

# No Crises in the Curriculum: A Hybrid Course Design in Counselor Education

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## Abstract

School counselors are in a unique position to provide crisis prevention and intervention supports within their school community. Yet, many school counselors feel ill prepared to perform such a role when they leave their graduate training program. As such, this article discusses the development of a practical hybrid instructional design for teaching school counselors in a graduate program pertaining to crisis work. An overview of what influenced the design of the course, teaching methods, and general information about the course structure is provided. Recommendations for enhancing assignments with individual, peer, and instructor feedback along with online course management resources will also be shared.

*Keywords:* Hybrid course design, School counseling, Crisis work

Professional school counselors are called upon to provide services addressing the needs of students in the areas of academic, career, and social/emotional development. The ideals of their work are reflected in the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA) from ASCA (2019a), the ASCA Ethical Standards (2022) and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (2019b). Interconnectedly to all three resources is the intervention of crisis and trauma response as a key role of the school counselor. For example, school counselors provide short-term counseling as stipulated in the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (2019b) to meet the needs of students before, during and after a crisis (B-SS 3.e). Further, counselor education programs accredited with Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and/or recognized as ASCA Specialized Professional Association (SPA) program stipulate the need for crisis response training within their school counseling specific graduate programs. Despite this critical emphasis on preparation for and participation in crisis intervention in graduate programs, there is a reported lack of variety in andragogical learning experiences in counselor education in general (Baltrinic & Wachter Morris, 2020; Taylor, & Baltrinic, 2018) and to crisis response skill development specifically (Allen et al., 2002; Brown, 2019; Wachter Morris, & Barrio Minton 2012; Watkins Van Asselt et al., 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe the rationale and processes of developing a crisis intervention course offered in a counselor education program to adult learners becoming school counselors. The details of the primary sources of evidence that influenced the design of the course, the delivery modes of the course content, teaching methods and general information about the course structure itself will be explored. The evaluation of course outcomes will be left to future articles. The goal was to go beyond presenting theoretical information regarding crisis response to school counseling

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students contributing to a class atmosphere of analyzing and synthesizing course information in a safe learning environment that would be able to be transferred and applied to their professional practice as future school counselors. Counselor educators may use these ideas to explore ways to best prepare school counselor trainees for crisis prevention and response. Further, this article was meant to answer the question posed by Wachter Morris and Barrio Minton (2012): What academic methods and processes used by programs meet crisis curriculum? The following is an example structure of a hybrid/blended learning counseling course in crisis intervention.

### **Hybrid Learning a Historical Perspective**

According to the Fairborn Digital Academy (2022) there is a lengthy history of hybrid learning that pre-dates the implementation of computers. As early as 1873, there was the development of a school that encouraged learner participation via correspondence. In 1892, The University of Chicago became the first University in the United States to utilize a correspondence model for some courses. Fast-forward a 150 years and students for the first time were able to attend high school through the University of Nebraska and receive an accredited high school diploma via correspondence. In 1976, the first virtual college courses in the United States were developed followed by the interactive learning network that was developed in the 1990s with the widespread introduction of the internet. (Fairborn Digital Academy, 2022). From a quality perspective at one point programs that were correspondence based or based via a hybrid format were considered to be less of a learning experience than those same courses offered in a face-to-face format. Though a great deal was done prior to the pandemic to alter this perception, the pandemic was instrumental in demonstrating that the same learning outcomes are possible via an online and hybrid format when compared to their face-to-face alternatives.

Kazu and Yalcin (2022) noted hybrid learning is defined as a combination of face-to-face-learning coupled with technology. Part of the time in each course is spent learning in person while the rest of the time is spent meeting and conducting coursework via technology. On general there is a 50/50 split for both in-person and technological elements. Hybrid learning became very popular during the COVID pandemic and continues in popularity today. One of the benefits of such learning is the idea that such coursework allows for more flexibility.

Kazu and Yalcinn conducted a meta-analysis of journal articles from 2010-2020 determining that the ability to utilize such a modality of learning has increased significantly in popularity. In their meta-analysis, the authors determined that there was a statistically significant impact in utilizing a hybrid approach and academic achievement. Further, it was suggested that students in the hard sciences tended to benefit from a hybrid experience more than students in other disciplines; however, education such as the field of school counseling and the social sciences still show a positive impact on academic achievement from hybrid learning.

### **Design**

There is no right or wrong or one size fits all when creating a course in counselor education. Indeed, most counselor education instructors will find themselves drawing from many sources to create a research-informed course. The inspiration and creation of this course came from multiple sources including instructor personal theory of teaching and learning, CACREP 2016 Standards, program data

sources and priorities, professional literature and best practice documents, and state licensure requirements. This list includes accreditation standards along with research-informed and best educational practices in the areas of crisis preparedness and response along with the specific, unique focus for school counselors.

### **Educational Environment**

The course on crisis intervention was part of a 60-hour CACREP accredited counselor education program in the Midwest within the specialty of school counseling. The purpose of the course is to explore the issues and skills of crisis prevention and intervention in schools: mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. School counseling students can enroll in this course at any point during their program. This course is a 2-credit hour required course offered in the Summer semester.

Planning for the crisis course began several months before the course started. A thorough review of the counseling literature as well as consultation with faculty members informed the planning process. Activities in the development process were executed intentionally to align with counseling program objectives, CACREP Standards, state licensure requirements, and demands of the profession. The course is entitled: Crisis Intervention in Schools.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

When creating a course, the counselor educator puts their personal philosophy of teaching and learning into action ensuring students access to an engaging course experience that allows them to extend their attitude, knowledge, and skills needed for the profession. This crisis intervention course was developed through a constructive lens from the taxonomy of significant learning framework provided by Fink (2013) consisting of six interactive and circular tenets including: (1) foundational knowledge, (2) application, (3) integration, (4) human dimension, (5) caring, and (6) learning how to learn in a course. Although newer to counselor education, Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning has been used in the education, training, and course design of other health professions including dentistry (Partido et al., 2020), medical education (Branzetti, et al., 2019) and nursing (Marrocco, 2014). The ultimate goal in using this framework for guiding course creation was to generate a range of ideas related to crisis work in schools, to challenge students to generate their own clinical responses to complex problems from real-life school specific scenarios of crisis situations, and to learn and utilize crisis counseling skills to remedy the dissonance between theory to practice in a safe learning environment.

### **Expected Outcomes and Learning Objectives**

#### ***CACREP 2016 Standards***

Program accountability through a professional accreditation board is an ongoing consideration for any graduate training program. Counseling education programs who have or desire to have accreditation through CACREP are no exception. Designing with competencies that align to the CACREP standards are in the forefront of any course design or redesign. The Crisis Intervention in School's course was designed to be in compliance with CACREP Standards as the program was CACREP accredited.

The 2016 CACREP standards that provided the framework for developing curriculum, activities, and assessment for the Crisis Intervention in Schools course were the following table:

**Table 1**

*2016 CACREP Standards*

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School counselor roles and responsibilities in relation to the school emergency management plans, and crises, disasters, and trauma (5.G. 2.e)</li> <li>2. Suicide prevention models and strategies (2.F.5.1).</li> <li>3. The effects of crisis, disasters, and trauma on diverse individuals across the lifespan including suicide, bullying, school violence, explosive/aggressive children, domestic violence, sexual abuse, trauma, and burnout (2.F.3.g).</li> <li>4. Counselors' roles and responsibilities as members of interdisciplinary community outreach and emergency management response teams (2.F.1.c)</li> <li>5. Procedures for assessing risk of aggression or danger to others, self-inflicted harm, or suicide (2.F.7.c)</li> <li>6. Procedures for identifying trauma and abuse and for reporting abuse (2.F.7.d)</li> <li>7. The impact of crisis, interpersonal violence and trauma on marriages, couples, and families (5.F.2.g, 5.F.2.i)</li> <li>8. Characteristics, risk factors, and warning signs of students at risk for mental health and behavioral disorders (5.G.2.g.)</li> <li>9. Signs and symptoms of substance abuse in children and adolescents as well as the signs and symptoms of living in a home where substance use occurs (5.G.2.i)</li> </ol>
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***Student Learning Outcomes***

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are the stated attitudes, knowledge, skills, or abilities that can be demonstrated upon completion of a learning experience or sequence of learning experiences. With respect to counselor education, SLOs should be informed where appropriate by the following:(1) counseling discipline-related skill set (2) accreditation and other external accountability expectations (3) program goals and objectives (Barrio Minton, et al., 2016). Keeping Fink's Taxonomy (2013) in mind while specifically going beyond content mastery, the following SLO's were created and applied to pedagogical practice.

**Table 2***CACREP Standards and SLO's*

CACREP Standard	SLO
5.G.2.e	<p>Distinguishes school counselor roles and responsibilities in relation to the school emergency management plans, and crises, disasters, and trauma</p> <p>Identifies sources of information on policy and reporting procedures regarding child abuse, bullying, suicide/self harm and violence-harm towards others</p>
2.F.5.1	<p>Applies suicide prevention models and strategies</p> <p>Evaluates suicide prevention models and strategies</p>
2.F.3.g	Identifies effects of crisis, disasters, and trauma on diverse individuals across the lifespan including suicide, bullying, school violence, explosive/aggressive children, domestic violence, sexual abuse, trauma, and burnout
2.F.1.c	Explains counselors' roles and responsibilities as members of interdisciplinary community outreach and emergency management response teams
2.F.7.c	<p>Demonstrates procedures for assessing risk of aggression or danger to others, self-inflicted harm, or suicide</p> <p>Evaluates procedures for assessing risk of aggression or danger to others, self-inflicted harm, or suicide</p>

2.F.7.d	Demonstrates procedures for identifying trauma and abuse and for reporting abuse  Evaluates procedures for identifying trauma and abuse and for reporting abuse
5.F.2.g, 5.F.2.i	Identifies impact of crisis, disasters, and other trauma events on individuals and families including those from diverse populations
5.G.2.g	Analyzes characteristics, risk factors, and warning signs of students at risk for mental health and behavioral disorders
5.G.2.i	Describes the signs and symptoms of substance abuse in children and adolescents as well as the signs and symptoms of living in a home where substance use occurs

### ***Course Structure***

During the seven-week term, the course is scheduled for two nights a week for 1.5 hours each class. Due to the creation of the course being rolled out during the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was designed as a blended or hybrid online course meeting instructional contact requirements through a combination of asynchronous online educational learning activities one class period per week and one synchronous class meetings via Zoom per week. During the third year of teaching this course, the format changed to a combination of asynchronous online educational learning activities one class period per week and one synchronous class meetings on-campus each week.

The asynchronous learning activities within this course included reflection journals, discussion boards, student presentations, peer feedback, video demonstrations, video review, problem solving exercises, and reading assignments. The course readings came from many sources including the textbook entitled *School Crisis Prevention & Intervention* by Kerr and King, ASCA Position Statements on topics related to crisis work and the role of the school counselor and school board policies and procedures all of which were used to incorporate active learning. Synchronously, during class time, the students engaged in active learning in large and small group skill demonstrations, small and large group discussion, case studies, problem-based learning, role play, fishbowl, muddiest point and gallery walks.

### ***Learning Assignments***

There are a myriad of ways to create assignments that align with course SLOs. In creating assignments, it is important to determine the outcomes that each assignment will work to accomplish. Simply, assignments are used to assess how well students are achieving course outcomes. The following

assignments were intentionally developed to enhance student learning and assessment of SLOs related to the material covered in the Crisis Intervention in Schools course.

### ***Digital Video Recordings of Role Play Crisis Intervention and Self Evaluation Reflection***

Counseling skills training is central to the development of an effective school counselor. Video recording of mock sessions were used as an instructional strategy for the course. Role plays/mock sessions allow trainees to put counseling theory to practice by allowing students to become active consumers of their learning. Role plays carry the potential to benefit trainees by increasing their counseling self-efficacy (Larson et al., 1999; Rønning, & Bjørkly, 2019). A handful of mock sessions are completed in the course with the scenarios of parental divorce, bullying, child abuse, and suicidology. Following the mock session, the student watched the video, assessed their own performance (strengths and opportunities for growth) of using the crisis framework from Gilliland's Six Step Model (James & Gilliland, 2005) and identified any other personal or practical issues of their work through a written reflection. The students were required to complete three video mock sessions increasing their time spent using the crisis framework from 10 minutes to the final video being roughly 30 minutes. Students met outside of the class to record their sessions using Zoom. These videos and their written reflection of their work were uploaded to CANVAS. The video and the written reflection critique are reviewed, assessed, and supervisory feedback was provided by the instructor within three days of submission. Storing the final video as the signature assessment with a quantitative rubric score as well as qualitative supervisory feedback from the course instructor assessment was tracked as a data point for their progression through the program.

### ***Student as Client Feedback of Video Recording***

Peer assessment is an expansive term for a variety of learning activities that include students evaluating and providing feedback on the work of their peers. The goal of peer feedback is to encourage students to see learning as a collaborative effort where they can measure their progress and enhance their skills from the feedback of their peers to enhance learning (Boud, 2015; Chang, et al., 2012; Van Gennip, et al, 2010). In counselor education, Swank and McCarthy (2013) described two different types of feedback: positive and corrective. In this course assignment, the instructor identified a scaffolded structure of learning as suggested in Vygotsky's (1978) where peers identified strengths and opportunities for growth to support their peer's learning and clinical skill development. Since timing of feedback (more immediate) is important to learning (Hattie & Timpereley, 2007; Wisniewski, et al., 2020) peer feedback evaluations needed to be completed and given to their trainee partner within 48 hours after their mock session.

### ***Class Attendance and Participation***

Student participation is considered as one aspect of student engagement (Baron & Corbin, 2012) which promotes critical thinking, active learning, and development of listening and speaking skills. All of which are vital to the role of a school counselor. Class participation depicts students' attitudes, knowledge and skills about course content, and it is an important variable since it positively impacts academic outcomes (Gunuc, 2014). Due to diverse learning needs, participation was more than attendance and speaking out in class. More observable classroom participation behaviors considered were preparation for

class, exhibiting characteristics of effective communication, small group activities and writing activities (i.e minute papers, clickers). Participation was assessed each week for both asynchronous and synchronous classes.

### ***Weekly Reactions***

Each week students submitted a reflective response that included comments, observations, reactions, or questions pertaining to course material or questions posed by the instructor. Reflection has been defined in many different ways. Gustafson and Bennett (2002) defined reflection as thinking about experiences over a prolonged period of time while “looking for commonalities, differences, and interrelations beyond their superficial elements” (p. 1). Reflection must be about something from which thoughts develop and connect (Dewey, 1997) in hopes of improving learning and enhanced professional practice (Ryan, 2010). These academic reflection assignments had a deliberate and stated purpose as described by Moon (2006) and needed to show evidence of learning. The reflective writing responses were in the form of a class discussion board for evaluation and response from both the instructor and class members on CANVAS. Weekly reactions were assessed, and feedback was provided each week by the instructor as part of their asynchronous learning activities.

### ***Professional Presentation***

Student presentations highlighting and evaluating a school/school district’s crisis response plan or another school crisis issue was a learning assignment for the course. Incorporating student presentations in college courses has shown to meet the SLOs and fostered student engagement and belonging (Quay & Quaglia, 2004), responsibility of course content (Girard, et al., 2011; Malik et al., 2007), and connect theory to real-world application (Horntvedt, et al., 2018; Živković, 2014). In order to save synchronous class time and allow students to view their own presentation, students developed video presentations and uploaded them to the discussion board in CANVAS for evaluation and response from both the instructor and class members.

## **Discussion**

Developing and implementing this crisis course arose from the desire to increase the learning and practice opportunities of school counselor trainees’ work in crisis prevention and intervention in schools to meet the demands of the field and CACREP requirements. This hybrid/blended learning course design successfully aligned the learning objectives, providing school counseling students with opportunities to learn, discuss, critique, and apply course content and facilitate mock crisis counseling sessions using the Six-Step Model framework.

Implementing an active-learning approach within a course design often is not an easy task and may involve overcoming numerous barriers. Active learning often requires more time and some may say at the detriment of course content coverage, however, this hybrid crisis course is designed to offer a unique and flexible teaching and learning opportunity. Adding to the support for hybrid learning environments, academic programs are not fundamentally compromising the quality of the educational learning by offering less in person learning options exchanging with hybrid learning environments (Müller & Mildemberger, 2021). In fact, hybrid learning environments offer greater individualization enabling more



adult learners to access higher education opportunities (Smith & Hill, 2019) and increases educators' opportunities to provide individualized feedback (Milman, 2012). This is an important point to mention here because this course draws not only school counselor trainees in a counselor education program, but practicing school counselors in the geographical area as well. The reasons for the broader reach explained by practicing school counselors and other educators who enrolled in the course are the course format (hybrid and seven weeks) along with the demand for professional development in the area of crisis intervention within the context of schools.

The instructional design of the course allowed for active learning supported by processing, critiquing, and reflecting on content from crisis prevention and intervention literature, providing and receiving feedback to/from peers and practicing and developing crisis counseling skills. Utilizing a hybrid/blended learning environment in the context of a crisis intervention course had many advantages as students came prepared to the synchronous class with the necessary theoretical and procedural components from the asynchronous learning activities. Giving students clear expectations and instructions on how to participate in this type of hybrid/blended classroom learning experience can be helpful. Students were held accountable for asynchronous work through their preparation of the Weekly Reaction assessment. Questions from the Weekly Reaction assignment (typically from a 3-2-1 activity) were reviewed each class which produced increased opportunities for in-depth discussion of crisis preparation, school protocol adherence, and practical application within the context of crisis work in schools by school counselors.

Assessment and feedback from self, peers, and instructor became an essential part of the learning process of this course design. Students were then able to use the assessment and feedback to improve and enhance their skills in their next recorded mock session. These active learning activities described in this course design potentially cultivated more opportunities for the school counselor trainees to discover and demonstrate cognitive processes that are consistent with higher levels of critical thinking and cognitive complexity (Moran & Milsom, 2015).

Creating a conducive educational environment in which students can learn, reflect, be assessed, and give and receive feedback is important. The instructor's impression during and following the course was that she helped create an environment that expanded learning and enhanced skill development for and with the school counseling trainees related to crisis prevention and intervention all the while observing the students become excited about and have a desire to learn more about crisis work in schools and their role as school counselors. In addition, the instructor highly appreciated the students engaging and sometimes challenging questions and comments as these suggested the students' critical consideration of the teaching andragogy and hybrid learning environment used. Post course evaluations from students further encouraged the instructor's positive view of the learning experience. Various strategies can support active learning during practice experiences, but combinations of these strategies addressed are most likely to be effective in helping school counselor trainees achieve their educational goals with the end result of having the knowledge and skills to assess and address the needs of their students in crisis.

### **Conclusion**

Crisis assessment, prevention and intervention are necessary components of skill development for school counselors; yet, findings suggest it remains inadequate (Allen et al., 2002; Brown, 2019; Wachter Morris, & Barrio Minton 2012) in their graduate training program. Therefore, we presented an example structure

of a hybrid/blended learning counseling course in crisis intervention which focused on active learning and crisis skill development for school counselor trainees. This course design using a hybrid/blended classroom to facilitate student learning may prove useful in increasing trainees confidence in feeling prepared in preventing and responding to a traumatic event in their school. Conducting further research of the preparedness of school counselors after participating in a crisis intervention course is highly encouraged.

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