

A Mixed-Methods Case Study of an Online Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Certificate Program

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Abstract. This case study employed a mixed-methods, convergent parallel design to explore how a forensic rehabilitation counseling (FRC) certificate program provides the unique multidisciplinary training necessary for the development of competent and qualified forensic rehabilitation counselors. Quantitative methods were used to measure the difference in pre- and post-program earnings and the frequency of providing expert witness testimony before and after the program. Qualitative methods were used to describe FRC program graduates' motivations for enrollment and post-program career trajectories. Additionally, participants described their experience of the interactions between student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content. An analysis of the data revealed that after completion of the program, salary increases were not statistically significant. However, economically, an average salary increase of approximately \$10,000 after completing the FRC program indicates significant income growth. Similarly, frequency of expert testimony did not statistically significantly increase. However, students served as expert witnesses more frequently after the program as compared to before the program. Participants described their motivation for enrollment as being related to the specialized nature of the training and the involvement of the University's law school. Participants, on average, received job promotions or were hired in higher-level professional roles after completion of the program. Students identified the role of student-to-instructor interaction as a primary component of their satisfaction with the program.

Keywords: forensic rehabilitation counseling, rehabilitation counseling, graduate certificate programs, distance education, web-based learning

Forensic rehabilitation counseling is a distinct area of rehabilitation counseling that requires specialized training, above and beyond the standard, graduate level rehabilitation counseling curricula. Despite the rapid growth of forensic rehabilitation counseling, there exists a paucity of research specifically related to this area of practice and even less research exploring how to train competent and skilled forensic rehabilitation counselors. As such, there is an imperative need within the field to start a conversation about how to provide the unique training necessary for work as a qualified forensic rehabilitation expert witness. The current study provides a mixed-methods investigation

of an online FRC graduate certificate program offered by The George Washington University. A mixed-methods design was utilized due to the fact that a strictly qualitative or quantitative approach would be inadequate to best understand the breadth of students' experience of the FRC Program.

The research questions were as follows:

Quantitative Approach

1. Does salary increase from pre-program to post-program?

2. Does the average number of times a person served as an expert witness differ from pre-program to post-program?

Qualitative Approach

1. How do FRC program graduates describe their motivation for enrollment, expert witness preparation and career advancement?
2. How do FRC program graduates describe their post-program career trajectories?
3. How do FRC program graduates describe the interactions between student-to-instructor, student-to-content, and student-to-student in the FRC program?

Literature Review

Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling

Forensic rehabilitation counseling, a relatively new field, is the largest growing subset within the practice of rehabilitation counseling (Barros-Bailey, Benshoff, Fischer, 2008). The introduction of the vocational expert (VE) witness began in the public sector as part of the Social Security Administration (Blackwell, Field, Johnson, Kelsay, & Neulicht, 2005) and has since become prominent in both the private and public sectors (Barros-Bailey, Carlisle, & Blackwell, 2010). The discipline of forensic rehabilitation counseling is distinguished by setting (Havranek, 2007), relationships (Barros-Bailey et al., 2010) and qualifications (Sleister, 2000). Forensic rehabilitation counseling services are provided as a part of a legal action and in a "legal setting" (as cited by Blackwell et al., 2005; and Sleister, 2000). VEs specialize in varied areas of practice. The American Board of Vocational Experts (ABVE) includes the following areas of practice for VEs: "workers' compensation, personal injury litigation, marital dissolution, civil rights, social security and wrongful death" (ABVE, n.d.).

In 2007, The Forensic Ethics Workgroup, a taskforce entirely comprised of rehabilitation professionals with forensic experience, was created by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) to review and recommend revisions to the Code that would establish much needed guidelines specific to forensics (Barros-Bailey et al., 2010). After thorough discussion and debate, the workgroup produced a draft of the revisions that was released for public comment. Comments that were received were then reviewed and integrated into the final recommendations. As of January 2010, Section F, a new addition to the Code dedicated entirely to the practice of forensics and indirect service provisions by rehabilitation counselors, was (and continues to be) in effect (CRCC, 2010).

Counselor/Client Relationship

A foundational difference between rehabilitation counseling and forensic rehabilitation counseling is the counselor/client relationship. In traditional rehabilitation counseling the relationship between counselor and client is fostered and considered a vital interaction. In a forensic capacity, no such relationship is established as forensic rehabilitation counselors mediate a counselor/client relationship that is more restricted as compared to the traditional, counselor/client dyad. According to Section F of the CRCC Code of Ethics (2010), in a forensic setting the client is defined as an evaluatee, "a person who is the subject of an objective and unbiased evaluation" (p. 1). It is important to note, however, that the Code (2010) dictates that regardless of the setting, the counselor's primary obligation is to the client or evaluatee. Section F mentions the "occasionally competing demands" (p. 16) of the standards governing the forensic rehabilitation counselor's role in performing forensic activities and the requirements of the legal system. In these instances, the Code (2010) instructs forensic rehabilitation counselors to make their commitment to the Code known and take steps to resolve conflicts.

Qualifications of the Expert Witness

The American Board of Vocational Experts (ABVE) Code of Ethics (2007) defines the expert witness role as:

a person, who by reason of education or specialized training, possesses knowledge of a particular subject area in greater depth than the public at large. The vocational expert witness' role is to provide assistance to the trier of fact in identifying the effect of injury or other event on an individual's capacity to work, earn money, and/or to maintain a quality of life (p. 5).

Havranek (2007) puts forth the notion that competent forensic rehabilitation counseling requires years of rehabilitation counseling experience and specialized education in the unique demands of the legal system (Dunn & Kontosh, 2011; Havranek, 2007). Rehabilitation counseling masters degree programs provide the baseline tools for skill development and application (Marini et al., 2003). What is missing, however, is the integration of the legal training and the need to understand the law in relation to the assessments and tools used within the rehabilitation counseling discipline (Etheridge, Rodgers, & Fabian 2007; Marini, Isom, Reid, 2003). In short, without additional training in FRC, graduate level rehabilitation counselors are not properly equipped for work in the forensic realm.

Disclosure and Informed Consent

The requirement that rehabilitation counselors provide a professional disclosure statement is another change within the CRCC Code of Ethics (2010). The importance of written professional disclosure is reinforced in the new code, as it states that a counselor must communicate the following to the consumer, both orally and in writing:

...qualifications, credentials, purposes, goals, techniques, limitations, the nature of potential risks and benefits of services, frequency and length of services, confidentiality and limitations regarding confidentiality, contingencies for continuation of services upon incapacitation or death of counselor, fees and billing arrangements, record preservation and release policies, risks associated with electronic communication and legal issues affecting forensic services (Barros-Bailey et al., 2010; Shaw and Lane, 2008).

Informed consent is also addressed in the CRCC Code of Ethics (2010). In terms of ethical obligation, an individual has a right to know what to expect when working with a rehabilitation counselor. Expectations are to be clearly defined at the beginning and throughout the process (Blackwell & Patterson, 2003). At a minimum, the informed consent provided to the client must include the nature and purpose of services provided, along with the risks, benefits and available alternatives upon initiating services with a rehabilitation counselor.

FRC Education

Dunn & Kontosh (2011) delineated two paths to becoming a vocational expert: experience followed by education; or education followed by experience. For many counselors who are already in the field, having foundational education is appropriate for work in the public sector and as a rehabilitation counselor. However, transitioning to the work of forensic rehabilitation counseling requires the refinement of specialized skills, significant clinical experience and a clear understanding of the legal system.

In their (2003) article, Schultz and Brooks explored whether rehabilitation counseling graduates are prepared to work in private sector rehabilitation capacities. Information was gathered from a round table discussion at the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP) Conference. Attendees thought graduates were "ill prepared for the roles and functions of the rehabilitation counseling in the private sector and lacking skill sets in forensic testimony" (Schultz & Brooks, 2003). In addition, according to Marini et al. (2003), rehabilitation counselor education programs are not adequately preparing graduates for forensic rehabilitation employment settings. There is a clear need for further examination of

the role of the rehabilitation counselor and the unique ethical dilemmas that exist within this specialty.

Dunn and Kontosh (2011) proposed a doctoral program in FRC education in order to prepare rehabilitation counselors to work as qualified and appropriately trained expert witnesses. Their proposal describes, justifies, and prescribes the necessary next steps for universities to take in order to meet the demands of the field, suggesting that a doctoral program in FRC is what is needed to fill the gap in training and preparation. Currently, however, there exists a limited array of training options, and no doctoral FRC programs. As a result, the qualifications required of FRCs are being met through other means, namely, through a combination of on-the-job training and real world experience (Havranek, 2007). In an effort to expand the field of FRC, educational opportunities must be developed, implemented, assessed and revised. At the time of publication, only two FRC programs are in existence: GWU's FRC certificate program, a twelve credit degree seeking program, and University of Florida's Forensic Vocational Rehabilitation certificate program, a nine credit, non-degree certificate.

Distance Education

The ever-increasing academic and professional development requirements for national certification and licensure for counselors has led to a proliferation of online academic programs offering either masters degrees or certification programs (Bollettino & Bruderlein, 2008). Distance learning is a widely accessible learning method, especially for military, private industry, people living in remote locations and people with disabilities who may be unable to participate in an on-campus, face-to-face program.

In the private sector, competitiveness and the need to engage in continuous training has created an enormous demand for time-flexible learning opportunities. Beginning in 1993, rehabilitation counseling education programs have employed distance education (Davis & Yazak, 1995) and, in the two decades since, a growing e-learning industry continues to meet the demands for professional development in rehabilitation counselor education. A variety of models of distance education have been applied based on the specific needs of rehabilitation counseling students (Dziekan & Main, 2012). The combination of traditional classroom instruction and multiple distance learning modalities has been introduced as a hybrid model in recent years (Dziekan & Main, 2012).

Distance Education Defined

At the postsecondary level, most Internet web-based instruction is based on individual faculty members' designing their own courses via an online learning management system such as Blackboard or Web CT,

and offering the course to a class size that parallels the classroom based model. According to Egan & Akdere (2005) online distance education is defined as those courses in which at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online. "Face-to-face" or traditional classroom instruction includes those courses in which zero to 29 percent of the content is delivered online (Egan & Akdere, 2005). The remaining alternative, hybrid instruction, is defined as having between 30 percent and 80 percent of the course content delivered online (Egan & Akdere, 2005). Distance education is also defined as a potential and effective tool for promoting rehabilitation education on regional, national, and international levels (Dziekan & Main, 2012).

Strengths of Web-Based Learning

In their review of the distance education literature, Simonson, Schlosser, and Orellana (2011) compared two major areas of research: barriers to the application of distance education and empirically supported best practices. The authors concluded that online learning could be as effective as traditional learning (Simonson et al., 2011). In a qualitative study exploring the experience of students enrolled in an online school-counseling program, it was found that students refer to online delivery as an "enhanced learning environment..." (Hallford, 2012). Hallford (2012) suggested that "as online and face to face instruction are not exactly the same, there is room for creative license in creating new learning experiences for the students that may surpass what exists in the traditional classroom" (p. 60).

Rehabilitation Counseling and Online Education

Several studies report that students taking courses online perceived their quality of learning as equivalent to students enrolled in RCE programs that rely solely on traditional, face to face learning (Simonson et al., 2011; Mansouri, 2003; Eldredge et al., 1999). There are, however, few studies that assess how effective distance education is when used for areas of learning that require the development of clinical skills. According to the most recent (2008-2011) Annual Profile of Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), accredited programs require a range of 48 to 68 credits; include an average of 23.9 credit hours obtained via online education (CORE, 2011). No research exists specifically exploring distance learning and FRC education.

Graduate Certificate Programs

Emener, Evans, Lowe, & Richard (2001) suggest requirements for graduate certificate programs include being housed and operated by a degree-granting department within an accredited college/university.

Courses should be taken in a progressive sequence with content focused on a specific and central theme throughout the entirety of the program. Defined and monitored admission standards should be enforced and completion should be a requirement. Lastly, the faculty and the school should endorse both the curricula and program (Emener et al., 2001). The proposed online graduate certificate program meets all of these criteria.

FRC Certificate Program

The George Washington University (GWU) Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling (FRC) Certificate Program provides an online, collaborative, multidisciplinary and multi-modal learning approach, designed to prepare rehabilitation counselors to work as expert witnesses. Curricula covers areas such as the role of counselors in the legal system, the ethical standards expected of expert witnesses, and the business aspects of successful forensic counseling practice. Students learn the intricacies of courtroom testimony and the fiscal importance of forensic issues such as personal injury, medical malpractice, life care planning, marital dissolution, product liability, or catastrophic injury. The FRC program brings together courses instructed by experienced, Ph.D. level forensic rehabilitation counselors as well as faculty from GWU's Law School. Counselors seeking additional education for certification or licensure also benefit from this program as courses can apply to the coursework required by state licensing boards to obtain counseling licensure. Finally, many FRC students utilize the four graduate level courses for continuing education units (CEUs) for current credentials (CRC, LPC, CDMS).

The FRC Program follows an asynchronous distance education format. Course activities, assignments and assessments are completed online and, therefore, do not require students to reside near or commute to a campus. This facet of distance education provides increased access to students with disabilities. Blackboard learning management system provides a variety of tools used to encourage active student involvement and interaction. Online technology is used to facilitate discussions, submit assignments, complete assessments, view video lectures and enables direct communication between students and instructors.

Coursework

The FRC program includes four three-credit courses: (1) Foundation of Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling I; (2) Foundation of Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling II; (3) Law and the Rehabilitation Consultant; and (4) Disability and Case Management. The first course, Foundation of Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling I,

presents an overview of the roles and functions of rehabilitation professionals who provide forensic services in matters of litigation. Topics covered include medical assessments, labor market data and surveys, transferable skills analysis, job analysis, and information regarding civil suits. Ethical standards, practices and common situations found in the litigation process are reviewed and thoroughly examined. Students become deeply acquainted with forensic rehabilitation services, instruments utilized, Social Security and Supplemental Security, personal injury, medical malpractice, divorce, Workers' Compensation and marketing forensic rehabilitation services.

The second course in the progression, Foundation of Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling II, is a continuation of the initial Foundation course. This class provides a deeper focus on the business aspects of FRC practices. In addition, students examine the role of the Vocational Evaluator with respect to life care plans, loss of earnings capacity, assistive technology, factitious disorders, and federal court rules & laws.

In Law and the Rehabilitation Consultant, the students learn about procedures with respect to legal and court proceedings; the qualifications and functions of the expert witness, non-testifying consultant, and forensic experts in state and federal venues. Wrongful death, consortium claims and cross-examination are discussed at length. Students become familiar with court rules and procedures, specifically: admissibility of evidence and opinion, discovery and work product, hearsay, employment law, discrimination, and medical and professional malpractice. This course is offered in collaboration with faculty from GWU's Law School.

The final course, Disability and Case Management is the culmination of all of the learning completed in the previous courses as students are required to apply and integrate the content of readings, lectures, discussions, and experiences as they work with actual, redacted case studies. Course topics include: establishing a forensic practice, evaluation of a case, providing a deposition, testifying in court, federal rules of civil procedures, and the admissibility of expert testimony.

Interactions

Johnston (2005) posited that as a result of their asynchronous natures, online classrooms provide a situational difference in student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content interactions (p. 54). The researchers of the current study utilized these three areas as a means of examining the multiple modes of interaction built into the FRC program framework.

Student-to-instructor interaction. Studies show that distance education works best when students feel that instructors are accessible. Souder (1993) found

that students at a distance site perceived a greater connection between the professor and student than those enrolled in the same course via a traditional classroom (Johnston, 2005). The GWU FRC program encourages student/instructor interaction via email and Skype. Student questions and feedback are welcomed and instructor response time is immediate. Instructors also offer the opportunity for students to communicate over the phone, thus enabling direct contact.

Student-to-student interaction. A significant component to the program involves student-to-student interaction. Students are required to participate in an ongoing, robust online discussion. Each week, students are asked to develop an original topical thread consisting of a one to two page posting in APA format. Students are required to provide feedback to other students. Discussion questions and threads are used to challenge students to synthesize course content as opposed to mere reiteration. Students participate in three to five threaded discussions each week. These posts can be informal and facilitate community building and collaborative thinking.

Student-to-content interaction. Each of the sequential courses require that students complete weekly readings, post an original discussion topic, participate in discussions online with other students, write a mid-term paper on a specified topic, and complete a course project related to forensic counseling. The mid-term papers provide the students the opportunity to learn about a specific topic of interest in the course, initially they can choose their own topic. Final projects are centered on what the students should be prepared to experience in the field. Topics include: web site analysis, loss of earnings assessment, the forensic consultant interview, Social Security Disability (SSDI), workers' compensation, medical malpractice, divorce and personal injury cases.

Purpose

In the current study, as a counterpoint to Dunn and Kuntosh's (2011) study which proposes the need for a doctorate in forensic rehabilitation counseling, the researchers suggest that doctoral study, an academic endeavor requiring an extended time commitment, does not reflect the emerging needs of the field. The researchers believe that the majority of rehabilitation counselors seeking FRC training work full-time or have their own private practice or company and are not looking for a long-term training program. In an effort to propose online graduate FRC certificate programs (GCPs) as a viable way to expand the field of FRC, accommodate student needs, and provide an appropriate level of in depth training, the current study provides an exploratory case study of a FRC graduate certificate program. Quantitative methods were used

to measure the difference in pre- and post-program earnings and the frequency of expert witness testimony experienced before and after the program. Qualitative methods were used to describe FRC program graduate's motivations for enrollment and post-program career trajectories. Additionally, participant's descriptions of the interactions between student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content were collected.

Methodology

A mixed-methods, convergent parallel design was utilized in this study. The researchers selected this approach because they believed that a strictly qualitative or quantitative approach would be inadequate to describe the breadth of students' experience of the FRC Program. A convergent parallel design dictates that the researcher collects qualitative and quantitative data concurrently, analyzes the data sets separately and then the two data sets are merged for interpretation.

Case Study

Defined by Merriam (2009) as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p.40), case study was designated as an appropriate methodology for the current study meets this criteria. The phenomenon the researchers seek to understand is, to use Merriam's (2009) terminology, "intrinsically bounded" (p. 41) within a unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is the FRC Program. Existing research has informed the research questions, but there is no assumption that the research question and possible constructs are immutable as, in case study methodology, questions and constructs may shift throughout the study. Case study methodology is inductive due to the fact that data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process (Merriam, 2008, p. 169). Equally as important, case study does not negate or try to minimize the researcher's biases, worldview, assumptions, etc. Critical self-reflection is considered a vital part of the research endeavor. The current case study is exploratory in nature.

Participants

The purposive sample included graduates of GWU's Graduate School of Education and Human Development FRC Certificate Program. Email addresses were obtained via admission applications submitted by students upon entrance into the program. A total of 25 participants were included in the study. There were 37 students who received the e-mail invitation. Of the 37 students invited to participate, 25 completed the survey (an approximate return rate of 67%). Prior to participant recruitment, approval was obtained from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Office of Human Research at The George Washington University. The only selection criterion was that participants completed a FRC program. Participation in the study consisted of providing answers, both qualitative and quantitative, via an online questionnaire.

Of the 25 participants, 56% of participants were female, 44% male. The mean age was 36 years. The racial breakdown was as follows: African American (17%), Caucasian (75%), Hispanic/Latino (12.5%), and multiracial (4%). The majority of participants had completed a masters degree (76%), 4% of participants reported that they had a bachelors degree, 20% indicated that they completed an alternative level of education (Ph.D., chiropractic training, post-graduate certificates, etc.).

Forensic rehabilitation counseling was the primary area of practice for 40% of the sample, 20% worked in private rehabilitation counseling, 16% in disability management or workers compensation, 8% in personal injury, 4% in long and short-term disability and 12% of the sample reported that they worked in other work settings including rehabilitation for the blind, forensic economics or as a vocational expert. Forensic rehabilitation counseling was selected as secondary area of practice for 36% of the sample. Other secondary areas of practice included disability management/workers compensation (20%), personal injury (24%), long and short-term disability (12%), private rehabilitation (12%), no secondary area of practice (12%) and alternative area of practice (16%) including career counseling and social security. Approximately half of the sample works in urban (52%) areas, with other half of participants at an equal split between rural (36%), and suburban (36%) areas of practice. For each demographic question the participants were able to select multiple options, thus the total percentages do not add up to 100%. Participants' certifications were varied including (among others): Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (CRC), LPC Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), American Board of Vocational Experts (ABVE), certified disability management specialist (CDMS), licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), physician's assistant, psychologist, professor, and registered nurse (RN). The mean amount of professional work experience was 10 years.

Data Collection and Measures

FRC graduates who agreed to participate in the study did so by clicking a survey link from Survey Gizmo, an Internet-based survey website, that was delivered via e-mail invitation. Following the initial dissemination, the researchers sent a follow-up email two weeks later to potential participants in an effort to maximize the response rate. Participants need only click on the link provided (or copy and paste the link into a browser) to retrieve the survey. Prior to dissemination, the re-

searchers tested the survey to ensure that it was properly compiling data. The data collected was automatically compiled from the web survey Surveygizmo.com and then exported into SPSS for Windows.

Along with the survey link, participants were also sent an informed consent electronically which informed participants that they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time, what would be done with the information they provide, the intent of the current study, limitations of confidentiality, and a statement about known risks and benefits associated with their participation. Participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The surveys did not collect any identifying information as a means of protecting the anonymity of participants.

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by the researchers and consisted of three sections: demographic information, program experience, and post-program review. The demographic information collected included gender, age, ethnicity, primary and secondary areas of practice (public, private, forensic, etc.), primary geographic area (rural, urban, suburban), highest degree achieved, GPA and major of that degree, professional licensure and certifications, state of licensure, years of experience in forensic rehabilitation prior to applying to the FRC program, years of attendance in the FRC program, and GPA in the FRC program. The question types used in the survey included Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions.

Qualitative data were extracted from responses to the open-ended questions. There were 155 statements extracted from the open-ended questions. The coding process was completed in multiple steps and any one response could be coded into multiple categories. Three independent raters coded the data. Inter-rater reliability was used to assess the degree to which different raters agreed or disagreed in their assessment decisions. Where there were different responses, an agreed upon algorithm and discussion were used to develop consensus. These data were initially organized and coded based on the question asked on the survey instrument, e.g., "Please explain why you chose GWU's FRC Certificate Program." A second coding analysis on the data was performed to review the raw responses with respect to the interaction topics discussed in the literature review, "Student to Student," "Student to Content," and "Student to Instructor" categories. Once coded, the data was then analyzed and interpreted by the research team.

Results

Quantitative

There was no statistically significant change in salary from before beginning the FRC program ($M=\$72,066$, $SD=\$30,130$) to after completion of the FRC program ($M=\$82,000$, $SD=\$47,822$), $t(12)=1.406$, $p=.185$, $r=.88$, $d=.39$. However, the low sample size and low response rate to the salary question resulted in low statistical power for significance testing. Descriptively, on average salary increased nearly \$10,000 from pre- to post-FRC program ($d=.39$). While not statistically significant, an increase of approximately \$10,000 for a 12-credit certificate program within one year can be considered economically significant.

Though not statistically significant, the average number of times participants served as an expert witness increased from pre-program ($M=471$, $SD=1264$) to the total number of times (pre- and post-program combined; $M=603$, $SD=1608$), $t(16)=1.504$, $p=.152$, $d=.36$ (see Figure 1). Of note was the large amount of variability associated with participant's responses to these questions, as indicated by the standard deviations ($\text{min}=0$, $\text{max}=6500$). Furthermore, this trend is expected over time because it is impossible for this number to decrease from pre- to post-test. Within two months of completing the program, participants served as an expert witness as a group on average 132 ($SD=372$) times.

Qualitative

The first qualitative research question asks how FRC program graduates describe their motivations for enrollment, expert witness preparation, and career advancement. The following findings were indicated:

Motivations for enrollment. The FRC Certificate Program is specifically targeted for rehabilitation professionals who have experience in the field and have a working knowledge of rehabilitation counseling. Most students indicated that they had several years and, for some, two to three decades of prior experience. Student motivations for seeking education in forensic rehabilitation counseling included: "updating skills and expanding knowledge," "intellectual fulfillment," "career advancement," and "to understand concepts specific to forensic rehabilitation counseling." Specific motivations for selecting GWU's FRC Certificate Program included: "school and program reputation and prestige," "curriculum content," "multidisciplinary perspective," "law school participation," "professors and instructors," "cost," and "flexibility in scheduling." One student wrote, "GWU is at the forefront of forensic studies."

Expert witness preparation. The program seeks to prepare students for being an expert witness in a

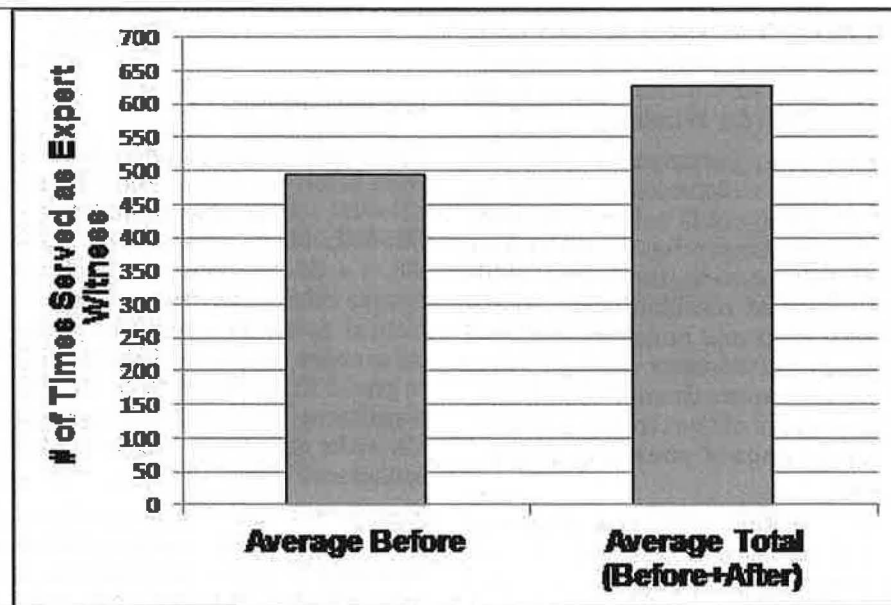


Figure 1. Number of times served as an expert witness before and after completing the FRC program.

court of law. When asked whether or not students felt adequately prepared to testify as an expert witness responses included: "Yes, but I would have liked a mock trial," "Yes, but there is no substitution for actual experience," and "I would have preferred more hands-on experience." Areas that students wanted added to the curriculum included more practice in deposition or trial testimony, a practicum/internship, mentorship, and a law course that was more focused on civil litigation and testimony of VEs. Desire for a practical component was consistent throughout participant responses. The students who did not feel prepared attributed their skill deficiency to the lack of previous experience. These students felt that they needed more preparation than the program provided. Students who felt adequately prepared wrote statements such as, "The knowledge imparted was key to the testifying process. I would have never felt more comfortable."

Career trajectories. Students who participated in the program had varied responses to whether or not they believed the program to have contributed to the advancement of their careers. Many students felt that completion of the program made them more attractive to employers. Statements supporting this notion were, "[the program] adds to my resume and depth of knowledge," "attorneys view my CV and me as a professional with updated skills and education," "I have been able to be more selective in my work and I am adapting my career in the direction I had planned," "I have already received a legal malpractice referral based on my resume," and "... [the program] contributed to my positive reputation as a vocational expert." Students who did not feel that the program assisted them in their career aspirations provided responses

related to the desire for additional support in post-program employment assistance. Several students made comments indicating that work as a forensic rehabilitation counselor takes time and they have yet to be promoted. One student wrote, "Only time will tell." Pre-program/post-program job changes included: Rehabilitation Counselor to Vocational Expert, Field Agent to Vocational Consultant, Rehabilitation Manager to Vocational Expert, Disability Management Specialist to Vocational Expert.

Interactions

The second qualitative research question asks how FRC program graduates describe the interactions between student-to-instructor, student-to-student, and student-to-content. The questions were not asked directly with respect to these interactions, however, based on the literature review, these categories were available to the coders, and resulted in extensive use in this analysis. The following findings were indicated:

Student-to-instructor. The courses are divided by content, and therefore, the instructors were specific to the course content. A faculty member of the Rehabilitation Counseling program, who is a forensic rehabilitation counselor by training and trade, taught the Forensic Rehabilitation Counseling specific courses and a George Washington University Law School professor, who is a lawyer by training and trade, taught the legal course.

The Student to instructor relationship resulted in 17 positive and 5 negative results. The majority of the positive results were focused on the interaction with

the forensic rehabilitation-counseling professor, in multiple instances, reporting his name in response to the question of positive aspects of the program. The positive comments highlighted the feedback and the structure provided by the instructor: "The course was definitely worth attending and has helped a great deal. The instructor was dynamic and ensured we kept moving forward and completed course work in a timely manner which was helpful;" while another student reported: "I enjoyed participating in the FRC program, interacting with classmates who had a great deal of info to share, and found the professors engaging. I would certainly recommend it." Several participants commented on the weekly video lectures provided by the instructor. Students reported that the video lectures helped them feel more connected to the University and added an element of "personalization to the instruction."

Four out of five of the negative comments were focused on the lack of interaction with the law professor, as an example:

I would have liked to receive feedback and participation from the professor to weekly submissions throughout the program to know that my input was valuable, on-target or if it needed further research, work, etc. It is great to have the support of peers but if a student does not know that a professor is actively participating in an online course, then it becomes more of a peer-guided course rather than a formal educational program with the exception of following an established curriculum.

Students indicated that they "appreciated the opportunity to engage with course content related to expert witness testimony". However, there was a desire for a legal curriculum that was more related to vocational rehabilitation counseling and FRC. One participant reported, "There was a lack of instruction regarding the application of vocational rehabilitation and rehabilitation in forensic settings."

Student-to-student. The students were provided opportunities to interact on-line. As with the Student to Instructor category above, there was not a specific question asked about the student-to-student interaction. The final coding resulted in 11 positive comments, and 1 negative comment with respect to student-to-student interaction. The negative comment referred to needing an awareness that each student had a different background, "All participants were not practicing in this capacity. So keeping this in mind when providing instruction and including elements that represents this type of learner." The positive results revolved around learning from other students, and gaining from their experience: "Interacting with and learning from classmates who have had years of experience in the field and knew different areas of FRC;" and "Even though it was online there were so

many personal connections through discussions." Others referred to "learning" from each other, and "networking" with each other.

Student-to-content. The Student to content area appeared to have the most influence on the respondents as the statements resulted in 81 positive and 35 negative results. The positive feedback was classified into subcategories of (1) knowledge expansion, (2) skill update; (3) skill application; and (4) integration. Knowledge expansion included comments from students starting with a "foundation," and having had previous "experience," one student commented: "I felt I needed more professional development in vocational rehabilitation and this was a good place to start. I wanted to learn the basics and also more about specific areas in depth. My employer also encouraged it." The skill update was about adding to already existing toolbox of skills, students referenced "reinforcing" their skillset, "utilizing" their existing skillset, and creating a feeling of "comfort;" "My research supported that this program was more closely aligned with my past training and philosophy."

With respect to the skill application, students looked to apply what they were learning: "It assisted me by providing real life examples/experience to apply to the programs topics." Finally, one or two students commented positively about the integration with the law school "I liked the idea that there was a connection with the School of Law." The majority of the negative were focused on lack of opportunities for "internship," "mock trial," "mock expert testimony," and the need for "experience." One student's comment summarizes it: "Provide students with a mock trial experience where they prepare for testimony as an expert witness in a given case."

Discussion

This study surveyed participants of the FRC program. The results provided valuable data regarding FRC program participants' changes in salary, expert witness experience and career advancement. Havranek (2007) and Dunn and Kontosh (2011) proposed the notion that competent forensic rehabilitation counseling requires years of rehabilitation counseling experience and specialized education in the unique demands of the legal system. Students' description of the FRC program content details "specialized" FRC training as part of specifically sequenced curricula. Students' reports also reflect the view of Marini et al. (2003) who claim that rehabilitation counseling master's degree programs do not provide for adequate skill development and application in forensic work. Legal training must be integrated into the counseling coursework so that students understand the law in relation to the assessments and tools used within the rehabilitation counseling discipline (Etheridge et al., 2007; Marini et al., 2003).

The FRC certificate program provides students with the skills needed to testify as an expert witness in a court of law. Students who graduated from the program indicated that their earnings increased on average by approximately \$10,000 after completing the FRC program. In addition, participants reported that they also experienced an increase in the number of times that they testified after completing the program. The quantitative results found that participants increased their frequency of testifying and on average testified nearly eight times (7.76) within two months of completing the FRC program. A vocational expert that testifies on average seven to eight times within a two month period should be making a good salary and is reflected in the mean increase of FRC graduates earnings. While statistical significance was not found for the quantitative results, it can be concluded that this increase in expert witness experience can be considered to have a significant practical utility. Thus, the program provides a profitable return on investment, as testifying as an expert witness can be a career changing experience that promotes revenue and opens doors to new areas of practice and increased referrals.

The findings of this study support the idea that online education can be an effective and multi-faceted way to learn. Simonson et al. (2011) compared two major areas of research: barriers to the application of distance education and empirically supported best practices. The authors concluded that DE could be as effective as traditional learning. Hallford (2012) suggested that "as online and face to face instruction are not exactly the same, there is room for creative license in creating new learning experiences for the students that may surpass what exists in the traditional classroom" (p. 60). The participants' comments regarding the weekly video lectures indicated an appreciation for a distance education learning experience that included a personalized learning component. The experience of being able to see your instructor, as opposed to only knowing them via email or discussion boards, appeared, from the students' perspective, to be a very welcome addition to the curriculum.

With respect to the interactions, as previously denoted from Johnston (2005), the distinct categories of interactions between students and instructors, students and content, and students and students were very much a part of the responses in the qualitative review. The students' interactions with the instructors and content carried a greater weight than interactions with each other. It appears that the component of the training with which the students were familiar, i.e. having a counseling instructor, receiving immediate feedback, and learning about the factual foundation information, met the expectations of the students and overall received feedback that was positive to the program, school, and instructor.

Where the responses were negative appeared to be where expectations were not met. There are some clear-cut requests and examples of wanting an experiential component added to the program, students were vocal about this. However, the polar responses between the experience with the counseling related courses and the law course appeared to have more than falling short of expectations. Sounder's (1993) report of accessibility was a driver in the feedback specifically between the feel of accessibility with one instructor and with the feel of lack of accessibility from the other. Again, the students were clear about wanting immediate feedback, however, in retrospect, is that how law school professors provide interaction to law students? Is this a question of pedagogical style? Does that address more than just the immediate feedback? These questions cannot be answered from the results of this survey, an option could be to further study this in another research project, or consider options for managing student expectations for the law related courses.

The studies showed that instructor accessibility was key to student satisfaction; a limitation of this study was the lack of definition of accessibility. The review of this question could also consider further exploration into experiential components such as the mock trial, or expert witness role-play the students requested. However, completing a mock trial would be difficult to complete online and would require a hybrid component where the students travel to GWU and attend GW's School of Law.

Overall, students indicated that the strongest component of the program was the quality of the instruction. The instructor was described as "knowledgeable," "dynamic" and having "expertise." Interaction that was specifically cited as helpful included feedback from instructor and video lectures. Other strengths included the program structure, flexibility of online learning, and "making personal connections with and learning from classmates." Weakest components included lack of practical testimony information, no mock trial, and the online format. Content and instruction of the law class, Law and the Rehabilitation Consultant, was found to be particularly lacking. Several students indicated that the law class was a stark contrast to the other courses as the course content was "off topic" and the instructor provided limited feedback to students. The potential addition of video lectures by the law school instructor may mitigate some of the dissatisfaction in students' interaction.

Conclusion

Limitations

The results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations or settings as the sample represents

the unique makeup of FRC program graduates. The questionnaire used was not tested for reliability or validity. Qualitative methods were included in an effort to provide a more complex understanding and description of participants' experiences in the program. A limitation of qualitative research is a lack of validity and reliability. Researcher bias must be taken into consideration as the principal investigator serves as Director of the FRC program and the secondary researcher serves as a doctoral level research assistant for the FRC program. Qualitative analysis is inherently subjective, as findings are shaped by the researcher's knowledge and interpretation and, therefore, different researchers may produce varied findings. Limitations of the quantitative analysis are related to the low sample size and low statistical power. The analysis was descriptive in nature and causality cannot be inferred.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study represents a step towards better understanding the value of graduate certificate programs in FRC. With only two certificate programs in the country specializing in FRC, the field could benefit from collaboration between GWU and University of Florida to assess the needs of the students seeking these certificates. Longitudinal studies that can provide a more complex understanding of the long-term benefits of the program will shed further light on the significance of a program of this type and in this content area. As there are more graduates, an increased sample size will enable further statistical analysis. Although exploratory in nature, this study has implications for the further development of graduate certificate programs specializing in FRC. From the findings of this study, it appears that students benefit from increased student-to-instructor contact when engaged in distance education environments. Continued exploration of how to provide creative and fruitful interactions between students and instructors, other students and the course content will enable educators to better serve their students. Future research should also focus on establishing formalized training standards and competencies for forensic rehabilitation counselors.

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