

Vocational Evaluation: Research on Its Speciality Status in Rehabilitation Education

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Assessment, (b) Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability, (c) Job Development and Placement, (d) Principles and Practices of Vocational Evaluation, (e) Vocational Evaluation Systems and Techniques, (f) Interpretation and Application of Vocational Evaluation Data, and (g) Practicum/Internship.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to survey the field of rehabilitation educators to determine their capacity and qualifications to establish vocational evaluation specialties within CORE-approved rehabilitation counseling programs. Analyzes of the nature and extent of vocational evaluation content within existing Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE) curricula would determine the potential for CORE to endorse a change in scope to include a specialization track in vocational evaluation.

Method

Instrument

The Survey of Graduate Programs in Rehabilitation Counseling Regarding Vocational Evaluation was developed to survey graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling regarding course work, curricular content, faculty expertise, and clinical learning experiences in vocational evaluation. The survey consists of 17 items designed to gauge the following: a) recent trends in employment opportunities for vocational evaluators; b) the nature and extent of vocational evaluation content in RCE curricula; and c) the potential for establishing a distinct specialization track in vocational evaluation. Items were reviewed by a panel of experts in vocational evaluation, who recommended modifications. The participants were asked to rate items on a four point scale (1= not at all, 2= a little, 3= a moderate amount, 4= a great deal).

Participants

The Survey of Graduate Programs in Rehabilitation Counseling Regarding Vocational Evaluation was sent to the coordinators/directors of all 84 CORE-accredited, master's level RCE programs in October, 1996. A total of 39 usable returns were received by the May 1, 1997 due date, resulting in a response rate of 46%. Of the 39 programs responding, 37 (95%) were located in public universities and two (5%) were in private

institutions.

Responding programs had an average of 3.7 core faculty ($SD=1.4$; range of 1 to 7) and an average enrollment of 38.5 students ($SD=18.7$; range of 12 to 90). Nine respondents (23%) also had doctoral programs in rehabilitation with an average student enrollment of 10.4 ($SD=7.2$; range of 1 to 20).

Results

Vocational Evaluation Training, Employment, and Research Resources

Thirty-four respondents (87%) indicated that they were moderately to very well aware of employment trends in vocational evaluation. Thirty-five programs (90%) responded that they have little or no difficulty finding literature and other educational materials on vocational evaluation. Similarly, no difficulty finding opportunities for clinical training in vocational evaluation were reported by 34 respondents (87%). Thirty programs (77%) reported little to no difficulty in finding good vocational evaluation role models for their students. Research interest in the area of vocational evaluation appears moderate, with only seven programs (18%) reporting some to a great deal of scholarly activity and 12 programs reporting a little research activity.

In terms of faculty preparedness to conduct vocational evaluation training, responding RCE programs averaged 1.2 faculty members with master's-level preparation in vocational evaluation ($SD=1.3$) and 1.1 faculty ($SD=1.0$) with direct vocational evaluation job experience. Far more faculty ($M=1.8$; $SD=1.4$) possessed rehabilitation counseling job experience which included vocational evaluation responsibilities. The Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE) credential, however, was not well represented. A large number of programs (23; 59%) reported that they have no CVE faculty member. Ten programs counted one CVE (26%), and three programs reported two CVEs (8%) and three programs reported three CVEs (8%) among their faculty.

Curricula Addressing Vocational Evaluation Content Areas

There were thirty-four (34) vocational evaluation content areas on the survey. Respondents were

asked which were currently addressed in their curricula. Table 1 summarizes these findings.

Methods of Vocational Evaluation Education

Of the 39 RCE programs responding to the survey, five (13%) have an entire degree program or major devoted to vocational evaluation. Nine programs (23%) indicated that they have more than one course devoted to vocational evaluation (ranging from 2 to 15 required courses). For example, the University of Wisconsin - Stout has seven required courses and seven elective courses available and Auburn University has 15 required courses and two elective courses. These two universities have entire degree programs in vocational evaluation. West Virginia University had a track within their RCE program offering four required courses and no elective courses in vocational evaluation. Thirteen programs (33%) have one required course. Seventeen programs (44%) indicated that they implement vocational evaluation content in one or more required courses across the curriculum.

Plans for Curriculum Revision and Enhancement

When asked to indicate interest in establishing a specialization track in vocational evaluation to better prepare students for employment in vocational evaluation positions, 17 of the 34 programs who did not have an existing vocational evaluation program indicated either a moderate or great deal of interest.

Discussion

Course Content

It is encouraging that a high percentage of programs (46%) responded to a written survey, indicating the timeliness and importance of the survey content. Further, those programs without any dedicated

Table 1

Vocational Evaluation Content Areas Addressed by RCE Curricula

Topics addressed by 90-100% of
responding RCE Programs

Occupational Information

Job Analysis

Job Development and Placement

Medical/Psychosocial Aspects of Disability

Standardized Testing

Assessment

Functional Aspects of Disability

Job Modification and Accommodation

Vocational Interviewing

Topics addressed by 80-89.99% of
responding RCE Programs

Behavioral Observation

Situational and Community-Based Assessment

Interpretation and Application of Vocational
Evaluation Data

Work Samples and Systems

Community Resources Utilization

Functional Skills Assessment

table continues

Assistive Technology

Principles and Practices of Vocational Evaluation

**Topics addressed by 70-79.99 % of
responding RCE Programs**

Professional Liability

Vocational Evaluation Systems and Techniques

Ethical Issues in Vocational Evaluation

Report Development and Communication

Individualized Vocational Evaluation Planning

**Philosophy and Process of Vocational Assessment
and Evaluation**

**Topics addressed by 60-69.99 % of
responding RCE Programs**

Monitoring and Evaluation of Client Outcomes

Transition Planning

Vocational Evaluation Software

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

**Topic addressed by 50-59.99 % of
responding RCE Programs**

**Interactions with Attorneys, Employers and
other Stakeholders**

table continues

**Topics addressed by 40-49.99% of
responding RCE Programs**

Ergonomic Principles and Practices

Assessment of Learning

Research in Vocational Evaluation

Vocational Evaluation Credentialing

Expert Witness Testimony

**Topics addressed by 30-39.99% of
responding RCE Programs**

**Vocational Evaluation Program
Design and Development**

specialization in vocational evaluation (17) indicated interest in implementing a special track in vocational evaluation, in great part based on their recognition that their students would be interested in dual specialties in rehabilitation counseling and vocational evaluation.

The program development process would not involve extensive reorganization of course curricula, according to the results of this survey. An analyzes of course content units required by CORE and CCWAVES indicate a significant overlap among the requirements. For existing RCE programs, course work in Principles and Practices of Vocational Evaluation, Vocational Evaluation Systems and Techniques, and Interpretation and Application of Vocational Evaluation Data would need to be added, as well as a practicum to meet CCWAVES certification requirements for individuals.

When analyzed by percentage of respondents, more than 90% of the programs met three key content areas: Assessment; Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability; and Job Development and Placement. Eighty to ninety percent of the programs indicated course work with emphasis on Vocational Evaluation Systems and Techniques, including work samples, assistive technology, and situational and community-based assessment. The other key content areas, which was addressed by seventy to eighty percent of the respondents, were Planning, Report Development, and Philosophy and Process of Vocational Evaluation. For those programs without current courses or course content in vocational evaluation, the blueprint is clear for development of the course curriculum based on the recommendation presented by Taylor and Pell in 1993 and corroborated by this study.

However, the results of this study indicate that programs with courses in vocational evaluation may be missing key content areas to meet certification requirements in vocational evaluation. Respondents rating suggests that there may be omissions in key CCWAVES knowledge and performance areas. Such omissions can make it very difficult for students to achieve certification. RCE programs would benefit from a course content review, to validate the scope of the vocational evaluation specialty.

Similarly, this study should be compared with the results of the most recent CCWAVES role and function study or other process to validate field practice and certification requirements. It may be that the results of this study can corroborate those data or introduce new data that can assist CCWAVES in its validation studies.

Assessment of Learning, one of the elective CCWAVES Knowledge and Performance areas, was included in curricula by less than 50% of the respondents. Depending upon setting and clientele served, this knowledge could be considered very critical. The graduate seeking work in such an area would benefit from formal course preparation. While creating a dedicated course may not be necessary, an elective may be developed, which is taught in a related discipline, such as education, special education, or psychology.

Faculty Expertise

Expertise in vocational evaluation among the RCE faculty was adequate in the areas of awareness of employment trends, access to literature, and identification of clinical training opportunities and role models for students. Given that the average number of faculty members per program is only 3.7, it is reasonable to conclude that vocational evaluation expertise is adequately, if not well represented among RCE faculty. On average, 1.2 faculty members have master's level preparation in vocational evaluation and 1.1 members have actual work experience in the area.

Of greater concern are the areas of research and certification. There was limited research interest, 20 programs reported no faculty research activity in vocational evaluation. Also, fifty-nine percent of the programs responding reported no CVE credential among the faculty. These two factors, research and credentialing, are significant to the development of the field. Without faculty commitment to research in the discipline, the profession is compromised.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this research, it is recommended that CORE proceed to change its scope to

include vocational evaluation. A majority of the response from 46% of the RCE master's level programs indicate interest in a vocational evaluation specialty within rehabilitation counseling instruction.

While the curriculum development issues are clearly articulated, there is a critical need for commitment to research and credentialing to enhance the profession of vocational evaluation. Strategies should be developed to encourage research, such as mini-grants co-sponsored by the professional organizations (VEWAA, NRCA, ACA). Mentoring programs for those faculty who are conducting research to team with other interested faculty should be fostered. Master's level students should be encouraged in courses to conduct more research on vocational evaluation, in partnership with faculty and the professional organizations.

The professions of vocational evaluation and rehabilitation counseling share many content areas. There needs to be a strong partnership fostered among the faculty of programs committed to dual specialties in vocational evaluation and rehabilitation counseling, the students seeking dual specialties, the employers hiring such students, and the organizations certifying the programs and the individual graduates from those programs. With all stakeholders involved in the curriculum design, implementation, and research, students can achieve employable skills and serve their clients most effectively.

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