Four Takeaways

Anna M. Pyles

Department of Counselor Education, Longwood University

COUN 503

Dr. Justin Jordan

December 1st, 2022

Takeaway 1: Advocacy Discussion

A class discussion that I really enjoyed was when we discussed the topic of advocacy. Everybody in the class was given the opportunity to discuss their opinions and feelings towards advocating for the counseling profession as a whole and advocating for our clients. I submitted a post on the Discussion Board stating that I felt advocating for the counseling profession can be beneficial because we are able to advertise what the profession is and how it can benefit others. I also stated that advocating for our clients is important because counselors meet different people every day who come in with their own personal stories and backgrounds. Advocating for our clients means that we are recognizing them as an individual instead of a case file. I enjoyed reading my classmates’ posts on the Discussion Board as well because it provided different points of view and ways of thinking. I thought it was interesting how a lot of the responses on the Discussion Board came from either people’s own personal experiences or from the perspective of what job they may currently have. Some of my classmates discussed how advocacy can act as a way to gain knowledge and educate oneself. As students, and one day professionals in the field, we have to keep educating ourselves, especially when it pertains to social issues, multiculturalism, and anything that we may face one day. Advocacy also allows us as the professionals to act as a voice or support for others. This particular discussion made me feel excited for the roles and responsibilities I will have beyond going to work. I’ve already been asked questions like “What do you want to do with your degree?”, “Why do you want to be a counselor?”, “What exactly does a counselor do?”, etc.… In a way, I’ve been able to advocate for the profession by answering all of these questions without even knowing it.

Takeaway 2: School/College/Career Discussion

The prompt in this Discussion Board was, “Can counselors in these settings truly compartmentalize academic/professional goals without attending to mental health needs, as well? We have discussed a holistic wellness model as a key component of counselor identity... how does that fit in here?”. I enjoyed responding to this question because I felt that it required deeper thought. I expressed during the class discussion that I felt it’s hard to compartmentalize academic/professional goals without also attending to mental health needs. Mental health can be detected in all areas of one’s life and can also influence other areas in one’s holistic wellness model. As a class, we were able to break down the holistic model and highlight each area within the model by relating them to our own personal experiences. I left this specific class meeting feeling validated because I was able to disclose personal feelings and information about myself, while hearing some of my classmates discuss personal information as well. I’ve found that it’s easier to participate in class and be vulnerable in an environment that feels safe, comfortable, and without judgment from my peers and professor. This specific class discussion supported my interest in the profession because it made it that more obvious that mental health is everywhere, and we are responsible for providing care. It’s something that cannot be ignored, even if there are other areas or topics that the counselor is responsible for. Before starting this program, I was unaware of all the possibilities that can come from obtaining a degree in counseling. Having these certain discussions has helped to broaden my knowledge of all the career opportunities and that this is not a “cookie-cutter” profession. Although I’m not a counselor at this time, it’s been helpful and rewarding to know that this profession is so broad and that there are many areas and settings where we can provide and offer help.

Takeaway 3: Counseling Theory

 This specific discussion was one of the more helpful discussions that we had this semester. Before starting the Counselor Education program, I did not know that you can choose what theoretical orientation(s) you are able to use during your sessions. I was aware that you pursue a master’s degree and obtain licensure to learn the required skills and techniques, but I was unaware that part of the professional development involved adopting an orientation into practice. I was able to use the knowledge that we are learning in COUN 505 and incorporate some of that into the discussion we had in this specific class. I enjoyed that this class discussion was not only focused on the historical background information of the theoretical orientations, but that we also discussed how our values and experiences can help us determine what theory (or theories) we best align with. One way that I was able to prepare for this class discussion was reviewing the material provided in the textbook for this class and also the material that is provided in the textbook from COUN 505. It helped me to better understand the information so that I could talk through it with my classmates and even during the class discussion. Something else that I did to prepare myself to hear from others in the class was to ask questions and start smaller discussions with the people that I am close to in class. A couple of the people that I’ve befriended in class already have experience working in the field, so I tend to ask them lots of questions about how they apply the theories they chose or what theory they found works best for them and the setting they are in. I have not yet chosen what theory, or theories, I may want to utilize in the profession, but I have found that this experience has been more helpful when I’m able to collaborate with others and hear about other’s experiences as well. One thing that I’ve enjoyed about being in a graduate program is the ability to build relationships with your peers, which has allowed me to learn about things like job opportunities.

Takeaway 4: Identity Class Activity

 One activity that I thought was really impactful was the one where we were given four options of what we think a counselor’s identity or role should look like and the class divided into the identity group that you decided. I cannot remember all of the options, but I remember the identity I chose was “Expert”. I chose this role because I believe that being an expert means more than just having more knowledge than somebody else. I see an expert as being somebody who is fully equipped and trained to handle a specific career or responsibility they may have. In this case, becoming a counselor requires specific trainings, skill sets, and knowledge to be successful at this career. If that were not the case, then in my opinion there would be no need to pursue a certain degree, complete internship/practicum hours, and obtain licensure. It was interesting to hear everybody else’s perspectives and thoughts about why they agree or why they disagree. Personally, I think this class activity sparked one of the longest and most insightful discussions we had this semester. There was argument and much disagreement, especially between my group and one of the other’s. The discussion was still respectful, and everybody let each other make their own point without judgment. During this discussion, I felt the most heard from my classmates. Although there was disagreement, I never felt that anything I incorporated into the discussion was ignored or passed on like it didn’t matter. It’s interesting to look back at my time during undergrad because I don’t remember any of my class discussions during undergrad being as in-depth or even longer than just a few minutes. I hope that we continue to have discussions and interactions like this during my time in the Counselor Education program because I’ve found that I’m more engaged and enticed to participate more. I struggled with participation and speaking up during undergrad, so being surrounded by people who have the same goal and are respectful has pushed me to step out of my comfort zone with this.