Rank	
	%	<i>n</i>	2015	2005
Which specific school counseling interventions result in the greatest gains in students' academic development and achievement?	100	24	1	1
What is the impact of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program on students' academic development and achievement?	96	23	2	8
Which specific school counseling interventions result in the greatest gains in students' personal/social development?	83	20	3	11
What is the impact of reducing student–counselor ratios on program outcomes?	79	19	4	25
What factors contribute to the success of a school counseling program?	75	18	5	6
What is the impact of enhancing school counselors' ability to use data in planning and accountability on student outcomes?	71	17	6	3
What is the impact of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program on students' personal/social development?	71	17	6	12
Which specific school counseling interventions result in the greatest gains in students' career development?	67	16	8	10
What is the impact of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program on students' career development?	67	16	8	22
What are the most effective approaches to enhancing the program organization and management skills of school counselors?	67	16	8	39
Under what circumstances are whole classroom, small group, and individual counseling maximally effective?	67	16	8	21
Do school counselors who use research to guide practice have a greater impact on student outcomes?	63	15	12	40
What are the factors that contribute to the efficacy of a school counseling program's implementation?	63	15	12	19
What are the most effective approaches to changing school leaders' opinions about school counselor role and function?	58	14	14	9
What is the impact of implementing a results-based school counseling program on students' academic development and achievement?	58	14	14	7
What is the impact of implementing an ASCA National Model school counseling program on students' academic development and achievement?	58	14	14	15
What are the best ways to measure the extent to which a school counseling program model is fully implemented?	54	13	17	24
What research and evaluation skills are necessary for effective school counseling practice?	54	13	17	30
What is the impact of implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program on school leaders' perceptions of the value and legitimacy of school counseling?	54	13	17	28

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

**2015 Expert Panel (EP) Ranking of the 2005 Delphi Questions:
Top 20 Research Questions**

2005 Delphi Question	2015 Response		EP Rank	
	%	<i>n</i>	2015	2005
What are the most effective approaches to enhancing the leadership skills of school counselors?	50	12	20	26

Note. The 2015 EP ranked 42 out of the 43 2005 Delphi questions. Because of an administrative error, panel members were not asked the following question: What are the most effective professional development approaches to enhance school counselor competence? ASCA = American School Counselor Association.

list that had been sorted into seven domains. Twenty-six (90%) panelists responded in Phase 3, identifying their top 30 research questions from the list generated in Phases 1 and 2 (see Table 2). Due to the clustering of responses identifying priorities at similar ranks (e.g., three items tied at rank 2) the research questions ranked as the top 28 are displayed on Table 3 along with the associated topic area and domain.

Of the results displayed, nine questions appeared from Domain 1, eight questions from Domain 2, five questions from Domain 3, zero questions from Domain 4, five questions from Domain 5, one question from Domain 6, and zero questions from Domain 7. (A complete list of the final 174 research questions by domain and topic areas is available at www.umass.edu/schoolcounseling.)

Discussion

This study replicated and updated a prior study (Dimmitt et al., 2005) that used the Delphi method to identify a school counseling research agenda. The goal of the current study was to gather data about research possibilities and priorities in the field with the eventual goal of improving the professional knowledge base and increasing awareness of the important role of research in school counseling. The panel of experts generated many valuable and relevant research questions, and ideally, these will be used to focus research efforts by SC educators, graduate students, practitioners, and related professionals. These questions could also be used to prioritize funding efforts, as they identify what knowledge is most needed in the field. An additional goal of the study was to support research collaborations and partnerships among those with a stake in the ongoing development and improvement of the school counseling profession.

The expert panel's rankings of the final set of 174 questions suggest that identifying best practices related to the interventions implemented by school counseling practitioners is still the priority for the profession. More than one third of the top-ranked questions were in this domain, including items related to the use of evidence-based practices for closing achievement gaps, the use of data, and supporting college and career readiness. This

TABLE 2
Domains and Examples of Research Questions
Asked During Phase 3

Domain	No. of Questions in Domain	Domain Name	Example
1	46	Identifying best practices (work done in schools, by practitioners)	What are the best practices related to mental health interventions in schools? What are the best practices related to college and career readiness, and college counseling?
2	23	Documenting SC effectiveness	What are the impacts of SC efforts for social justice, equity, advocacy, and closing gaps on student outcomes? What are the impacts of the use of technology (Naviance, text reminders, social media, productivity software such as Google, etc.) on student outcomes?
3	22	Role of research in the profession	How can research be used to bring about effective change in the profession, in graduate student training, and for K–16 students and schools? What are the best ways for SCEs to identify models for collaboration and partnerships (school–family–community and SC–SCE)?
4	28	Identifying the most effective educational and supervisory approaches	What are the best practices for mentoring SCs as doctoral students? What are the best practices for helping SCs understand the importance of not just consuming research but producing research—instilling the love and need for it within our profession?
5	31	Advocacy, informing district-, school-, state-, and national-level program and policy decisions	What are the best ways to inform all students of postsecondary education opportunities? What is the connection between school counseling legislation and student success?
6	19	Collaboration and partnerships	What are the impacts of collaboration and partnerships on school-wide initiatives such as PBIS, RtI, and SEL? What is the impact of administrators who have knowledge of appropriate roles and functions of SCs?
7	5	Other general questions	What is the role of SCEs within colleges of education, and with other mental health fields? To what degree do SCEs contribute to professional conversations (research, policy decisions, and standards) that exist outside of our departments or programs?

Note. SC = school counselor; SCE = school counselor educator; PBIS = positive behavior intervention support; RtI = response to intervention; SEL = social emotional learning.

TABLE 3

Highest Ranked Research Questions: Expert Panel Endorsement

Domain	Topic Area	Item	Rank	%	<i>n</i>
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of using the ASCA National Model or not using the ASCA National Model?	1	62	16
1	SC delivery of services	What are the best practices related to the use of evidence-based interventions and practices?	2	54	14
1	SC partnerships, collaboration, community, and family involvement	What are the best practices for SC interventions that improve social justice, equity, advocacy, and closing student achievement gaps?	2	54	14
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of using evidence-based practices?	2	54	14
5	Accountability	What are the best practices related to program evaluation?	3	50	13
1	K–12 SC program organization	What are the best practices related to implementing the ASCA National Model?	4	46	12
1	SC delivery of services	What are the best practices related to college and career readiness, and college counseling?	4	46	12
1	SC use of data	What are the best practices related to the use of data to improve practice?	4	46	12
2	Specific interventions—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of using evidence-based interventions?	4	46	12
5	Research impacting policy	How can research on the relationship between social/emotional/mental health services and students' academic and career success inform district-, school-, state-, and national-level programs and policies?	4	46	12
6	Administrator variables—impact on SC program and student outcomes	What is the impact of administrators who have knowledge of the appropriate role and functions of SCs?	4	46	12
1	SC use of data	What are the best practices related to the use of data to make program decisions?	5	42	11
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of SC efforts for social justice, equity, advocacy, and closing gaps on student outcomes?	5	42	11
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of smaller SC—student ratios?	5	42	11
3	Identifying best models	What are the best models for bridging research and practice?	5	42	11
5	Advocacy and policy change	What are the best ways to explore the affirming role that SEL and non-cognitive factors (hope, well-being, engagement, grit, persistence) play in college and career readiness?	5	42	11
1	SC advocacy	What are the best practices related to SC advocacy?	6	39	10

(Continued)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Highest Ranked Research Questions: Expert Panel Endorsement

Domain	Topic Area	Item	Rank	%	<i>n</i>
3	Identifying best models	What are the best models for evaluating student outcomes related to non-cognitive factors/SEL-centered interventions?	6	39	10
3	Instrument use	What are the best instruments to use to assess the impact of school counseling interventions?	6	39	10
3	Instrument use	What are the best instruments to use to evaluate K–12 students' outcomes?	6	39	10
1	SC delivery of services	What are the best practices related to how to implement interventions for social justice, equity, advocacy, and closing gaps?	7	35	9
1	SC delivery of services	What are the best practices related to working with students with unique needs (minority status, ELL, disabilities, health concerns/chronic illness, homeless and foster care youth)?	7	35	9
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of RAMP status?	7	35	9
2	SC program-level factors—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of SC evaluation of programs and interventions?	7	35	9
2	Specific interventions—impact on student outcomes	What are the impacts of SC curriculum development and classroom interventions?	7	35	9
3	Instrument use	What are the best instruments to use to evaluate SC programs?	7	35	9
5	Research impacting policy	How can research on SC–student ratios inform district-, school-, state-, and national-level programs and policies?	7	35	9
5	Research impacting policy	What is the impact of understanding the relationship between SC–student ratios and student outcomes, and more specifically, how time spent in various aspects of school counseling practice relates to (or does not) relate to student outcomes?	7	35	9

Note. *N* = 26. SC = school counselor; ASCA = American School Counselor Association; SEL = social emotional learning; ELL = English language learners; RAMP = Recognized ASCA Model Program.

prioritization of applied research is consistent in the profession (Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Whiston et al., 2011) because the goal of school counseling is to support student success and well-being through effective prevention and intervention. Knowing what is most likely to work is thus a logical focus.

The next highest priority identified was documenting school counselor effectiveness through evaluation and outcome research. Questions in this domain focused on measuring the impact of specific practices, interventions, and programs, such as the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), evidence-based interventions, and efforts for social justice. These questions are also

intrinsically related to best practices, as documenting the positive impact of an intervention eventually leads to it becoming a best practice, and best practices should have some evidence of efficacy (Dimmitt et al., 2007).

Several top-rated questions were about generating knowledge needed by the profession through research (Domain 3). These questions focus on identifying the best models, rather than best practices, for areas such as bridging research and practice, evaluating school counseling outcomes, and measurement. Without knowledge of these more theoretical components of the practice, school counseling runs the risk of becoming a loosely connected set of practices without any coherence, even if each intervention is effective. A new area of research focus that emerged in this study was the need for valid and reliable instruments for measuring outcomes, with three of the most frequently endorsed research questions being in that subtopic area of Domain 3.

A few top-rated questions related to collaboration, partnerships, advocacy, and policy (Domains 5 and 6). These topics concern the ways that the profession works more broadly across populations and settings, including with families, communities, school colleagues, state education policy makers, and other stakeholders. These domains also involve communication about the profession with others and how to best support the profession in contexts outside of schools. Knowledge generated in these domains is more useful for creating change on a larger scale, which can support the direct improvements designed for students in schools.

No top-rated questions were in the domain for identifying effective educational and supervisory approaches for preservice SCs. One interpretation of this finding is that much of the field's research is already about SC education practices, so these topics may not be the priority (Zagelbaum et al., 2014). There is also relative standardization of training and supervisory practices, as well as external evaluation standards, because of CACREP requirements (Bobby, 2013). This study suggests that there is a priority for information about the practice of and outcomes for school counseling in K–12 contexts.

There were several differences between the findings of the 2005 study and the current study. This Delphi expert panel generated many more research questions about a broader range of topics. There was greater diversity of opinion, with even the most frequently endorsed question being identified by barely half (55%) of the panel. Panelists also differed on which research questions were most important, reflecting both changes in the profession and the current educational context. For example, in this study, there were more research questions about college and career readiness interventions, and these were identified as more of a priority, which is not surprising given the national initiatives in this area. Another area with both more questions and higher endorsement was social justice and equity efforts, which is perhaps a reflection of the increasing awareness of the role of SCs in closing access and achievement gaps for all students. Additionally, evidence-based practices were identified as a research focus in this study, which was not true 10 years ago.

In 2005, questions about academic outcomes were a priority, reflecting the educational context of that time, with No Child Left Behind Act pressures and schools prioritizing academic test results. Ten years later, there is more awareness of the importance and impact of social and emotional skills in academic contexts, and those questions were prioritized. In the original study, questions were generated about the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), the results-based model (S. Johnson, Johnson, & Downs, 2006), and the comprehensive model for school counseling and guidance programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014). In the current study, the focus was on the ASCA National Model, perhaps reflecting its current wide adoption (Martin et al., 2009).

Strengths and Limitations

The design and methods of this study posed certain strengths and limitations. Strengths included a response rate of 83% to 97% across the 3 phases, and a larger expert panel (i.e., 29 members in 2015 vs. 21 in 2005) of SC educators, organization leaders, and practitioners from 16 states. Experts had multiple opportunities to share opinions through open-ended responses, and we employed numerous content analyses to identify research domains and corresponding questions.

Despite efforts to recruit more diverse expert panel members, most of the panel were Caucasian SCEs; however, it is worth noting that several of the panelists' research agendas address diversity and social justice issues. Another limitation was that recruiting members from the EBSCC Advisory Board might have introduced a bias toward research questions about evidence-based practice, instrument development, ASCA National Model, and outcome research. Replication of this study with different expert panel members may have produced different results. Adding members to our research team would have increased trustworthiness in the results. While every precaution to accurately interpret open-ended responses was taken, we could have inadvertently changed the connotations when rewriting questions.

Implications

This study has considerable implications for SCEs, school counselor training and supervision, and professional development with school counselor practitioners. The expert panel identified research priorities that reflect the SC profession's current needs and contexts, and provided guidelines for intentional collaborations and focused partnerships that are critical for research that informs practice and increases internal accountability and external legitimacy (ASCA, 2012; Sink, 2009; Whiston & Quinby, 2009; Zigelbaum et al., 2014). The research questions we identified provide counselor educators, graduate students, and practitioners with empirical support for ongoing and future research investigations in the SC profession. We plan to disseminate the results of this study through e-mail lists, webinars, websites, and conference presentations. It is our hope that the results will be used to focus dissertation topics, inform grant-seeking efforts, and encourage multi-university partnerships as well as connections between counselor educators

and practitioners with similar research interests. For example, researchers and practitioners attending the annual EBSCC can use this information to develop collaborative work groups and to frame conference presentations.

Professional standards such as the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014), CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2015), and *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (ASCA, 2016) all emphasize the importance of using research to inform practice. Counselor educators can incorporate the findings of this study in coursework for school counselors, particularly when teaching about using research to make effective program decisions. The full list of research questions includes several about critical areas of counselor education, such as supervision and training issues; but overall, the panel prioritized topics concerned with student well-being and school counseling program outcomes, perhaps in consideration of serving the counseling profession and clients most broadly (see www.umass.edu/schoolcounseling or bit.ly/2g8ryon). School counselors, often more than counselor professionals in other settings, are under increased pressure to implement research-based interventions with evidence of efficacy (ASCA, 2012). This study's findings provide a basis for establishing or enhancing faculty research agendas and collaboration efforts with school practitioners and state school counseling leaders. Counselor educators can also use the study results when providing professional development and applying for external grant funding.

Doctoral students who are developing their research skills can use the top research questions to design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method investigations that contribute to the gaps in the professional knowledge base. The study could also be used to help doctoral students make decisions about dissertation topics that are truly useful to the field and to practitioners. Similarly, results from doctoral dissertations can support the graduates' development of their own research agendas. Practitioners can use the results to conduct action research studies as well as to partner with counselor educators in implementing outcome research studies that have extensive utility.

A challenge in school counseling research, as in all educational research, is that both local evaluation of impact in specific schools and larger scale outcome research studies that replicate findings in broader diverse samples are critical. The profession needs research that can be immediately used by SCs to make effective interventions and programming decisions, as well as research that is rigorous enough to be generalizable across contexts. The first Delphi study helped to organize the priorities of the Ronald H. Fredrickson Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and this update will be used to inform current initiatives and future efforts. In addition, a research-focused training day at the EBSCC will provide opportunities for conversations among SCEs who are excited about related research topics. Hopefully, this study will help to focus efforts to meet both immediate and more extensive research needs in the profession in a way that is helpful to practitioners, SCEs, future members of the profession, and the young people that school counselors serve.

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