Effective Student Remediation In Synchronous and Asynchronous Programs

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Abstract

Student remediation remains to be an critical topic of discussion in counselor education. This process begins once a student enters a counseling program and continues until the time of graduation. Although remediation can take many forms, the implementation of it will vary depending if the program is offered in a synchronous or asynchronous environment. The current article will identify key components of approaching student remediation for various online environments.

*Keywords:* Remediation, Counselor Education, Online Education
Online education is a rapidly growing modality of education in the United States (Remenick, 2019). The pandemic gave a boost to this method of instruction throughout the world. Traditional brick and motor institutions are rethinking their strategic plans by incorporating online education into the fold (Toczauer, n.d.). While the uptick in online counselor education programs is a benefit for the profession, online programs are held to the same accreditation and ethical standards as traditional in-person programs (ACA, 2014; Snow et al., 2018), including creating significant learning environments, gatekeeping and remediation efforts of the student with problems of professional competences (PPC).

Online learning environments pose unique challenges to the fundamental charge of counselor educators to serve as gatekeepers for the profession (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Haddock et al., 2020; Sheperis et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a paucity of literature in the research related to the andragogy of online teaching (Barrio-Minton-Minton et al., 2014). A lack of research has led to calls in the profession to expand counselor educators’ understanding, practices, and pedagogical practices in online environments (Haddock et al., 2020; Sheperis et al., 2020). To further complicate the issue so gatekeeping in an online or traditional learning environment, the profession lacks a consensus method of addressing gatekeeping (Crawford & Gilroy, 2012; Salpietro et al., 2022); online programs typically attract students from non-traditional backgrounds that have life experiences and prior career experiences outside of counseling (Remenick, 2019); thus their developmental level as a counseling student requires a lot of external validation (Gibson et al., 2010), but is complicated by the unique cultural lens of life experiences (Ziomek-Daigle & Bailey, 2009).
Remediation Process

Despite the structural barriers to gatekeeping naturally embedded in the online environment, counselor educators’ duty to keep clients in the forefront of gatekeeping decisions making does not abate. Salpietro et al., (2021) proposes an effective remediation model to use in the profession for gatekeeping. The model consists of six areas of focus during the remediation process with master’s-level counseling students (Salpietro et al., 2021). The authors argue counselor educators should place importance on the relationship between counseling student and faculty, consider developmental aspects during remediation process, celebrate small victories, provide a supportive environment, be transparent and fair during the process, and, finally, infuse accountability in the process for both the student and faculty (Salpietro et al., 2021).

Translating Salpiertro’s et al. (2021) model to an asynchronous online environment takes thought, planning, and intentionality on behalf of the counselor educator because asynchronous learning environments are not in real-time. Thus, faculty members may have limited real-time interactions with their students making difficult to gauge problems of professional competences outside of submitted work by the student.

Starting with the first area, relational, counselor educator should have intentional strategies from the start of the semester. Instead of sending out an announcement through their Learning Management System (LMS), consider sending out a prerecorded video announcement. In doing so will, the counselor educator will immediately put a face to the name; thus, alleviating possible fears and offering an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. The learning environment is in parallel to counseling process, which is built on common factors and, ultimately, the relationship between instructor and student (Gillespie, 2005; Weinberger, 1994).
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As previously mentioned, online learning environments may attract non-traditional students due removing barriers to attend in-person classes and life responsibilities (Remenick, 2019). Yet, this medium also highlights certain developmental considerations the faculty member needs to consider. Student may come to enroll in courses with a myriad of life experiences and varying levels technological expertise. Taking the extra step in making students comfortable with technology would be prudent step by the faculty member. For example, institutions may offer trainings on how to better utilize their LMS. Being comfortable and knowledgeable as possible with the LMS can help the faculty member trouble-shoot minor issues. Furthermore, faculty members need to have a level of self-awareness and understanding that students’ developmental level and life experiences, particularly for marginalized populations, to differentiate if the students’ worldview is truly a PPC or the student is attempting to incorporate their lens, which should be valued into the material, and having difficulty (Finke, 2013; Gibson & Fripp, Ziomek-Daigle & Bailey, 2009). A deep self-reflection on the part of the faculty member is a good step to take. Additionally, the faculty member should consult with other faculty members about possible developmental issues that arise in their courses.

A strength-based approach in education, and counselor education, is an important factor to help nurture and grow the next generation of counselors (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Smith, 2022; Wiley et al., 2021) With that in mind, counselor educators should be aware that the remediation process can be a scare provoking process for counseling students. However, counselor educators are well equipped to navigate these difficult situations through a strength-based lens by celebrating the small victories. For example, a student may have struggled throughout a course in submitting assignments at the level typically associated with graduate schoolwork. Throughout the course, the faculty member provided *formative* assessment and feedback. On the last
capstone paper, student submitted the assignment and exceeded the expectations as outlined in rubric. It would not beyond expectations of faculty member to send an extra note to student and congratulate them. This demonstrates a level of support on behalf of faculty to the student and shows that the faculty member is indeed paying attention with vested interest.

A support system can make the difference between a student, particularly a student with marginalized identities, succeeding in college or not (Haywood & Sewell, 2016; Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). As faculty members, we are naturally embedded in the support system of our students. With online students having additional responsibilities (e.g., family) that their in-person peers may have, it is essential that faculty members have a more flexible lens regarding their teaching responsibilities. It is not surprising, Lee et al. (2022) recommend faculty keep virtual office hours; however, the traditional view hours need to be adjusted for the online environment and non-traditional students. If, of example, a student works full-time as a teacher and going to school part-time for school counseling, traditional office hours may not be conducive for the student to meet. Meeting outside of traditional “banking hours” is needed to give students access to their instructors, while maintaining their other responsibilities.

The final two areas that Salpietro et al. (2021) state should be an area of focus in the remediation process are a transparent and fair practice and accountability. Due process is critically important in the remediation process (Burkholder et al., 2014). Researchers in the profession agree that students have a right to due process in the remediation process (ACES, 2016; Barrio-Minton et al., 2022; Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; Salpietro et al., 2021; Salpietro et al., 2022). Best-practices for due process include documenting PPC, sharing concerns about PPC with the student, and developing and sharing a writing plan to help the student develop in areas that need improvement (Barrio-Minton et al., 2022). It is in this last area where online programs
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may have an advantage. Setting up and sharing an internet drive (e.g., One Drive) where the student in question and faculty members have access allow all members to be on the same page, and the faculty member can track access to the drive and completion of assigned tasks (e.g., reflective assignment).

Throughout the process, it essential for faculty members to remember the remediation process should not be viewed as a “weed-out” process. Instead, the remediation process should be viewed as an opportunity to help improve the awareness, skills, and knowledge needed to be an effective counselor in the field. To this point, Smith (2022) recommends online faculty create authentic and meaningful connections with their students, in parallel fashion to the counseling relationship. By creating and cultivating those relationships through check-ins and validating students’ experiences, faculty can enter the remediation process more as a support unit than a disciplinary arm of the profession.

Finally, Barrio-Minton found only 4% of counseling related journal articles pertained to online education. The authored called on the profession to dedicate more attention to this teaching modality space (Barrio-Minton, 2019). Even less is talked about when it comes to remediation in an online environment. Therefore, it is of critical importance for the profession to address this needed gap in the literature. This article reinforces the call for profession to address the research gap for online teaching and remediation, while offering a practical strategy for counselor educators to implement at their respective programs (Barrio-Minton, 2019; Rollins et al., 2022).
References


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