Becoming Gatekeepers: A Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development in Counselor Education

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ABSTRACT

BECOMING GATEKEEPERS: A CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL OF GATEKEEPER DEVELOPMENT IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

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Northern Illinois University, 2020
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The need for diligent gatekeeping practices in counselor education is well documented in professional literature, ethical guidelines, and standards of practice; although much has been written about gatekeeping, an extensive examination of the literature did not reveal any studies on how and where counselor educators are learning to be gatekeepers. Therefore, this study sought to ascertain what counselor educators identify as meaningful learning experiences and critical incidents that facilitated their sense of efficacy and preparedness as gatekeepers and to examine how counselor educators acquire and develop the competence to become proficient gatekeepers in the counseling profession. Phenomenological interviewing and analysis identified themes related to gatekeeper development such learning, training, competence, barriers, improvements, and conceptualizing gatekeeping. From these themes, a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development emerged. Implications and further directions for research are suggested. Personal reflection on contextual influences such as COVID-19 Pandemic and Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement are also discussed.
BECOMING GATEKEEPERS: A CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL OF GATEKEEPER DEVELOPMENT IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

BY

NATASHA JOY SALIER SCHNELL
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Scott A. Wickman
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DEDICATION

for my dad
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Beginning

My CACREP-accredited doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) provided ample opportunity to learn about the roles and responsibilities of a counselor educator. Knowing I wanted to work as a counseling professor in the future, I tailored my courses and internships to allow for diverse, “real-world” experiences that would best prepare me for work in the field of counselor education. I sought opportunities to co-teach courses in counseling skills and techniques and to provide supervision to our master’s level practicum students. Through these experiences I began to recognize the importance of student assessment and counselor educator roles in not only preparing students to work as counselors, but in recognizing when students were failing to meet the criteria necessary to advance in the counseling field. In my experience, I found some criteria fairly straightforward and easy to assess, such as the accurate use of grammar in a written assignment or performance on a multiple-choice test. Other times, criteria were more ambiguous and less easy for me to evaluate, such as demonstration of self-awareness or gaining insight. Through experience and meaningful supervision, I began to build a foundation of how to approach student assessment and how to work with students needing additional instruction or remediation. I had a sense of “how it was done” based on my experiences at my university and planned to take this knowledge into my career as a counselor educator.
However, my first teaching experience outside my training university proved that not everyone views the area of student assessment and readiness for the counseling profession the same way, and that the policies and procedures for assessing and remediating students can vary significantly from one university to another. I had previously taken for granted that through my training I had learned a “standard” method of student assessment and evaluation, but soon came to realize that, in my limited experience, a universal standard did not seem to exist. Experiencing such vastly different approaches to student evaluation led me to question my approach to student assessment. My confidence was greatly diminished; I felt ill-prepared, naïve, and realized I had a lot to learn regarding student assessment and remediation before I considered myself competent in this area of counselor education. This discord and drop in confidence led me to the counseling literature to ascertain if my experiences were unique. Upon review of the literature, I came across Bernard and Goodyear’s (2009) term gatekeeper, which stimulated my research interests from that point forward and set the foundation for this dissertation.

Fueled with this terminology I previously lacked, I began to ponder what it means to be a gatekeeper in the counseling profession. I wondered how others define and conceptualize this aspect of counselor education. I thought about what I had experienced in my doctoral program and early career, and began to consider how gatekeeping skills and knowledge are acquired. I wondered about the idea of gatekeeping efficacy, questioning what types of experiences lead toward gatekeeping competency. I wanted to dig into the literature and talk with other counselor educators; I wanted to learn more about this phenomenon of gatekeeping.
Overview

The American Counseling Association’s (2014) *Code of Ethics and Professional Standards* defines gatekeeping as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (p. 20). Gatekeeping would seem fairly standard in most advanced degree programs, as it relates to the evaluation of students’ academic performance and ability to demonstrate adequate skills and knowledge necessary for the demands of their particular program of study. Obviously, the necessary academic prowess and specific skill acquisition vary with each unique profession, but these measures are the prevailing evaluation criteria found in higher education. In certain professions, however, these evaluation criteria are not sufficient for determining a student’s fitness or readiness for the profession. Professions in which members are responsible for the health and welfare of the public demand that students be screened on additional criteria. Such criteria are not easily defined or measured as academic ability and skill level, but have more to do with a person’s character, judgment, decision-making ability, and overall social skills, than mere academic talent or technical skill (Schoener, 1999).

The current dilemma encountered by counselor educators and supervisors is that, beyond professional codes of ethics . . . there is not a set of standards for the professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal conduct expected of trainees that is commonly accepted within the clinical professions. (Homich, DeLorenzi, Bloom, & Godbee, 2013, p. 127) When students’ dispositional characteristics and fitness for the profession comes into question, a formal assessment or evaluation of such characteristics becomes important. As Schoener (1999) explained:

The field [of counseling] requires that the practitioner not only use tools but also be the tool. Part of counseling, psychotherapy, and teaching in our field depends on who we are as people. This includes our personal adjustment, both long-term and short-term. The
field and the services it offers are not simply mechanical events or the result of simple scientific rules or techniques. (p. 693-6944)

That being said, it stands to reason that personal characteristics should hold equal ground to academic ability and skill development as evaluative tools in determining a student’s fitness or readiness for the counseling profession (Forrest, Elman, & Vacha-Hasse, 1999; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

**Problem Statement**

The need for diligent gatekeeping practices within counselor education programs is well documented in professional literature (Bradley & Post, 1991; Forrest et al., 1999; Homich et al., 2013; Kress & Protivnak, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Professional standards and codes of ethics further support the necessity of gatekeeping in the field of counseling and counselor education. Much has been written regarding the assessment of student readiness or appropriateness for the counseling profession. Counseling literature (Donati & Watts, 2005; Duba, Paez, & Kindsvatter, 2010; Homrich et al., 2014; Irving & Williams, 1999; Lumabue & Duffey, 1999) has examined academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal characteristics essential to success in master’s level counseling programs and the field of counseling in general. Early studies (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Kutz, 1986; Lamb, Presser, Pfost, Baum, Jackson, & Jarvis, 1987) have examined the difficulty in assessing non-academic characteristics of counselors-in-training, whereas later research (Hanna & Smith, 1997; Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002; Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005; Trolley, 2008; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004) sought to suggest methods of more clearly assessing and objectively defining these aspects of student fitness for the counseling profession. Later, models of gatekeeping
(Daigle & Christensen, 2010; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Kress & Protivnak, 2009) were developed that examined the stages of gatekeeping, recognizing that the duties of gatekeeping varied depending on the point in time within a counseling program a counselor-in-training was being assessed. And other studies on gatekeeping (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Daigle, 2005; Frame et al., 1995; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Handlesman, 2010; Hanna and Smith, 1997; Kerl & Eichler, 2005; Wissel, 2011) reflect upon counselor educators’ perceptions, phenomenological experiences, and the emotional complexities of gatekeeping when faced with the responsibility of terminating a student from a counseling program for non-academic reasons. More recently, Frick and Glosoff (2014) conducted focus groups that examined doctoral students’ efficacy in their roles and responsibilities as supervisors to masters level counselors-in-training. Their study found that counseling doctoral student supervisors expressed “feelings of uncertainty” (p. 40) regarding their responsibilities toward student remediation and gatekeeping. Participants desired additional preparation in student assessment, remediation, and gatekeeping to feel more competent in this aspect of their counselor education and supervision training.

**Purpose**

The aforementioned studies clearly indicate the importance of gatekeeping in the counseling profession. Collectively, they also demonstrate that gatekeeping can be difficult, at times ambiguous, emotionally draining, and that counselor educators sometimes feel unprepared for its challenges. Although much has been written about gatekeeping, an extensive examination of the literature did not reveal any studies on how and where counselor educators are learning to be gatekeepers. Therefore, this study sought to ascertain what counselor educators identify as meaningful learning experiences and critical incidents that facilitated their sense of efficacy and
preparedness as gatekeepers, to examine how counselor educators acquire and develop the
competence to become proficient gatekeepers to the counseling profession.

The purpose of this study was to examine the developmental learning process of
becoming a gatekeeper in the counseling profession, specifically focusing on counselor
educators’ reflections on their education, training, and professional experiences leading toward
perceived gatekeeping competence.

Research Questions

1. How do counselor educators describe what it means to be a gatekeeper in the
counseling profession?
2. What educational experiences or critical incidents do counselor educators identify as
key learning (turning points) in their preparation to be gatekeepers?
3. How do counselor educators define/describe gatekeeping competency?
4. What recommendations do counselor educators suggest to maintain or improve
gatekeeping competence in counselor education?

Significance of the Study

Understanding how gatekeeping skills are acquired and developed can provide relevant
information to doctoral counselor education and supervision training programs, as they seek to
prepare their graduates to be effective gatekeepers. Additionally, examining early professional
experiences in gatekeeping could also provide valuable information to counseling faculty as they
seek to support junior faculty in their role as gatekeepers. Gaining insight into what types of
experiences were meaningful, informative, and helpful in the development of gatekeeping
knowledge and skills, while also seeking to explore what was missing, confusing, or unhelpful in training on gatekeeping, may provide helpful information to counselor education departments when refining educational and training protocol to best meet the needs of students and/or faculty in gatekeeping.

**Rationale**

**Why Now?**

In the current political climate, with recent religious freedom bills being proposed and, in some cases, passed into law, clear expectations regarding the intersection between personal values, religious beliefs, and ethical practice are timely and necessary. In April 2016, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed House Bill 1840/Senate Bill 1556 into law, legislation that supports “religious freedom” as rationale to permit “counselors to deny services and refer clients based on the provider’s strongly held beliefs” (capitol.tn.gov., HB1840). However, this law was in opposition to the American Counseling Association’s *Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014), which mandated that “the primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients, (American Counseling Association, 2014, Standard A.1.a) and that:

> counselors be aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Counselors respect the diversity of clients, trainees, and research participants and seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counselor’s values are inconsistent with the client’s goals or are discriminatory in nature. (ACA, 2014, Standard A.4.b)
American Counseling Association CEO, Richard Yep, argued that this law has the potential to deny services to those “most in need” and he addressed the discriminatory slippery slope, explaining that:

through this law, a counselor who is offended by a client’s hijab could turn away the client; a counselor who doesn’t agree with a client’s feminist stance could turn away the client; a counselor who doesn’t agree with a client’s sexual identity could turn away the client. (ACA website: https://www.counseling.org/news/updates/2016/04/30/message-from-aca-ceo-richard-yep-regarding-tennessee-hb-1840)

Additionally, the American Counseling Association issued a formal statement on their website in response to some counselors’ uncertainty regarding whether or not the ACA has the authority to determine to whom counselors can choose to provide or deny counseling, explaining:

The ACA Code of Ethics supersedes the new Tennessee law. If a complaint is brought against a counselor who is a member of ACA, then we have an obligation to investigate the charge. If an individual is found to be in violation of the ACA Code of Ethics, the counselor could be asked to take remedial coursework or other types of corrective action. However, for the most serious of violations, the ultimate penalty would be expulsion from the American Counseling Association. (ACA Website, http://www.counseling.org/my-voice/myths-vs-facts)

Adhering to ACA ethical standards, counseling faculty have made decisions to dismiss students from their programs when students cite religious beliefs as rationale for their refusal to counsel particular clients. Courts have supported these gatekeeping decisions and thus far have ruled in favor of counseling programs (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2011; Ward v. Polite, 2012; Ward v. Wilbanks, 2009). For example, in 2009, while in her practicum, counseling student Julea Ward was dismissed from the counseling program at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) for refusing to counsel a gay client; she suggested he should be referred to another clinician because her religious beliefs would prevent her from working with him regarding homosexual relationship issues. The EMU counseling faculty provided Ward with three options to address this concern:
complete a remediation plan to help her learn to work with clients who hold values that are different from hers, seek a formal review, or withdraw from the program (Burkholder, Hall, & Burkholder, 2014). Ward chose the formal review and reiterated that she would be unable to counsel a gay client “concerning homosexual relationships . . . or non-marital sex . . . because as a Christian she was morally obligated to express the biblical viewpoint regarding proper sexual relationships” (p. 283). The counseling program dismissed Ms. Ward and she sued EMU, claiming “EMU discriminated against her based on her religion and violated her constitutional rights to free speech, free expression, equal protection, and due process” (p. 283). The District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan ruled in favor or EMU, which Ward appealed. After years of litigation, EMU settled the case by granting Ward $75,000. EMU made the decision that it was “in the best interest of its student and the taxpayers of the state of Michigan to resolve the litigation rather than continue to spend money on a costly trial” (Rudrow, 2013).

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) nondiscrimination section clearly states that “counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination” based on a number of factors including race, gender, disability, and relevant here, “sexual orientation [or] marital/partnership status” (American Counseling Association, 2014, C.5). This nondiscrimination section of the ACA Code of Ethics restricts constitutionally protected free speech and conduct, and because of this regulation, the ACA became involved in the case and wrote an official position paper on Ward v. Wilibanks in which they concluded that professional counselors may not deny counseling services to a homosexual client (or any other class of clients) on the basis of the counselor’s values. Referrals are to be made on the basis of skill-based competency, not values (ACA, Amicus Brief, 2011). In 2010, a U.S. District Court granted judgment in favor of EMU.
This ruling, and others like it (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2011; Ward v. Polite, 2012), have not been met without scrutiny and ambiguity among counselor educators (Burkholder et al., 2014; Sells & Hagedorn, 2016; Smith & Atieno Okech, 2016). Burkholder et al. (2014) found many counselor educators expressed support for EMU’s gatekeeping decision to dismiss Ward, yet a minority of counselor educators expressed disapproval, believing EMU faculty missed an opportunity to attend to Ward’s professional growth and development and failed to fulfill their obligation as counselor educators. Some stated EMU demonstrated an “inability to work with students who hold sincere spiritual beliefs,” engaged in “religious discrimination,” and “showed gross negligence in how they addressed spiritual issues in counselor development” (p. 274-275). In fact, those in support of Ward recognized her “desire for authenticity/genuineness to preserve her religious freedom and client rights” (p. 275). One respondent elaborated on this perspective, explaining:

We all have biases . . . In some cases we can seek supervision and training to examine those biases and determine if we can work around them successfully. But when such a deeply held conviction is unlikely to change, isn’t it better to know and admit to that and refer the client out rather than risk providing treatment that may negatively affect the client?” (p. 277).

The counselor educators supporting Ward believed that Ward’s level of self-awareness was to be commended rather than punished and that counseling skills and values are interconnected and inform clinical performance (Burkholder et al., 2014).

Consistent with the differing views expressed by counselor educators on this case, Burkholder et al. (2014) also found counseling students reported receiving inconsistent messages from program faculty about referring clients based on client/counselor value conflicts. Some students “had been instructed that values-based referrals are unethical, other students had been instructed that values-based referrals are ethical, and yet other students had been hearing
different faculty in their programs espousing both positions” (p. 269). This ambiguity creates confusion for students and faculty alike, and indeed demonstrates the importance of meaningful dialogue around these controversial topics.

In light of these court rulings and controversial laws, now, arguably more than ever, the need for diligent gatekeeping of the counseling profession becomes increasingly apparent. By thoroughly educating counselors-in-training regarding the counseling profession’s ethical standards, encouraging meaningful examination of personal values, promoting non-discriminatory practices, engaging in activities to encourage counselor-in-training growth and development, and intervening when problems occur, counselor educators can safeguard clients and the integrity of the counseling profession. Knowing how to approach, work with, remediate, or potentially dismiss, a student with firmly held or discriminatory beliefs or values is an important component of gatekeeping; and now, with the potential conflict presented by these religious freedom laws, the need for clear gatekeeping guidelines is increasingly relevant. As counselor educators embark on this important aspect of preparing future professionals, they would benefit from sound training and support in the development of gatekeeping competencies. Examining how gatekeeping counseling competencies are developed is timely and relevant given our current political and legal climate.

**Summary**

The topic of gatekeeping has become increasingly relevant in counselor education. Studies have examined counselor educators’ perceptions of the gatekeeping process, experiences of terminating students for nonacademic concerns, and gatekeeping policies and procedures. Additionally, despite ethical and professional mandates pertaining to gatekeeping, many barriers
exist in regard to gatekeeping within counselor education. The oftentimes ambiguous nature of assessing dispositional characteristics contributes to the challenges of gatekeeping. Additionally, given the current political climate and discriminatory laws, the need for competent gatekeeping practices has become increasingly apparent. Although literature speaks to gatekeeping’s importance in counselor education, no studies have yet examined how counselor educators develop their skills, knowledge, and practices of gatekeeping. This study attempts to explore the educational and professional experiences that lead to the development of gatekeeping competency in counselor education.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional counseling literature supports the need for diligent gatekeeping practices, policies, and procedures (Hanna & Smith, 1997; Homrich et al., 2014; Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002; Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005; Trolley, 2008; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004). Gaubatz and Vera (2002) as well as Russell, DuPree, Breggs, Peterson, and Anderson (2007) found that both faculty and students report being aware of serious impairments in students enrolled in counseling programs whereas Forrest et al. (1999) as well as Hupric and Rudd (2004) found similar reports of student impairment in psychology training programs. Barlow and Coleman (2003) reported comparable findings of student impairment in social work programs. Such impairments can interfere with students’ ability to work professionally and effectively with clients. Identified areas of concern range from inadequate clinical or technical skills (Bhat, 2005; Overholser & Fine, 1990) and poor judgment (Overholser & Fine, 1990; Trolley 2008) to troubling dispositional characteristics such as, biased attitudes and values (Bhat, 2005; Kerl et al., 2002), poor impulse control (Kerl et al., 2002), argumentativeness (Overholser & Fine, 1990), or the inability to receive or incorporate feedback (Kerl et al., 2002; Trolley, 2008). The counseling profession relies on counselor training programs to identify these issues and intervene with students when necessary to ensure that the areas of concern are resolved and remediated. Should remediation fail, the counseling profession trusts training programs to prevent impaired students entering the field (Bogo, Regehr, Power & Regehr, 2007; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Homrich et al., 2014).
Gaubatz and Vera (2002), however, identified significant barriers to gatekeeping and indicated that impaired students sometimes “slip through the cracks” of training programs without intervention (Forrest et al., 1999; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). This phenomenon, termed gateslipping, undermines the counseling profession’s ethical code and duty to protect clients from harm by allowing individuals with deficient skills, problematic dispositional characteristics, or biased beliefs and values to enter professional practice. Thus, to safeguard client welfare and the integrity of the counseling profession, it is in the interest of counselor educators to continually assess their gatekeeping skills and practices while striving toward gatekeeping competency.

With all the barriers, uncertainties, and gateslipping that continue to plague the counseling profession, the importance of adequate training in the area of gatekeeping is increasingly apparent. How counselor educators acquire their approach to gatekeeping (skills, knowledge, and overall philosophy of gatekeeping) and develop gatekeeping competency is the focus of this study.

**Defining Impairment**

Part of the difficulty evaluating counseling students’ characteristics that make them unfit for the profession comes from the unclearly defined meaning of *unfit*. Forrest et al. (1999) discussed this difficulty in detail in their review of the literature on trainee impairment within the mental health professions. They explained that the area of trainee competence is largely under-researched and there exists a “lack of clear, shared, and consistent language to represent the different types of problematic behaviors” (p. 629). They explain that beginning in the early 1980s, the term *impairment* began to be used to define a broad range of issues from “personal
distress, to decreased professional functioning, to ethical violations, to incompetence” (p. 629).

Lamb and colleagues (1987) attempted to clarify the term with a more comprehensive definition of impairment within a training context. They described trainee impairment as:

An interference in professional functioning that is reflected in one or more of the following ways: (a) an inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one’s repertoire of professional behavior; (b) an inability to acquire professional skills to reach an acceptable level of competency; (c) an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction and/or excessive emotional reaction that interfere with professional functioning. (p. 598)

In developing their definition, Lamb et al. (1987) examined the difference between competence and impairment to distinguish between less concerning training “problems” and more severe trainee “impairment.” They expanded their definition to address this difference, stating that a “problem” would become “impairment” when most of the following conditions are present:

(a) the intern does not acknowledge, understand, or address the problem when identified; (b) the problem is not merely a reflection of a skill deficit that can be rectified by academic or didactic training; (c) the quality of services delivered by the intern is consistently negatively affected; (d) the problem is not restricted to one area of professional functioning; (e) a disproportionate amount of attention by training personnel is required; and/or (f) the intern’s behavior does not change as a function of feedback, remediation efforts, and/or time. (p. 599)

Although these definitions of impairment seem comprehensive, they are still problematic in that they do little to differentiate between incompetent, impaired, diminished, or unethical behavior among counselor trainees. Kutz (1986) whose research examined impaired psychology trainees, advocated that the “term impairment [italics added] should be reserved for situations of diminished functioning, whereas incompetence [italics added] should indicate an absence of qualities or skills necessary for adequate professional performance” (p. 220). Additionally, Vasquez (1999) argued the importance of determining “whether impairment connotes diminished
functioning after having reached an adequate level of competence or whether competence has never been reached” (p. 688). Dissecting these definitions may seem an unnecessary, purely academic exercise, but recognizing such distinctions and understanding the origins or contributing factors for a trainee’s inadequate functioning are vital in determining appropriate responses or interventions.

According to the above definitions, unfit students can demonstrate varying degrees of incompetence, impairment, diminished functioning, or unethical behavior. What these definitions fail to illustrate, however, is exactly the specific, observable types of behaviors that constitute each of these particular levels of unfitness. Further examination of research on trainee impairment leads to a clearer picture of behaviors indicative of unfit counseling students (Homrich et al., 2014; Torres-Rivera, Wilbur, Madduz, Smaby, Phan, & Roberts-Wilbur, 2002; Trolley, 2008). Little has been written regarding specific, observable behaviors; however, some examples of such behaviors can be found in counselor trainee evaluation instruments and assessment tools (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Hanna & Smith, 1997; Kerl et al., 2002; Mearns & Allen, 1991). For example, in their survey exploring the incidence of impaired functioning among psychology graduate students, Mearns and Allen (1991) provided a list of 38 behaviors and personality characteristics they consider indicative of impaired professional functioning. Examples of behaviors dealing with ethical improprieties include “cheating on an exam, inappropriate sexual involvement, and breaches of confidentiality,” whereas examples of personal characteristics that might impair functioning include “poor social judgment, severe depression, histrionic behavior, and drug or alcohol abuse” (p. 193).

Hanna and Smith’s (1997) Scoring Rubric for Counselor-Trainee Clinical Work provides operationalized, observable behaviors ranging from the highest to lowest levels of clinical
competency. Their scoring rubric is broken into sections on Professional Responsibility, Theoretical and Procedural Knowledge, and Personal and Professional Development. This comprehensive assessment tool clearly illustrates and defines the varying degrees of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. For example, their description of inadequate professional behavior states that an unfit trainee:

Evidences little attention to such professional mannerisms as language, behavior, or dress 50% of the time; oral communication [is] often unclear; rarely indicates knowledge of current professional literature; is frequently late or unprepared for client session and/or does not provide client with full attention; rarely takes advantage of available professional activities. (p. 30)

Additionally, Hanna and Smith (1997) explained that an unfit trainee will have “significant difficulty exhibiting a knowledge of and/or use of the core conditions of counseling: empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and concreteness/intentionality” (p. 33). Unfit trainees will “demonstrate little or no grasp of the deep and complex issues of individual clients... [and] will not indicate ability to sense path of future progress... [and will have] poor timing of interventions in counseling process” (p. 35). In areas of self-evaluation and personal growth, Hanna and Smith described unfit behaviors, such as “little personal effort exerted to improve counseling skills” (p. 36), “does not seem to understand the relationships between own personality, utilization of specific techniques and theories, and career goals” (p. 37), “exhibits disrespectful behaviors toward colleagues (including administrators, supervisors, and peers) as to indicate that self and personal needs are more important than others; tends to become involved in conflictive situations which are not of clinical work [and] denies personal issues which may interfere with performance as a counselor” (p. 38). These concrete examples provide more clarity in the definition of what constitutes an unfit counseling student.
Conversely, Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995) described nine essential characteristics of fit counselors-in-training. They argued that in order to be fit for the counseling profession, students must be “open, flexible, cooperative, willing to use and accept feedback, aware of impact on others, able to deal with conflict, able to act appropriately, and able to express feelings effectively” (Section 5, para. 3). If these are characteristics of fit trainees, the opposite or absence of these characteristics can be used as evidence to indicate a student’s unfitness for the counseling profession.

Homric et al. (2014) suggested that expected conduct of graduate students in clinical training tend to fall into three categories:

(a) professional—behaviors that are expected of the profession and/or of individuals entering into an occupation with defined training and performance qualifications, (b) interpersonal—behaviors that occur in interactions or in relationship to others, and (c) intrapersonal—behaviors that are characteristic of internal functioning or qualities of the self.

Various characteristics within personal and professional realms can lead toward student classification as unfit, impaired, incompetent, or unethical. Additionally, each of these labels can overlap depending on how these personal characteristics are played out through a wide spectrum of problematic behaviors.

Problems Associated with Unfit Counseling Students

Students who present with the aforementioned unfit characteristics pose many problems to those who aim to educate them. Concerns over impairment are not limited to the short-term issue of suitability for graduate training, but extend to the longer-range concern of how the counselor’s mental health and professional performance will ultimately impact future clients. The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) requires counselors to
“monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired” (Section C.2.g.). Often, however, student trainees lack awareness of the types of impairment that have the potential for harm in a counseling relationship. Because some students may be unable to accurately self-assess, counselor educators must take on the responsibility of evaluating students’ fitness for working with clients; this responsibility can be described as that of a gatekeeper to the profession.

Assessing and Evaluating Unfit Characteristics

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) defines gatekeeping as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (p. 20) and speaks to counselor educators’ gatekeeping responsibility, stating that “a primary obligation of counseling supervisors is to monitor the services provided by supervisees. Counseling supervisors monitor client welfare and supervisee clinical performance and professional development” (Section F.1.a). Additionally, the Ethical Guidelines for Counselor Educators and Supervisors (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 1993) obligate counselor educators to monitor students’ personal and professional development:

Supervisors, through ongoing supervisee assessment and evaluation, should be aware of any personal or professional limitations of supervisees which are likely to impede future professional performance. Supervisors have the responsibility of recommending remedial assistance to the supervisee and of screening from the training program, applied counseling setting, or state licensure those supervisees who are unable to provide competent professional services. (Section 2.12)
Problems with Evaluation

Counselor educators not only have the responsibility of monitoring student performance but also the obligation of remediating or potentially dismissing students from their training programs; therefore, a substantial power differential exists within the student/teacher relationship. The potential for actual or perceived abuse of this power is one of the problems facing counselor educators in their role as gatekeepers to the profession (Homrich et al., 2014; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

Students who enter counselor education programs most likely come with the assumption that they will be evaluated on their academic and skill-based performances. Course syllabi further emphasize these evaluation criteria through specific course objectives and the inclusion of a grading rubric. Many students pursuing counseling degrees may not know, however, that their fitness for the profession will also be assessed through evaluation of personal characteristics and behaviors. Academic ability and skill level are fairly generalizable terms that can be objectively defined and measured; however, as discussed above, operationalizing dispositional characteristics leading to impairment, incompetence, or unfitness can be a more elusive process (Homrich et al., 2014). A lack of clearly articulated evaluation criteria of such characteristics can be problematic for counselor educators when faced with students who excel academically and demonstrate adequate skills but also exhibit unfit characteristics. When students do not know they are being evaluated on their personal characteristics and later learn that they have been identified as unfit by one of their educators, they may feel unfairly judged and as though their rights have been violated.

Added to this concern is the fact that identifying and labeling unfit characteristics
depends much upon the subjective appraisal of the evaluator (Homrich et al., 2014). Markert and Monke (1990) contend that recognizing students’ mental health issues is more difficult than identifying academic performance issues. They suggest that assessing mental health concerns is sometimes a matter of clinical perception rather than based in objective data. Furthermore, given the subjectivity of faculty members’ perception of students’ mental health, the identification of concerns can vary quite a bit among faculty members (Bradley & Post, 1991). In their survey of counselor educators’ experiences teaching practicum from The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP)-accredited programs, Bradley and Fiorini (1999) found “sixty-eight percent [of respondents] reported that factors such as intuition and ‘gut feelings’ also played a part in students’ evaluations” (Evaluating Student Performance Section, para. 2). Therefore, even with clear definitions and evaluation procedures in place, counselor educators still are left to rely on their own interpretation of these definitions and subjective appraisal of students.

The subjectivity inherent in this type of appraisal and interpretation can be problematic for counselor educators. If educators have to rely on “intuition” or “gut instincts” rather than specific behavioral examples to explain their concern over a particular student’s fitness for the profession, the educator’s integrity can be called into question. Bemak, Epp, and Keys (1999) explained that when a faculty member’s subjective evaluation differs from the student’s perception of a problem, the resulting “clash of these two perspectives often reverses the roles of accuser and accused by switching the focus from the student’s impairment to the faculty’s own professional judgment and evaluative skill” (p. 23). Given these concerns, it becomes increasingly important for counselor educators to establish clearly articulated evaluation
procedures that make students aware of the multiple ways in which their performance will be reviewed (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012; Homrich et al., 2014).

**Multicultural and diversity considerations.** Additionally, it is important to understand the impact multicultural complexities can have on the assessment of impairment (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Multiculturally competent and feminist counselor educators recognize that a person’s definition of fitness may be shaped by one’s worldview and life experiences. Consequently, multicultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, which can be problematic for counselor educators when serving in an evaluative role. For example, “some problematic trainee behavior may overlap with cultural experiences, such as hostility to members of other races, views about homosexuality as pathology, or other life experiences and values that may not be easily changeable” (Vasquez, 1999, p. 691). If counselor educators are not sensitive to multicultural differences or worldviews that may affect behavior, they may inaccurately assess a student to be unfit. Keeping multicultural complexities in mind when evaluating students will prevent counselor educators from being unintentionally racist, sexist, homophobic, or insensitive to cultural differences.

Indeed, Barlow and Coleman (2003) explained some faculty members have expressed reluctance to embrace gatekeeping policies or procedures for fear that these practices “might lead to unfair admissions criteria or dismissal of a student due to ‘difference’” (p. 155). However, it is equally important that the desire to not appear racist, sexist, homophobic, or insensitive does not inhibit counselor educators from labeling minority students as unfit when such students exhibit what the counselor educator clearly views to be impaired or incompetent behavior. As always,
counselor educators must balance the needs and development of their students with the needs of future clients and the general public.

Counselor educators must also consider level of ability or disability as a component of multicultural identity (Vasquez, 1999). Taking students’ ability/disability status into consideration is important when evaluating their fitness for the profession. However, sometimes differentiating between a disability and other characteristics of impairment can be difficult, which leads to an additional problem facing counselor educators in their role as gatekeepers. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) was enacted to protect the rights of people with disabilities and ensure that such people have equal access to educational and professional opportunities. The act prohibits employers from discriminating against “an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires” (ADA, Title I, Sec. 101[8]). Because counselor education programs serve as training for employment, it can be inferred that universities must also abide by these statutes. The act specifies that:

Considerations shall be given to the employer’s judgment [and consequently an educator’s judgment] as to what functions of a job are essential, and if an employer [or educator] has prepared a written description before advertising or interviewing applicants for the job [or training program], this description shall be considered evidence of the essential functions of the job. (ADA, Title I, Sec. 101[8])

Therefore, to be in compliance, as well as to protect employers and clients from potential harm inflicted by unfit trainees, counselor education programs must clearly define the “essential functions” of the counseling student role as well as provide evaluation criteria through which the ability to perform such functions will be assessed (Homrich et al., 2014). Additionally, “programs that dismiss trainees who happen to have disabilities must have well-reasoned,
professional reasons, and must not have discriminated against the student based on assumptions concerning a disability” (Vasquez, 1999, p. 690). Fear of discriminating against an individual with a disability is an additional problem counselor educators face in their gatekeeping role.

**Trends in evaluation policy and procedure.** Given the problems that can arise when student and faculty perceptions of a student’s performance differ, one might believe that all counselor education programs would have formalized evaluation procedures in place. In fact, the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) mandates counselor educators and counseling supervisors to:

> Clearly state to students, prior to and throughout the training program, the levels of competency expected, appraisal methods, and timing of evaluations for both didactic and clinical competencies. Counselor educators provide students with ongoing feedback regarding their performance throughout the training program. (Section F.9.a)

Similarly, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision’s *Ethical Guidelines* (1993) state that counselor educators and supervisors:

> Should incorporate the principles of informed consent and participation; clarity of requirements, expectations, roles and rules; and due process and appeal into the establishment of policies and procedures of their institutions, program, courses, and individual supervisory relationships. Mechanisms for due process appeal of individual supervisory actions should be established and made available to all supervisees. (Section 2.14)

Whereas organizations such as ACA, ACES, and CACREP provide ethical standards and a call for monitoring and dealing with counselor impairment, they do not offer specific guidelines for the remediation or dismissal of emotionally impaired, incompetent, or otherwise unfit students. Without clearly defined and standardized procedures and polices to address how to handle impaired students, counselor education programs are left to create their own gatekeeping models (Homrich et al., 2014; Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Gaubatz and Vera (2002) argued that for many institutions:
The difficulties of implementing formalized review strategies may outweigh their perceived benefits. Knowing whether formalized procedures actually improve the screening of deficient students would be helpful to the administrators of such programs as they assess the benefits. It would be useful, especially for faculty in programs that do not have formalized policies, to learn whether such strategies reduce the number of deficient students who slip through programs’ gates (i.e., graduate without remediation). (p. 296)

Although a number of formalized gatekeeping models have been presented (e.g., Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl et al., 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999), many mental health training programs have been slow to implement them. Forty-five percent of counselor education programs surveyed reported that they had no formal, written evaluation policies (Olkin & Gaughen, 1991). Additionally, of those programs that do conduct annual or more frequent evaluations of students, “many do not consistently report these results either verbally or in written form to their students” (Biaggio et al., 1983; Levy, 1983; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991, in Forrest et al., 1999, p. 639) “or place the evaluation in students’ files” (Biaggio et al., in Forrest et al., p. 639). These findings indicate that some graduate training programs are failing to meet accreditation and ethical standards. With department-wide nonadherence to ethical practices, individual counselor educators may have little support from the rest of their faculty when faced with a problematic or unfit student. Therefore, a lack of formalized evaluation procedures is an additional problem facing many counselor educators in their role as gatekeepers to the profession.

The impact of evaluation on students’ due process rights. A lack of formalized gatekeeping procedures can interfere with adherence to due process laws. Constitutional due process guarantees that no state may “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws”
Due process can be procedural or substantive. Procedural due process ensures that students are given information regarding the ways in which they will be evaluated, that they will receive adequate notice when they fail to meet evaluation requirements, and will have an opportunity for a hearing or formal defense. Substantive due process dictates that students are not evaluated in an arbitrary, capricious, or prejudicial way (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (1993) addresses the need for due process within its Ethical Guidelines:

Supervisors should not endorse a supervisee for certification, licensure, completion of an academic training program, or continued employment if the supervisor believes the supervisee is impaired in any way that would interfere with the performance of counseling duties. The presence of any such impairment should begin a process of feedback and remediation wherever possible so that the supervisee understands the nature of the impairment and has the opportunity to remedy the problem and continue with his/her professional development. (Section 2.13)

And:

Supervisors have the responsibility of recommending remedial assistance to the supervisee. These recommendations should be clearly and professionally explained in writing to the supervisees who are so evaluated. (Section 2.12)

CACREP Standards reinforce the importance of due process in gatekeeping and student assessment, requiring that:

The program faculty conducts a systematic developmental assessment of each student’s progress throughout the program, including consideration of the student’s academic performance, professional development, and personal development. Consistent with established institutional due process policy and the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) code of ethics and other relevant codes of ethics and standards of practice, if evaluations indicate that a student is not appropriate for the program, faculty members help facilitate the student’s transition out of the program and, if possible, into a more appropriate area of study (CACREP 2009 Standards, Section P).

These guidelines, while speaking to the obvious necessity of due process, fail to describe specific processes or procedures by which feedback and remediation can occur. Bodner (2012) suggested
“faculty and supervisors may receive little guidance on how to implement such procedures in a highly ethical manner and/or how to approach complex and challenging gatekeeping dilemmas, especially at different stages of education and training” (p. 60). Without guidelines for formalized, institutional gatekeeping procedures, counselor educators may fail to meet necessary requirements to ensure that students’ due process rights are maintained. Counselor educators may, therefore, find themselves ill equipped to perform the duties of the gatekeeper (Homrich et al., 2014; Bodner, 2012).

**Remediating or Dismissing Unfit Students**

When unfit students are identified through either formal or informal evaluation procedures, counselor educators face the dilemma of *how to* sensitively remediate or dismiss these students. Several recommendations for remediation and dismissal procedures have been articulated in the literature on trainee impairment (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Bradley & Fiorini, 1999; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991; Schoener, 1999). Common remediation strategies include receiving an incomplete or in-progress grade, repeating coursework or practicum, taking additional coursework, receiving increased supervision or mentoring, participating in personal counseling, or a taking a leave of absence (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Little research has been conducted to test the effectiveness of such interventions and it is not known if some methods of remediation are more effective with certain types of impairment than others (Homrich et al., 2014). Additionally, just because a student participates in remediation efforts, there is no guarantee that they will ultimately be found fit for the counseling profession. Therefore, selecting and/or recommending remediation procedures is yet another problem facing counselor educators in their role as gatekeepers to the profession.
Barriers and Resistance to Gatekeeping

A comparison of data from studies on student impairment, finds that as many as 93% to 95% of mental health faculty and students have reported observing impaired students in their programs, however, faculty members in only 66% to 76% of programs have reported that their programs actually remediated or dismissed such students (Mearns & Allen, 1991; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991). Wheeler’s (1996) survey of British counselor educators found that 44% of respondents reported that they had passed students they “would consider unsuitable to be counselors” (p. 179, in Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). These statistics lead one to question what prevents counselor educators from engaging in gatekeeping when problematic student behavior or impairment is observed.

Gaubatz and Vera (2002) conducted a survey to examine resistance to gatekeeping among counselor educators. They coined the term gateslipping to describe the process by which counselor educators fail in their roles as gatekeepers to the profession by letting unfit students “slip through the cracks” and graduate from counseling programs unremediated. They offered some insight into counselor educators’ reluctance to gatekeeping, citing fear of lawsuits from vengeful students as one of the greatest barriers.

Legal Aspects

Counselor educators’ fear of being sued by unfit students is often unfounded, however, as courts have consistently ruled in favor of training programs dismissing students as long as due process is followed (Connelly v. University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, 1965; Gasper v. Bruton, 1975; Goss v. Lopez, 1975; Ward v. Wilbanks, 2009). Greenhill v. Baily
(1975, in Lumadue & Duffey) ruled that “any [italics added] notification of a student’s academic deficiencies prior to termination satisfies due process conditions” (Section 3, para. 2). This case helped extend the definition of academic performance to include not only a student’s demonstrated knowledge and technical skills, but also, “interpersonal skills, attitudes, and professional character” (Knoff & Prout, 1985, p. 791-792). Lumadue and Duffey described the case of Harris v. Blake and the Board of Trustees of the University of Northern Colorado (1986), in which Harris, a psychology graduate student, was not allowed to register for practicum based on behaviors that his professor termed incompetent and unethical. Blake described Harris’ behaviors as an “[i]nability to verbalize his own or others’ perceptions, lack of attentive behavior, paucity of listening skills, no warmth, genuineness, respect, or empathy in his interactions with clients or fellow classmates” (p. 421, in Lumadue & Duffey, Section 4, para. 2). This case clearly shows that incompetent, unethical, and/or unfit personal characteristics or behaviors alone are admissible in court as evidence enough to support the dismissal of unfit students.

Whereas the aforementioned cases demonstrate that courts often rule in favor of counseling program faculty when lawsuits arise related to the dismissal of unfit students, the threat of a different type of lawsuit remains a very real and valid concern for counselor educators (Fame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl et al., 2002). Counselor educators and their universities may be vulnerable to lawsuits from clients or employers of unfit graduates. Both Kerl et al. (2002) and Fame and Stevens-Smith (1995) cited a 1994 lawsuit filed against Louisiana Tech University (LTU; Custer, 1994) in which the prosecuting attorney claimed the university “failed to adequately train the counselor. [The attorney argued that] a university has an obligation that a person who graduates from its program is competent in the area in which the degree is bestowed”
(Custer, 1994, p. 7, in Frame & Stevens-Smith, para. 7). This case shows that counselor educators can be held accountable for their students’ malpractice and may be liable for harm caused by unfit students who slip through the cracks and are allowed to graduate despite their impairments.

**Professional Status**

Even with evidence supporting the legal necessity of gatekeeping and ethical responsibility of counselor educators to protect the public from incompetent professionals, some counselor educators are still reluctant to dismiss unfit students from their counselor education programs. Gaubatz and Vera (2002) site a desire to avoid the cost, time demands, and documentation required to dismiss or remediate unfit students as an additional factor contributing to the occurrence of gateslipping among counselor educators. They also found that new, untenured counselor educators are much more likely to let students slip through the cracks than more experienced, tenured professors. They explain that a fear of poor teaching evaluations and the resulting loss of job security is particularly worrisome for non-tenured faculty and may discourage some counselor educators from wholeheartedly fulfilling their roles as gatekeepers.

Gaubatz and Vera (2002) also found that full-time faculty members are more likely to vigorously fulfill the demands of the gatekeeper role than part-time or adjunct faculty. This finding makes sense as adjunct and part-time faculty members may have more limited interaction with individual students than full-time faculty, and therefore may be more concerned about their ability to accurately evaluate individual students. Bradley and Post (1991) spoke to this concern, explaining that not only do adjunct faculty have limited interactions with students but that during class, students may “mask their problems by limiting their self-disclosure in class exercises or in
interactions with particular faculty members. This could create uncertainty about the nature and significance of the problem” (Conclusion Section, para. 5). When faculty members have limited opportunities to interact with students, they may lack strong evidence to support their concerns. Additionally, adjunct faculty may have limited opportunities to interact with full-time faculty, and may, therefore, find themselves unable to express their concerns or have meaningful discussions regarding particular students. Additionally, adjunct professors may have limited knowledge regarding departmental evaluation criteria and gatekeeping policies (Bradley & Post, 1991; Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Bodner, 2012). Left on their own, adjunct faculty may be more likely to err on the side of doing nothing, believing that problematic students are best left to be dealt with by the full-time faculty.

Limited Departmental Support

Gaubatz and Vera (2002) and Barlow and Coleman (2003) identify lack of support from one’s department as significant cause for resistance to gatekeeping. Lack of departmental support is problematic for full, part-time, and adjunct faculty alike. The perception that their department will not back their evaluation of problematic students leads some counselor educators not to pursue further action when they identify unfit or impaired students. Confounding resistance brought about by lack of support are institutional pressures not to screen deficient students (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Gaubatz and Vera (2002) found that the aforementioned lack of gatekeeping policies, concerns over lawsuits, and a high percentage of adjunct and part-time faculty all contribute to an overall departmental tendency to ignore the responsibilities inherent in the gatekeeper’s role.
Resistance to the Evaluator’s Role

In addition to the previously named reasons for resistance to gatekeeping, counselor educators may find the mere process of student evaluation problematic, feeling uncomfortable with the power inherent in the evaluator role (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Handlesman, 2010; Hanna & Smith, 1997). Hanna and Smith (1997) suggested that traditional means of evaluation can have a negative impact in a counseling supervisory relationship. They argue that the concept of evaluation is hierarchical and takes away from the collaborative, collegial environment fostered in counselor education programs. Students may be fearful of or intimidated by evaluation, and as a consequence, not use the opportunity to learn more about themselves. They may feel “judged” and have difficulty hearing negative feedback, particularly if it relates to their personhood, rather than strictly their academic performance. Hanna and Smith (1997) recommended changing to an assessment model as a means for supervisors and trainees to compare clinical performance to the criteria of professional standards. They believed an assessment model could foster learning and personal growth in both counselor educators and students. They quoted Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters (1992), explaining:

“Assess” comes from the French “assidere,” which means “to sit beside” . . . The fundamental role of assessment . . . is to provide authentic and meaningful feedback for improving student learning . . . Assessment is not an end in itself. It is a process that facilitates appropriate . . . decision making by providing information on two fundamental questions: How are we doing? and How can we do it better? (p. 7)

When counselor educators and students continually ask these questions throughout the educational process, learning and assessment become integrated, thus lessening the power differential inherent in evaluation.
An equally compelling reason that counselor educators may resist a gatekeeper role is that counselor educators are driven to facilitate change and growth in others (Handlesman, 2010; Hanna and Smith, 1997). Kerl et al. (2002) suggested unfit or impaired students provide a particular challenge to their teachers and because of the “helping” attitude innate in many counselor educators, these educators may invest a lot in trying to remediate deficient students rather than dismiss them from their programs; much time and energy can be spent with a single student who, potentially, may not ever meet the program’s required standards for degree completion. Gibbs and Macy (2000) noted “few program operations are viewed as more complex, troublesome, and emotionally charged than the gatekeeping component of the educational enterprise” (p. 3).

Although gentle guidance into the process of self-exploration may facilitate growth and development in a fit or competent student, impaired students may fail to benefit from such interventions.

What may distinguish impaired counselor trainees is their inability to insightfully understand and resolve their own issues so that these issues do not interfere with the therapeutic process . . . The irony is that impaired counseling students often avoid or refuse to submit to the very therapeutic process through which they wish to lead others. (Bemak et al., 1999, p. 21, 23)

Even with the best of intentions, counselor educators may be unable to reach or remediate impaired students; therefore, investing too much time and energy into a single student can be problematic for counselor educators, as they must also consider the needs of the other students in their program.
Providing a good educational experience for all students is a primary goal of counselor educators, so when a student presents with characteristics making them unfit for the profession, counselor educators must also consider the impact the unfit student may have on his or her peers. Mearns and Allen (1991) conducted research examining psychology graduate students’ experiences in dealing with impaired peers and compared student responses to faculty predictions of how students would handle and perceive such situations. They found as many as 95% of students reported being aware of some sort of serious impairment that hindered professional functioning and 49% indicated an awareness of unethical behavior in a peer. When students and faculty were asked to report how students would respond to impaired peers, faculty overestimated the number of students who would do nothing in response to peer impairments and improprieties and greatly underestimated the number of students who actually confronted their peers directly. Faculty also inaccurately predicted students’ emotional responses to peer impairments and improprieties. Faculty believed students would feel more worry, disloyalty to the perpetrator, sorrow for the person, ambivalence, and guilt, when in actuality, students felt mostly angry and conflicted (Mearns & Allen, 1991).

Faculty appear to believe that students’ main concern would be protecting their peers, yet student responses indicated that their feelings of ethical responsibility outweigh sentiments of loyalty to problematic peers. “Student respondents reported a high level of pessimism concerning their ability to make a difference” (Mearns & Allen, 1991, p. 199). These results indicate the impaired students have a much greater impact on their peers than faculty may realize. Because of the potential stress, anger, and confusion students may experience when they encounter...
impairment among their peers, it is essential that counselor educators not only provide clear
evaluation criteria, but that they follow through on their commitment to remediate or dismiss
unfit students from counselor training programs. Unfit students should not be allowed to remain
in counselor education programs at other students’ expense.

Addressing Areas of Concern in Gatekeeping

Standardized definitions of impairment may greatly ease the burden that unfit students
create for counselor educators (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Homrich et al., 2014; Lumadue &
formalized gatekeeping model can serve to provide a framework for gatekeepers to follow. In
developing a program specific model, Lumadue and Duffey recommend that counseling
departments seek to accomplish the following goals:

(1) To identify the qualities and behaviors expected of students; (2) to reach
faculty consensus on the expectations for student fitness and performance; (3) to
devise a rating form listing these qualities and behaviors; (4) to standardize
evaluation procedures within the department by using these forms; (5) to
communicate these expectations to all students in each class; and (6) to include
these expectations in the admissions packet issued to interested students. (SWT
Gatekeeping Model Section, para. 1).

These guidelines serve to protect students’ due process rights by providing ongoing and timely
feedback, abide by the statues of the ADA, ACA, ACES, and CACREP, and provide an
opportunity to openly examine and discuss the issue of student impairment with fellow faculty,
which helps foster a team approach for identifying and responding to impaired students. By
using a formalized gatekeeping model, counselor educators will have more guidance in dealing
with issues of student impairment, which will hopefully vastly decrease the occurrence of
gateslipping within counselor training programs (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Homrich et al.,
Mearns and Allen (1991) recommended including discussion of student impairment and impropriety in ethics curricula. When students and faculty share in discussions on these important topics, each can gain a better perspective on each other’s concerns, obligations, and responses to dealing with the difficulties associated with impaired students. When issues of impairment stem from multicultural differences or ignorance, counselor educators can utilize diversity training to help students identify attitudes or behaviors that may be harmful to classmates or future clients and allow for remediation of problematic worldviews or behaviors.

Summary

The issue of student impairment can be problematic for counselor educators. The problems are multifaceted and stem from poorly defined descriptions of unfit counselor trainees and a lack of formalized evaluation, remediation, and dismissal procedures. The failure to address or resolve these issues can cause counselor educators to be reluctant in their role as gatekeepers to the profession. A failure to fulfill the obligations of the gatekeeper role has a much greater impact than one might first imagine. Not only does this failure to serve as gatekeeper concern the individual counselor educator and impaired student, but it has the potential to impact all the faculty and students within a counseling department, future employers of the impaired graduate, and ultimately and most importantly, future clients. With all the potential harm that can come from a single impaired student, it is essential that counselor educators find ways to resolve the issues that interfere with their commitment to the role of gatekeepers to the counseling profession.

Professional literature supports that learning about gatekeeping, developing strong
gatekeeping competencies, and practicing gatekeeping from an ethical framework is an essential component of counselor education. Therefore, understanding how and where counselor educators learn about gatekeeping and develop gatekeeping competencies may provide valuable information for the field, particularly in regard to training doctoral students to be gatekeepers and supporting faculty in their gatekeeping role. This study attempts to address the literature gap regarding development of gatekeeping competencies in hopes of better understanding counselor educators’ perceptions of meaningful learning experiences in preparation for gatekeeping responsibilities.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study sought to examine the developmental learning process of becoming a gatekeeper to the counseling profession, specifically focusing on counselor educators’ reflections upon their educational and professional experiences (critical incidents) leading toward perceptions of gatekeeping competency. Given this purpose, I utilized an approach that enabled me to explore counselor educators’ perceptions of their experiences and meaning-making process related to development of gatekeeping knowledge, acquisition of skills, and sense of self-efficacy.

In order to study counselor educators’ perceptions of their gatekeeping training and sense of competency, I utilized phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology seeks to understand participants’ “experience through their stories” (Seidman, 2013, p. 5); the phenomenological method recognizes “the importance of language and stories in a person’s life as ways of knowing and understanding,” (Seidman, p. 4). This reflective process of sharing stories and meaning-making greatly interests me as a researcher. I find learning from others’ experiences, and seeing the world “through their eyes,” helps broaden my understanding of ideas. I believe this type of perspective-seeking provides a wider lens in which to investigate phenomena than a more limited, researcher-focused way of knowing. I approached my interviews with what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) referred to as “anticipatory schema”—meaning, I had some explicit, formal ideas in mind that inform my agenda and interview questions—but I sought to keep these presumptions in check; my preconceived ideas “stated as (or meant to be) propositions to be
proved or disproved” (Lightfoot, p. 186). I approached this study as an emergent, discovery-based process, seeking to uncover the lived experiences unique to each of my participants.

**Pilot Study**

With the phenomenological framework in mind, in Spring of 2017, I designed a pilot study to develop my interviewing skills, test my interview questions and research design, and refine my data analysis skills. I hoped to utilize this preliminary, small-scale study to inform and enhance my dissertation process and to determine the value of a full-fledged study. This pilot study (a) investigated participants’ phenomenological experiences and perspectives regarding their roles as gatekeepers to the counseling profession, (b) provided an opportunity to use phenomenological inquiry, and (c) produced rich, meaningful themes that indicated value in pursuing further investigation.

**Pilot Study Participants**

For my pilot study, I interviewed three counselor educators who were current faculty within, or recently retired from, the Counseling Program in which I currently work. I sought these participants for ease of access, but primarily for their many years of experience working in the field of counselor education, which I believed would contribute to rich and robust data. This small group of participants was not particularly diverse: they all shared backgrounds working as school counselors prior to entering the field of counselor education, all identified as White or Caucasian, cis-gender, and heterosexual; however, there was some diversity in gender, as two identified as female and one as male.
Pilot Study Interviewing and Data Gathering Process

To gather information from my pilot study participants, I used a semi-structured interview format and followed Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological interview approach. Although Seidman recommended adhering to a three-interview structure (p. 20), I abbreviated this approach to two 60-90 minute interviews with each participant. In one set of interviews, my participant and I met three days apart. For the other two sets of interviews, my participants and I meet one week apart. This format followed Siedman’s recommendation that interviews be scheduled between three days to one week apart (p. 24). The pilot interviews took place face-to-face, in faculty offices at the university where my participants work as counselor educators, where distractions were minimized. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

In addition to interviews, I wrote reflective memos, which provided insight into my interviewing style and helped me develop stronger skills with each subsequent interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended memoing as a technique to help move from “empirical data to a conceptual level, refining, and expanding…showing relationships, and building towards a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions” (p. 158-159). Through the reflective memoing and transcription processes, I was able to refine my interview guides, hone my skills, gain awareness into my biases and leading questions, begin to conceptualize my data, and in general become a stronger researcher. The process of reflective memoing brought to my awareness when I was making assumptions about my participants’ responses; it was through my memoing that I realized my preexisting relationships with my participants were preventing me from “digging deeper” into the information they shared, as I assumed I “knew” what they were talking about based on our shared work experiences. This ah-ha insight regarding my tendency
to assume encouraged me to be more mindful to minimize this behavior for future interviews. Given the benefits of reflective memoing on my development as a researcher during the pilot study, I continued this practice while conducting my dissertation interviews to further enhance the learning and research process.

I also collected artifacts from each participant that provided further insight into the participants’ experiences with gatekeeping. At the end of the first interview, I asked the participants if they would be willing to bring an artifact to our second interview that in some way embodied their understanding of their role as a gatekeeper in the counseling profession. I encouraged participants to select artifacts that they felt were personally or professionally meaningful in their development as gatekeepers, but otherwise set no parameters on the nature of the artifact. Each participant shared a unique artifact: one shared a photo of a former student; one shared a student assessment form utilized by the counseling program to assess students’ performance in their program; and the other participant shared an example of feedback on student assignments. During the second interview I asked my participants to describe the artifact and share about its significance in my participants’ professional development as gatekeepers to the counseling profession. The artifacts were an important part of the meaning-making process so, I decided to maintain gathering of artifacts for the dissertation interviews.

**Pilot Study Data Analysis Process**

For my pilot study, I utilized an open-coding method of analysis, seeking to see what emerged, rather than approaching the material “with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory . . . [I] wish[ed] to match to the data” (Siedman, p. 119). In my initial data analysis, I read through each transcript and created many codes in order to begin organizing the information
shared by participants. After identifying the codes, I conducted second cycle of analysis, in which I utilized an exploratory, holistic approach, employing a “lumping” strategy to chunk related codes together in an attempt to discover larger categories or themes.

Whereas discovering these themes within my data was exciting, I found the process daunting, at times completely overwhelming, and I frequently lacked confidence in my ability to make sense of my data in a meaningful way. I was reassured as I thought of Lareau’s (1989) description of the data analysis process, in which she confessed, “I found it exhausting, as well as exhilarating, to be constantly trying to figure out what to do next” (p. 189). Additionally, I sought comfort in Siedman’s (2013) explanation that it is normal to “wonder if you are making it all up, . . . feel considerable doubt about what you are doing, . . . [and] become worried you are falling into the trap of self-delusion” (p. 120). Equally reassuring was Moysten’s (1985) confidence in the data analysis process, suggesting, “what is required in responding to interview text is no different from responding to other texts—a close reading plus personal judgment” (Siedman, p. 120). Recognizing that uncertainty and doubt are part of the process, as well as trusting my judgment to make informed decisions, helped me develop more confidence in my data analysis skills.

I found the open coding, exploratory approach to data analysis very meaningful and exciting. Based on my experiences during the pilot study, I looked forward to continuing to learn about my participants’ phenomenological experiences by using this data analysis approach for my dissertation interview transcripts, artifacts, and reflective memos.
Research Design

Research Questions

1. How do counselor educators describe what it means to be a gatekeeper to the counseling profession?
2. What educational experiences or critical incidents do counselor educators identify as key learning (turning points) in their preparation to be gatekeepers?
3. How do counselor educators define/describe gatekeeping competency?
4. What recommendations do counselor educators suggest to maintain or improve gatekeeping competence in counselor education?

Site/Context

To examine counselor educators’ phenomenological experiences of gatekeeping, it was important to find participants who clearly align their professional identity with counselor education rather than a related mental health or educational field. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016), which is the national accrediting organization for Counseling and Counselor Education, defines counselor education as a distinct academic discipline comprised of “counseling, human development, supervision, and clinical practice. The primary focus of counselor education programs is the training and preparation of . . . counselors who are competent to practice, abide by the ethics of the counseling profession, and hold strong counseling identities” (p. 40).
The American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* (2014) further describes the role of the counselor educator in working with counselors-in-training, explaining that counselor educators aspire to foster meaningful and respectful professional relationships and to maintain appropriate boundaries with supervisees and students... They have theoretical and pedagogical foundations for their work; have knowledge of supervision models; and aim to be fair, accurate, and honest in their assessments of counselors, students, and supervisees. (Section F, p. 12)

In order to assure that participants maintained the professional identity of a counselor educator, all interviewees met the CACREP requirements for core counselor education program faculty (which was a necessary screening requirement for study participation).

Core counselor education program faculty have earned doctoral degrees in counselor education, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program, or have related doctoral degrees and have been employed as full-time faculty members in a counselor education program for a minimum of one full academic year before July 1, 2013. (CACREP, 2016, p. 8)

In addition to maintaining their professional identity as counselor educators, it was important that participants currently work as faculty in a Counseling Program (as opposed to teaching in a similar, related field such as Counseling Psychology, for example). Therefore, I sought interviewees who had taught full-time for a minimum of two years in a Master (or Master and Doctoral) level Counseling Program.

**Recruitment of Participants**

In order to explore the phenomenological experiences of a wider range of participants than I had for my pilot study, I sought greater diversity among participants in relation to their identifying characteristics, such as: number of years in the field of counselor education,
racial/ethnic background, age, gender, training institution, current place of employment, and so forth.

My initial approach to finding participants was to connect with fellow counselor educators at a state-level counselor education meeting. In March 2018, I attended a Coalition of [State] Counselor Organizations, in which counselor educators were the primary attendees. I briefly described my research project and passed around a sign-up sheet for anyone who would be interested in participating in my study. Immediately following the coalition summit, the State Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors convened their planning meeting. I participated in this meeting and again passed around the sign-up sheet and gained a few more interested participants. After reviewing the education and credentials of the potential participants via their universities’ websites, I found that six of them meet the requirements I have set for my study. I contacted the participants via email (Appendix A) to further clarify that they met the participant requirements and to determine if they were still interested in participating in the interview process. Three people responded to this initial exchange of emails; two became participants in this study and one did not respond to follow up emails.

Given the small number of participants I gathered through this initial avenue, I broadened my search by reaching out via email (Appendix B) to some counseling faculty with whom I had interacted or exchanged contact info at various State Counseling Association conferences or events. I initially wanted to conduct face-to-face interviews to enhance the interpersonal process of meaning-making that takes place during the interview process. Therefore, I sought participants teaching in counseling programs within my Midwestern geographical area, so I could meet with them in person. However, given some scheduling constraints of a few of my participants, I ended up conducting some of the interviews via online video conferencing (Zoom). After
conducting a few interviews this way, I noticed very little difference in the process or engagement between in-person or video conference interviews. Given the similar experiences of the different interview formats, I decided to broaden my search for participants to include counselor educators outside my geographical area. I contacted a counselor educator who I had met through a CACREP study, who works at a university in the Eastern United States. Fortunately, this person was agreeable to interviewing via Zoom, and became my seventh and final participant.

**Data Collection**

To gather data for this project, I utilized the same semi-structured interview format from my pilot study. From my reflection on the initial interviewing and data analysis process, I refined the interview guides previously developed from the pilot study to more effectively target information specifically related to the dissertation research questions (interview guides can be found in Appendix C). I followed Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological interviewing approach, and, because I found the two-interview format of my pilot study to provide sufficient meaningful data, I, again, followed this two-session format for my dissertation study. As recommended (Seidman, pg. 24), I scheduled the interviews between three days and one week apart. I conducted the interviews at a location of my participants’ choosing. For three of the participants, we met at their office for both interviews; for one participant we met online for the first interview and at her home for the follow up interview; for the remaining three participants, we conducted both interviews online. Regardless of interview setting (in-person or videoconference) all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.
As noted in the description of my pilot study, I included reflective memos as part of my research process. I continued this practice of reflective memoing to enhance my data gathering and further hone my interviewing and conceptualization skills, as well as to keep me mindful of my biases and assumptions. And, similar to my pilot study, I again asked participants to select artifacts that they found personally meaningful and in some way connected to their professional development as gatekeepers to the counseling profession.

Data Analysis

Based on the meaningful data analysis experience of my pilot study, I approached data analysis for my dissertation interviews in a similar format. Again, I utilized an exploratory, holistic, multi-stage process in which I began with open-coding of the transcribed interview documents and followed up with “lumping” and “chunking” of codes until larger categories began to emerge. I then sought out overarching themes and subthemes in order to make meaningful sense of the lived experiences of my participants.

Researcher Role

Spradley (1979) suggested “interviewing involves two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information” (p. 78). He explained that rapport “refers to a harmonious relationship between [researcher] and informant. It means that trust has been developed that allows for the free flow of information” (p. 78). Because I have preexisting relationships with the participant of my pilot study, I approached the initial, pilot stage of this project as an “insider.” In this insider role, my pilot research benefitted from established,
collegial rapport, which, in turn, helped move very quickly from the rapport-building phase of interviewing to the “eliciting information” phase.

Although there were many benefits to being an insider (e.g., ease of finding participants, preexisting rapport, limited barriers, no gatekeepers), there were some potential disadvantages as well. Because “pilot participants” belonged to a small pool of candidates, and especially because they were all colleagues and worked at the same university as I did at the time of the pilot study, I believe there may have been more similarities in their responses (and inferences about what they said given that I “knew” familiar talking references) than if I had sought participants from a wider geographic area who teach in different counseling programs. Additionally, my position as an “insider” and our similarities and shared work environment may have contributed to having the same assumptions or biases in relation to the area of study. Specifically, upon analysis of the transcripts, I realized that there were many “insider-terms or ideas” that were mentioned that I did not encourage my participants to elaborate on. On reflection, I am more aware that my preexisting knowledge of these topics may have led me to assume that I already “knew” what my participants meant, rather than seeking further meaning or clarification from their point of view. Recognizing that my longstanding, preexisting relationships and shared experiences likely contributed to a biased and assumptive interviewing process and interpretation of results, when moving forward with my dissertation interviews, I had a heightened awareness of my biases in order to reduce the likelihood of skewing the process and interpretation of what participants were saying. In order to minimize my assumptions and personal bias, I sought participants with whom I am an “outsider.” I did have some preexisting relationship with most of my participants due to engaging in shared professional experiences; however, I was not as close to any of these participants as I had been with my colleagues who participated in my pilot study.
Some of my personal biases and assumptions impacted how I approached the project, as well as what I chose to focus on when analyzing the data. Based on previous personal experience and views expressed in the professional counseling literature (Bodner, 2012; Gaubatz and Vera, 2002; Gibbs and Macy, 2000; Homich, 2014; Market and Monk, 1990; Mearns and Allen, 1991), I came to my research with the belief that gatekeeping is seen as a challenging responsibility within the field of counselor education, and that some people shy away from gatekeeping tasks within their work as counselor educators. I also believed that gatekeeping frequently relies on subjective assessments than can be easily biased by the training, teaching philosophy, professional experiences, race, gender, and/or belief system of the counselor educator. Whereas this belief is supported in the counseling literature (Barlow and Coleman, 2003; Bradley and Fiorini, 1999; Greenwald, 1975; Vasquez, 1999), it was essential that I recognized how this viewpoint could influence what I chose to attend to within my participants’ responses. When issues of “subjective decision-making” emerged in my pilot interviews, I delved more deeply and asked for more specifics of my participants than when other topics came up. My personal interest in this area most likely impacted my participants’ responses, as I sometimes asked leading questions or shared too much of my own experience when talking about this topic. This tendency is to focus more closely on areas of personal interest is an area in which I became much more mindful, and actively and intentionally minimized, in my dissertation interviews.

Additionally, when analyzing the data, I focused on areas that were of particular interest, or clearly stood out, to me, and I am sure I also, inadvertently, ignored other topics or themes that might have clear to another researcher. Weiss (1994) explained personal bias is inevitable in
data analysis, explaining that “how we code [our data] depends on our theoretical assumptions and the research interests we bring to the project” (p. 155). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that “coding is not just something you do to ‘get the data ready’ for analysis…but typically leads to a reshaping of your perspective; . . . at the same time, ongoing coding uncovers real or potential sources of bias” (p. 65). So, although I strove to minimize the impact of my biases throughout the research process, it is naïve to suggest that my personal experiences, beliefs, and preconceptions did not significantly impact the direction and findings of this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Guarding Against Researcher Bias**

An inherent disconnect between participants’ *true* perspectives and researchers’ *interpretation* of these perspectives exists within all types of qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) advised that while this fundamental problem is impossible to avoid, the impact of researcher bias can be minimized by approaching the research process mindfully, with the intent of capturing the participants’ perspectives as accurately, and with as little researcher influence, as possible. While gathering and analyzing my data, I was intentional in guarding against biases and in assuring I endeavored to accurately represent my participants’ point of view. One way I tried to stay true to my participants’ experiences is by aligning with Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) assertion that “phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying” (p. 25). Indeed, Bogdan and Biklen suggested that phenomenological inquiry starts with a “silence” and

this silence is an attempt to grasp what it is they are studying by bracketing an idea the informants take for granted as true. That is, researchers act as if they do not know what it
means and study it to find out what is actually taken for granted. What phenomenologists emphasize, then, is the subjective aspects of people’s behavior. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their informants (Geertz, 1973) in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives. (p. 25-26)

In order to minimize how my biases impacted my research, I aspired to accurately hear my participants’ stories and search for their “truth” without filtering their experiences through my personal lens of understanding. I encouraged my participants to describe their perspectives in detail to assure I am hearing their definitions rather than making assumptions regarding the meaning of their experiences.

In order to recognize and acknowledge the ways in which my assumptions, values, and beliefs might unintentionally bias my interpretations of my participants’ stories, I was intentional and purposeful in self-introspection and reflective memoing. To assist me in the process of identifying blind spots in my personal biases or assumptions, I asked for guidance from my dissertation committee members, who do not share my lived experiences and biases, and therefore, were better positioned to identify the beliefs and assumptions that are hidden from my awareness that may have otherwise “snuck into” my interpretation of my participants’ perspectives.

**Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

Unlike quantitative studies, which rely on experimental, objective measures and concepts of validity and reliability, qualitative research substitutes concepts of data trustworthiness to ensure rigor and robustness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Krefting (1991) explained “because the nature and purpose of the quantitative and qualitative traditions are different, it is erroneous to apply the same criteria of worthiness and merit” (p. 214). Indeed, Agar (1986)
suggested that a different language altogether is necessary to better describe the unique approaches to gathering, interpreting, and understanding the qualitative process and research findings. Additionally, Sandelowski (1986) highlighted that not only are the quantitative and qualitative disciplines dissimilar, but individual methods within the qualitative framework can be quite diverse as well. Therefore, Krefting asserted “the issues of the inappropriateness of quantitative criteria in the assessment of qualitative research and the plurality of qualitative research are important to the understanding of any model of trustworthiness of qualitative research” (p. 215).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the level of trustworthiness of a research study is important to determining its worth. They identified four components of trustworthiness within qualitative research that parallel the criteria used to establish rigor within quantitative studies: credibility (vs. internal validity)—which constitutes confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings, transferability (vs. external validity or generalizability)—which demonstrates the extent to which the findings have applicability in other contexts, dependability (vs. reliability)—which demonstrates that the findings are consistent and could be repeated, and confirmability (vs. objectivity)—which describes the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation, personal interest, etc. Even with this unique vocabulary, these concepts, though closely parallel to their quantitative counterparts, are not as straightforwardly addressed, objectively measured, or singularly defined (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand the rationale for each construct and to mindfully, intentionally attend to these criteria when constructing, implementing, and analyzing a qualitative research study. In order to assure
adherence toward these best practices in qualitative research, I looked more closely at these constructs to determine how to ensure trustworthiness within my dissertation project.

**Credibility.** Credibility can be ascertained by determining the extent to which a study measures or identifies what is actually intended (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) correlated *credibility* with *truth value*, which “asks whether or not the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or informants and the context in which the study was undertaken” (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). Shenton (2004) suggested that credibility or truth value can be achieved in a number of ways, such as: a) utilizing well established research methods that are appropriate for the phenomenon being studied, b) developing a familiarity with the culture or participants before data collection begins, c) utilizing random sampling of participants, d) *triangulation*, or utilization of different methods or diverse participants to gather data, e) tactics to ensure honesty in participants when contributing data, f) iterative questioning to explore discrepancies in participants’ stories, g) negative case analysis, h) frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and his or her superiors or project director(s), i) peer scrutiny of the research project, j) the researcher’s reflective commentary (field journal or personal memoing), k) background, qualifications, and experience of the investigator, l) member checks, m) thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and n) an examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project’s results are congruent with those of similar studies.

Though a long list of guidelines, I saw value in adhering to most, if not all, of Shenton’s recommendations. Taking Shenton’s first criterion (a) as an example, I followed Siedman’s (2013) phenomenological interviewing protocol, which is a well-established qualitative method appropriate to investigate my research questions. Criterion b, which suggests developing a
familiarity with the research participants before data collection begins has its drawbacks. As I mentioned in the analysis of my pilot study, my familiarity, or preexisting relationships with my participants led to some over-identification with their stories and experiences. Though familiarity can instill trust, rapport-building, and might ultimately enhance the interviewing process and depth of sharing of information, Krefting (1991) warns that

a major threat to the truth value of a qualitative study lies in the closeness of the relationship between the investigator and the informants that can develop during the prolonged contact required to establish credibility. The researcher can become so enmeshed with the informants that he or she may have difficulty separating his or her own experience from that of the informants. (p. 218)

Therefore, in order to minimize the threat of enmeshment, I intentionally minimized my level of familiarity with my participants.

Also, I was hesitant to completely adhere to Shenton’s (2004) recommendation (c) to utilize random sampling of participants. Given the specific nature of the phenomenon I wished to study, it was essential that I used purposive sampling in order to select participants who have experience with gatekeeping in counselor education. That being said, I did seek diversity within my group of participants in relation to their personal and professional characteristics. Whereas I saw some cause for concern with some of Shenton’s criteria, I wholeheartedly agreed with his recommendation for triangulation (d). Triangulation, which refers to the use of different research or data collection methods, is a sound way to assure trustworthiness. Krefting (1991) explained “the strategy of providing a number of different slices of data also minimizes distortion from a single data source or from a biased researcher, as may be the case in data based on a single application of one measure, a single client interview for example” (p. 219). To engage in triangulation, I utilized a multidimensional method of data collection: a two-tier interview protocol, collection and analysis of participants’ artifacts, and reflective memoing.
In addition to multiple data collection procedures, Shenton argued that triangulation also can encompass utilization of a variety of research sites. He explained:

Site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organizations so as to reduce the effect on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one institution. Where similar results emerge at different sites, findings have greater credibility in the eyes of the reader. (p. 66)

To that end, I selected my participants from a multitude of Counseling Programs, seeking variety in both the programs in which they were educated and in which they currently work.

In order to follow Shenton’s (2004) guidelines regarding participant honesty (e) and iterative questioning (f), I ensured that I followed appropriate procedures around informed consent and willingness to participate. Shenton suggested the each participant “should be given opportunities to refuse to participate . . . to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only those who are genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely;” additionally, “participants should be encouraged to be frank from the outset of each session, with the researcher . . . indicating that there are no right answers to the questions that will be asked” (p. 66). Additionally, when discrepancies or inconsistencies emerged within a participant’s story, I asked follow-up questions to gain clarity and provide an opportunity for shared understanding.

And, in order to encourage honesty, I assured each participant’s anonymity by using pseudonyms and eliminating any identifying information from their transcripts.

Given the collaborative nature of a dissertation, I fully capitalized on the support and input from my dissertation committee, which will allow me to follow Shenton’s (2004) protocol for frequent debriefing sessions (h) and peer scrutiny (i). “The fresh perspective that such individuals may be able to bring may allow them to challenge assumptions made by the researcher, whose closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with real
detachment” (p. 67). In addition to my committee members’ objective feedback, I sought to decrease my blindspots and biases through personal reflection throughout the research process. Shenton recommended engaging in “reflective commentary” (j) which I did through reflective memoing and journaling. Morrow (2005) acknowledged and even embraced the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research, but similar to Shenton, stressed the importance of researcher reflection, indicating “researcher reflexivity provides an opportunity for the researcher to understand how her or his own experiences and understandings of the world affect the research process” (p. 253). Krefting (1991) further suggested that:

research situations are dynamic, and the researcher is a participant, not merely an observer. The researcher, then, must analyze himself or herself in the context of the research . . . [and] must continuously reflect on his or her own characteristics and examine how they influence data gathering and analysis. (p. 218)

Self-awareness and personal reflection, therefore, were essential to my research process.

Other key factors that Shenton (2004) identified as important components of trustworthiness relate to researcher preparation, both in skill and experience of the researcher (k) and in familiarity with supporting literature and previous research findings (n). While certainly no expert in qualitative research, I have had a fair share of background experiences and coursework to prepare me to undertake this project. My doctoral courses in qualitative research methods and interview techniques, as well as my experience developing, implementing, and analyzing my pilot study have provided a solid foundation for my dissertation interviews. Additionally, through review of the counseling literature, I have gained valuable knowledge and insight into the topic of gatekeeping in counselor education, and felt confident in my ability to further investigate the phenomenon of this current study.
Transferability. Transferability roughly correlates to the quantitative concept of external validity or generalizability. Meaning, transferability seeks to ensure that the findings of a study have applicability in other contexts or similar situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Krefting (1991) contended there are two schools of thought regarding transferability in qualitative research. She explained:

if the assumption is made at the beginning of the study that the findings are descriptive in nature . . . data are of descriptive worth in and of themselves. If, however, the researcher means to make generalizations about the subject of the research . . . then strategies to enhance transferability are important. (p. 220)

Shenton (2004) supported these two perspectives, explaining “since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the finding and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations.” On the other hand, he explained, “although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and, as a result, the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected” (p. 69).

So, whereas transferability may not be entirely feasible within qualitative research, measures can be taken to enhance transferability within individual studies, when applicable. One suggestion to increase transferability is to use a “comparison of the characteristics of the informants to the demographic information available on the group being studied. As fieldwork continues, informants are selected to fill in the gaps in the profile” (Krefting, 1991, p. 220).

Additionally, using thick or sufficient data regarding the context, background, site, and participants will allow the reader to assess how transferable the findings are (Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004). Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Firestone (1993) indicated it is the researcher’s responsibility to provide sufficient contextual information, but they maintained,
“since the researcher knows only the ‘sending context,’ he or she cannot make transferability inferences,” but instead, “after perusing the description within the research report of the context in which the work was undertaken, readers must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other situations the results and conclusions presented” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

To increase the transferability of my dissertation findings, I diversified my sample of participants as much as possible. Whereas they had some similarities, such as meeting the CACREP requirements for Core Faculty, a minimum of two years full-time teaching experience within counselor education, I selected participants with different educational backgrounds, who work in different settings/counseling programs, and have various years experience working in the field of counselor education. I also made an effort to seek variety of participants of different ages, from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, with diverse gender identities, etc. When drawing conclusions regarding my data, I was be mindful that my findings are only minimally generalizable, and may be transferable only to similar people within similar settings. Even so, additional studies of similar projects employing the same research methods, but conducted with different participants in different settings could add value and increase transferability of the research findings.

**Dependability.** Dependability relates to the quantitative concept of reliability, meaning that the research findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Because qualitative inquiry deals with unique experiences of individuals or groups, seeking to replicate results is not practical for this type of research. Instead, focusing on replicating the process or procedures of the study becomes the aim when addressing dependability. Morrow (2005) explained:
the process through which the findings are derived should be explicit and repeatable as much as possible. This is accomplished through carefully tracking the emerging research design and through keeping an audit trail, that is, a detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos. (p. 252)

Krefting (1991) suggested that triangulation can also enhance dependability, to “ensure that the weaknesses of one method of data collection are compensated by the use of alternative data-gathering methods” (p. 221).

To address dependability within my study, I clearly documented all steps, stages, and procedures related to my research process. As recommended by Krefting (1991), I engaged the feedback of “colleagues and methodological experts to check the research plan and implementation [as] another means of ensuring dependability” (p. 221). I was intentional in describing my internal thought process as well as external procedures to provide a detailed record that could be replicated by another researcher. Additionally, I utilized triangulation within my data gathering by conducting interviews, analyzing artifacts, and engaging in reflective memoing.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the qualitative equivalent of the quantitative concept of objectivity. Basically, confirmability is defined as a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the research findings are shaped by the participants and are free of researcher bias, motivation, or personal interest (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Morrow (2005) contended that qualitative research never can be entirely objective because the researcher is intimately emerged in the data gathering and analyzing processes, and is, in fact, the very instrument of investigation. Therefore, rather than attempting to eliminate researcher bias or personal interest, confirmability relies on the
researcher’s explicit description and acknowledgment of his or her influence on the research process (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) indicated:

> to this end, beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted should be acknowledged within the research report, the reasons for favoring one approach when others could have been taken explained, and weakness in the techniques actually employed admitted. (p. 72)

Shenton explained the use of an “audit trail,” which describes the “step-by-step” course of the research decision-making and procedural process can be beneficial in ensuring both dependability and confirmability.

Another important element in achieving confirmability is the effort made to ensure participants’ stories are accurately captured and conveyed. Morrow (2005) indicated a number of ways to achieve this goal, such as “asking or clarification and delving ever more deeply into the meanings of participants [and] taking the stance of naïve inquirer” (p. 254). He indicated that the stance of naïve inquirer is “particularly important when the interview is an ‘insider’ with respect to the culture being investigated or when she or he is very familiar with the phenomenon of inquiry” (p. 254). As I noted in my pilot study, my “insider” perspective served as a barrier to seeking deeper description from my participants. Taking the stance of naïve inquirer could have served me well, as it would have allowed me to hold my assumptions at bay, in order to gain more specific meaning surrounding concepts introduced by my participants. As I moved forward with my dissertation interviews, I was very intentional in my efforts to maintain a stance of curiosity as I sought to understand and gather the unique perspective and experiences of my participants. I acknowledged my biases and assumptions as they emerged and I engaged in the process of reflexivity, or self-reflection, through memoing and reflective conversations regarding potential barriers to confirmability with my dissertation committee.
Adequacy of data. A final area to address when considering the trustworthiness of a qualitative research project is the adequacy of data. Not simply reflective of the number of participants, adequacy of data entails the collection of sufficient amounts of evidence. Patton (1990) recommended that “validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 185). Typically data are gathered to the point of saturation or redundancy, meaning no new information is emerging from new data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). “Ultimately, what is far more important than sample size are sampling procedures; quality, length, and depth of interview data; and variety of evidence” (Morrow, 2005, p. 255).

Morrow (2005) recommended utilizing purposeful sampling in which the participants are deliberately selected due to their experience with the phenomenon being studied, and therefore are able to provide information-rich data. As mentioned above, I found participants who have experience with gatekeeping in counselor education, and who consented to participate in this study due to the nature of the topic under investigation. Whereas this purposeful approach to sampling may have inevitably skewed the results, the importance of selecting participants with knowledge and experience in the area of gatekeeping far exceeded any risk toward transferability.

Informed Consent and Preventing Harm

In order to gain truthful, freely shared information from participants, it is essential that participants have adequate knowledge of the research process and understand their rights to consent or decline engaging in the study. To this end, I provided each participant with a brief
description of the purpose and procedures of the study, confidentiality measures, along with a consent form (Appendix D). I highlighted the potential risks and benefits to participation, as well as assured participants that they could withdraw their participation at any time. I protected my client’s confidentiality by utilizing pseudonyms and storing interview data on a password protected computer.

**Summary**

The phenomenological approach lends itself to this qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of counselor educators in their role as gatekeepers to the counseling profession. By allowing participants to share their stories through an in-depth, two-stage interviewing process, I was able to gain their unique perspectives regarding their experiences related to the topic of study. I utilized my prior knowledge, information gained from my literature review, and skills honed through my pilot study to inform the research process. And, I rigorously attended to the components of trustworthiness and informed consent to ensure I engaged in a thoughtful, robust, and ethical study.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The primary focus of this study was the investigation of phenomenological experiences of counselor educators as gatekeepers in the counseling profession. Specifically, this study sought to examine the developmental learning process of becoming a gatekeeper in the counseling profession, specifically focusing on counselor educators’ reflections on their education, training, and professional experiences leading toward perceived gatekeeping competence. Understanding how gatekeeping skills are acquired and developed can provide relevant information to doctoral counselor education and supervision training programs, as they seek to prepare their graduates to be effective gatekeepers. Additionally, examining early professional experiences in gatekeeping could also provide valuable information to counseling faculty as they seek to support junior faculty in their role as gatekeepers. Gaining insight into what types of experiences were meaningful, informative, and helpful in the development of gatekeeping knowledge and skills, while also seeking to explore what was missing, confusing, or unhelpful in training on gatekeeping, may provide useful information to counselor education departments when refining educational and training protocol to best meet the current needs of students and/or faculty in gatekeeping.

This chapter presents findings of data analyzed through the phenomenological method (Seidman, 2013). Phenomenology seeks to understand participants’ “experience through their stories” (Seidman, 2013, p. 5); using this method allowed participants to share their unique
perspectives and understandings of what it means to be a gatekeeper in shepherding their students’ educational and skill development. Based on reflection about data analysis experience from my pilot study, I have approached coding of the interviews in a similar format. I utilized an exploratory, holistic, multi-stage process in which I began with reflective memoing, then open-coding of transcribed interview documents, and followed up with “lumping” and “chunking” of codes until larger categories began to emerge. I sought out overarching themes and subthemes in order to make meaningful sense of the lived experiences of my participants.

The four research questions that guided this investigation were:

1. How do counselor educators describe what it means to be a gatekeeper in the counseling profession?
2. What educational experiences or critical incidents do counselor educators identify as key learning (turning points) in their preparation to be gatekeepers?
3. How do counselor educators define/describe gatekeeping competency?
4. What recommendations do counselor educators suggest to maintain or improve gatekeeping competence in counselor education?

Saturation was reached after 14 interviews with seven participants; each participant was interviewed twice to enhance meaning-making and increase depth of insight, as recommended by Seidman (2013). Participants had similarities, as they all met the selection criteria, yet were diverse in many ways. As a reminder, selection criteria were:

1. Participants are counselor educators who meet the CACREP criteria for Core Faculty, specifically:
Core counselor education program faculty have earned doctoral degrees in counselor education, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program, or have related doctoral degrees and have been employed as full-time faculty members in a counselor education program for a minimum of one full academic year before July 1, 2013. (CACREP, 2016, p. 8).

This criterion serves to ensure that participants are trained in and identify with the counseling field.

2. Participants have experience (a minimum of two-years) teaching full-time in a Master or Doctoral level counseling program.

What follows is a brief description of participants’ demographic information (Appendix F provides detailed participant demographic information). Note that names have been changed and replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Participants used their own words to describe racial/ethnic background rather than selecting from a list of options; therefore, there is some variation among participants’ description of their racial/ethnic identity. All participants hold doctoral degrees (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) from Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) doctoral programs, unless otherwise noted. All participants currently teach within Master’s Counseling (or Counseling and Development) Programs. The majority of participants earned their doctoral degrees from and teach within CACREP accredited programs; accreditation details, as well as university type (private/public, religious affiliation) are included within Appendix F.

(Joyce) identifies as a White woman, between the ages of 56-65 with 4.5 years full-time experience working as a counselor educator.

(Tonia) identifies as an African American woman, between the ages of 36-45 with 3.5 years full-time experience.
(Kristin) identifies as a Caucasian woman, between the ages of 36-45. She noted that she has 11 years experience working as a counselor educator, but has been employed full time for only 4 of those years. Her place of employment is not currently CACREP-accredited, but is in the process of seeking accreditation and has submitted their self-study as part of the accreditation process.

(Sarah) identifies as a White, non-Hispanic woman, between the ages of 36-45 with four years full-time experience.

(Rosa) identifies as a Filipino American, cisgender woman, between the ages of 46-55 with 5 years full-time experience.

(Carol) identified as a White woman, who provided her exact age, 69. She earned her Ed.D. in Adult Education. She has 14 years full-time experience as a counselor educator.

(David) identifies as an African American man between the ages of 36-45 with 12 years full-time experience.

Additional participants were not sought because consistent and rich data were obtained from the seven participants. Data reviewed and analyzed came from interview transcripts, participant demographic information forms, participant artifacts, and researcher memos, which were protected and stored within a password protected laptop computer. Steps of data analysis and findings are described in the following sections.

**Step One: Reflective Memoing**

In preparation for the current study, I had conducted a pilot study on this topic to hone and refine my interviewing and analysis skills, as well as to determine the viability of further research on the topic of gatekeeper preparation. While conducting my pilot study, I found
reflective memoing a valuable learning experience that helped me become more mindful of my interviewing skills, thought processes, and biases. I knew I wanted to continue the practice of memoing throughout the data collection and analysis phases of my dissertation, so I made time after each interview for focused reflective writing. In each memo, I recorded my thoughts, assumptions, and emerging connections, while also attending to the way my preconceived ideas or expectations might be impacting my interpretations. I tried to be especially mindful of potential areas of bias in order to unearth any blind spots that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. However, areas that exist outside my awareness, that may be more apparent to others. Therefore, I enlisted the support of my dissertation committee to bring to light additional biases or assumptions I had not recognized on my own.

An insight that emerged through the reflective memoing process relates to my tendency to attend to particular areas or topics more than others. For example, when participants shared particular aspects or experiences of gatekeeping that mirrored my own thoughts or reactions, I found myself making assumptions that, because I had experienced something similar, I tended to relate more to what they were sharing; therefore my interaction with them was perhaps filtered through my own lens. Conversely, when participant experiences were dissimilar to mine, I may have taken more of an “unknowing” role, and asked questions in such a way to encourage more elaboration, rather than agreement. Through the memoing, I caught this tendency fairly early in interview process (after just a couple interviews) and became much more intentional to minimize these types of interactions.

Another interesting insight I gained through reflective memoing was the way in which my participants described their growth as gatekeepers. In some of the early interviews, participants talked about how their perceptions of the gatekeeping process, their understanding of
their roles as gatekeepers, and the ways in which they engaged in gatekeeping changed over time. Hearing these stories encouraged me to think more deeply about gatekeeping as a developmental process, and after the third interview, I began intentionally framing my questions to inquire about participants’ descriptions of their growth as gatekeepers through a developmental lens. Initially, I was concerned that my interest in this developmental process could be a bias that might skew my findings, but I came to recognize that my emerging understanding of gatekeeping as a developmental process was indeed part of the iterative process of data analysis; I was beginning to formulate themes. I found myself getting increasingly excited as my interviews progressed, as I saw many additional commonalities among participants’ phenomenological experiences. I was eager to review my transcripts to delve into the next steps of the data analysis process.

**Step Two: Data Immersion**

Aside from reflective memoing, I did not otherwise immerse myself in the data while conducting my interviews; I waited until I had completed all interviews before delving into the information gathered. Initially, I inputted all data into a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program, in hopes this program would help me organize and categorize my material in a consistent and meaningful way. Although I had successfully utilized this program in my pilot study, I found the process of reviewing and trying to make sense of the amount of information gathered for my dissertation via computer software was cumbersome. Additionally, I felt disconnected from the data, as I tried to engage with it on my computer screen. Frequent headaches, eyestrain, and the general malaise generated from this process encouraged me to alter my approach. I decided I would print hardcopies of everything gathered from my participants.
Step Three: Coding

With hardcopies of participants’ exact words at my fingertips, I set out to begin coding the information. The first step in this process was to read every transcript and reflective memo line by line. While reading, I underlined passages and labeled ideas, concepts, or topics within the margins of each document with codes such as: early learning; academic training; vicarious learning; hands-on (experiential) learning; happenstance; intention; preparation; helpful; not helpful; team approach; isolation; on-the-job; always gatekeeping; transparency; expectations; ethics; standards; CACREP; responsibility; rules; advice; burden; needs; support; competency; skills; knowledge; characteristics; student development; student mental health; student-centered; dispositions; evaluation; assessment; barriers; regrets; costs; confusion; training; definitions; policies & procedures; guidebook; growth; adversity; advocacy; development; diversity; “how-to”; bias; assumption; self-awareness; uncertainty; failure; courage; honesty; “heart of the gatekeeper”; integrity; and so forth.
Step Four: Emergent Themes

After identifying multiple codes within each unique document, I created a separate spreadsheet in which I listed each code in a single column. I then reviewed the documents again and put a checkmark next to each code in my list to ascertain how many times each code was identified across the data. I eliminated codes that had only one or two checkmarks, deciding that those codes were not consistently represented, and therefore likely would not contribute to shared themes of common experience. Even after removing many codes, I still had a significant number of codes listed. From here, I lumped or “chunked” together similar codes into preliminary categories in an effort to identify emergent themes. Some of early themes included: Educational Experiences; Professional Experiences; Ethical Responsibility; Costs & Barriers; Developmental Process; Competence; Relationship; Multicultural Considerations; Gatekeeping Needs; Improving Gatekeeping; and Conceptualizing Gatekeeping.

Step Five: Participant Connections and Development of Final Themes

With tentative emergent themes in progress, I went back into the data to search for examples of participant language describing the phenomena identified in each theme. This step set the ground work for helping to identify sections of the transcripts which I would later include as participant quotations in my findings. Previously, I underlined portions of the transcripts that aligned with the codes in order to find examples to support the emergent themes within each transcript. During this process, I identified commonalities and connections among participants’ phenomenological experiences, which further solidified my confidence that I was on the right
track in my data analysis process. Upon closer review of the commonalities, and more intricate analysis of my participants’ stories, I was able to refine my themes and identify many subthemes.

I opened a new, blank document and outlined my themes and subthemes. From there, I went into the transcribed interview documents and copied participant’s language that described or contributed to a deeper understanding of the identified themes. Recurrence of themes across participants helped support trustworthiness and credibility. I sorted and pasted these examples within the outline until I populated each theme and subtheme with numerous, robust examples from my participants. Through this process, I identified some redundant themes, or subthemes that lacked meaningful examples, and therefore further refined my analysis by eliminating superfluous data. I consulted with my committee again at this stage to identify additional biases and to assure data were relevant and organized thematically. With input from my committee members, I eliminated one more theme and condensed the data one more time. With this process complete, I felt confident the final themes accurately identified and portrayed my participants’ phenomenological experiences with gatekeeping in counselor education.

Findings

In this section, thematic findings are presented with a brief explanation of each theme (or sub-theme). Narrative excerpts supporting and further describing participants’ phenomenological experiences related to each theme (or subtheme or sub-subtheme) are included. Seven themes (with subthemes) emerged during data analysis:

Theme 1: Professional Responsibility Toward Gatekeeping

Subtheme 1a: Ethical mandate

Subtheme 1b: Gatekeeping is a primary, constant role
Subtheme 1c: Gatekeeping is a weighty responsibility

Theme 2: Learning to be Gatekeepers
   Subtheme 2a: Educational experiences
   Subtheme 2b: On-the-job learning
   Subtheme 2c: “I’m on my own”

Theme 3: Gatekeeping as a Developmental Process
   Subtheme 3a: Growing as a gatekeeper
   Subtheme 3b: Considering student development
   Subtheme 3c: Recognizing student mental health issues
   Subtheme 3d: Committed to student success
   Subtheme 3e: Students’ due process rights

Theme 4: Gatekeeping Competence
   Subtheme 4a: Defining gatekeeping competence
   Subtheme 4b: Knowledge
   Subtheme 4c: Skills
   Subtheme 4d: Counselor-educator dispositions
   Subtheme 4e: Multicultural considerations

Theme 5: Barriers to Effective Gatekeeping
   Subtheme 5a: Lack of clearly defined guidelines
   Subtheme 5b: University administration
   Subtheme 5c: Missed opportunities for gatekeeping
   Subthemes 5d: Personal costs
Theme 6: Improving Gatekeeping

Subtheme 6a: Improving gatekeeping at the doctoral level
Subtheme 6b: Improving gatekeeping for new faculty
Subtheme 6c: Programmatic improvements for gatekeeping

Theme 7: Reconceptualizing the Gate

Subtheme 7a: Redefining gatekeeping
Subtheme 7b: Where is the gate?

The following sections describe themes and subthemes, along with additional sub-subthemes, and occasional sub-sub-subthemes in detail.

Defining Gatekeeping

Assuring researcher and participants are aligned in the way in which they are conceptualizing the topic of the study is an important first step in developing shared meaning. So, before delving into participants’ experiences with gatekeeping, it is important to explore how they describe or define gatekeeping. I have included each participant’s description of gatekeeping:

Joyce defined gatekeeping as: keeping an eye on everyone at all times, and to put up any red flags of things that would not be congruent with being an effective and ethical counselor . . . and then handling problems as they come and helping them grow if there’s a problem. So, gatekeeping is keeping an eye on students to be sure that they’re right for the field.

David defined gatekeepers as: people who are responsible for the individuals who are moving from being prepared or trained to actually functioning as professionals in the field. My understanding of gatekeeping is our role, or responsibility, or influence over those who are being trained and prepared for the field of counseling.

Kristin explained: Gatekeeping at the counselor education level is looking at not only does the student in the program meet the academic ability to continue in the program, but
do they have those professional dispositions, and do they demonstrate the professional maturity to engage in ethical and professional practice without concern of them violating somebody’s basic rights or violating the Professional Code of Ethics and licensure law. If there is a student who has concerning professional behavior, as well as academic performance, then putting some type of remediation plan in place so that student has an ability to become aware of their behavior. If they are not able to correct the behavior that is of concern, then it would be preventing them from being able to move forward in the program. Gatekeeping is keeping those people who are not demonstrating the ability to engage in professional conduct in an appropriate manner from entering the field.

Kristin further explained: “I view gatekeeping as a professional role of faculty in a counselor training program, to be the eyes and ears for the field of counseling, to be able to identify those students that are showing concerning behavior and bringing it to the attention of the team at the university.

Rosa suggested: A gate symbolizes—it’s a metaphor for entry into the field and protection of the field, right? So, when the gate is open, we are admitting folks into the field that belong in the field in accordance with the Code of Ethics and the national laws around that. When we close the gate, we are protecting the field. We’re also hopefully redirecting people to work that is better suited for them—ultimately, we have determined that counseling is not a good fit for them . . . I would say that gatekeeping is a well-rounded effort to shape students and to contribute to their identity development.

Carol explained that gatekeepers: keep things in check; [gatekeepers] keep things in some kind of an order . . . [gatekeeping is] like a door, how it opens and closes.

Sarah said: I understand gatekeeping as a way of protecting the field and making sure or ensuring quality of services to those that are seeking mental health services. Gatekeeping is a process that we participate in in order to ensure goodness of fit in the field as well as in each of the programs that one might be applying for.” Sarah further explained, “When I think of gate keeping, I think of being able to have a clear understanding of what boundaries look like, feel like in the moment. So not just boundaries like my own, but do other people have boundaries and can I pick up on that? And when they don’t, that’s when the red flag goes off.”

Tonia explained: When I think about being a gatekeeper, my understanding of it is that we are the people who determine a potential clinician’s readiness for the field and appropriateness for the field.

With these definitions clearly articulated, we can assume shared understanding of the term gatekeeping among participants, and can therefore, move into exploration of themes.
Themes

Theme 1: Professional Responsibility Toward Gatekeeping

All participants spoke of the professional responsibility toward gatekeeping within the field of counselor education. They identified gatekeeping as an ethical mandate and suggested that gatekeeping underlies all of their work as counselor educators; they are “constantly” gatekeeping and it can be a heavy responsibility. In order to fully understand the professional responsibility toward gatekeeping, the data have been organized into sub-themes.

Professional responsibility subtheme 1a: Ethical mandate. Many participants referred to the ACA Code of Ethics when describing their understanding of gatekeeping. They said they feel an ethical responsibility to protect the profession.

Kristin explained, “Gatekeeping, to me, is an ethical responsibility. It’s actually part of our ACA Code of Ethics.” In fact, for our second interview, Kristin brought in the ACA Code of Ethics as her artifact exemplifying her professional journey toward becoming a gatekeeper. She said, “I think what really helped in the journey towards understanding the role of gatekeeping for me was the Code of Ethics because it was a standard document that I was aware of that really laid out those aspirational values.” She elaborated, “If you look at the primary benefit for gatekeeping, I really look at it as the welfare of the client. And so when I kept thinking about that, I'm like that really does go back to the Code of Ethics as far as that outline of, ‘What are our values as a counselor?’”

Tonia further highlighted the importance of the role, explaining it’s a counselor educator’s ethical responsibility to:
Make sure we are protecting the profession and protecting any future clients that our students may have. It just doesn’t extend to what you do with your students; it extends beyond that because they are going to be interacting with people and touching people’s lives for a long time. So, it’s a long reach.

Joyce also talked about the interplay of ethics and gatekeeping:

In our field, ethics is such a strong component, and the person and the professional is one combined, holistic piece. So, this is not like an MBA Program where [students] have to get good grades and graduate. The gift of therapy is the person and the relationship, so [students] have to hit almost a 10-Standard of behavior.

These examples show the emphasis counselors educators place on ethical responsibility in their gatekeeping role. Given this ethical responsibility, many also spoke of the importance of gatekeeping in all aspects of their work.

**Professional responsibility subtheme 1b: Gatekeeping is a primary, constant role.**

Consistently, participants stressed the importance of the gatekeeping role within their duties as counselor educators. They indicated gatekeeping is fundamental in all facets of their work.

Tonia explained:

I think [gatekeeping] is probably one of the most important roles as a counselor educator, because it’s one thing to pass on knowledge to students and help to get them through a program and able to pass a test or pass an assignment. But one of the things I take seriously about my role is: I always tell the students, “Your grades are not really what matters to me. It’s producing effective counselors.” Because once you come through a program and say, “Well [this university] trained me, or Dr. [Jones] was my instructor.” My name, my reputation, my license, are pretty much on the line. And, so I really think that’s one of our primary roles.

Similarly, Sarah said:

I don’t think we can function or serve as even adequate counselor educators if gatekeeping is not at the forefront of what we do on a daily basis . . . I think gatekeeping is something that I’m constantly aware of and thinking of. When students are emailing, when they’re contacting you and reaching out, when they stop by your office, in the hallway, when they submit assignments, just different pieces—there’s always a level of awareness that I have in terms of *Is this appropriate? Is this an appropriate level of disclosure? How is their disposition? How are other people perceiving interactions?* I’m
always watching and listening for what students are saying and how they’re understanding things . . . I think if we're constantly gatekeeping, we're always thinking about that.

Rosa also described gatekeeping as a constant component of her work as a counselor educator:

Just as much as I have a protective stance on gatekeeping when we close the gate, the gate is open all the time. It’s open more than it’s closed. And so, I think gatekeeping, for me, it’s all of my roles as a counselor educator, with students, all my work with students—I’m constantly gatekeeping. Either I’m enhancing their fit for the field and their ability to do ethical, professional, clinical work or I’m going to go behind the gate so I can close it, but it’s always one or the other. I’m either going towards or away from the field.

Rosa further explained that:

Gatekeeping happens all the time. It's always happening. It's not just every mediation; we are constantly gatekeeping. But we're always gatekeeping. We're always ensuring fit. That's why we're teaching. That's why we grade papers. That's why we talk about APA. We're always ensuring that, whether it's on the keeping them out or letting them through. I'm constantly gatekeeping, and that it's time-consuming. It requires intentionality and commitment.

Similar to Rosa, David suggested that, “Everything you do [as a gatekeeper] is kind of leading towards this idea of helping students prepare for the field. And if they’re not appropriate for the field, finding a way to either dismiss them or provide the professional growth areas.”

Joyce explained that gatekeeping is an ongoing component of counselor education:

I look at the role almost as it’s like you’re a counselor as well, and you’re really keeping an eye on everything going on with that person. And so, it’s not just about grading papers and producing a good class. It’s like you just have your eye on that person as they grow, and it’s like super-vision. You’re really watching them. So, I feel like that is a pervasive part of my role that you don’t think about . . . it’s not a structured hat that you wear; it’s just innate.

Tonia shared a similar perspective on the importance of remaining constant in her gatekeeping work.

Whether it’s us being supervisors in an internship, a field placement, or whether it’s us being the actual instructor, we’re always assessing and always looking at blind spots and trying to help [students] figure out if this is a field they actually are appropriate for. And,
so when I think about gatekeepers, I’m always thinking about constant assessment of
their skills, their personality, and all those things that would be essential to making them
a good counselor.

Participants clearly feel that gatekeeping is an essential and ongoing responsibility in counselor
education.

**Professional responsibility subtheme 1c: Gatekeeping is a weighty responsibility.**

Because participants identified gatekeeping as a constant, ever-present, component of their work,
some participants shared that they frequently feel the weight of this responsibility. Particularly,
Sarah and Rosa spoke about the pressure to effectively handle this role. Sarah described:

> I feel like I'm seeing that picture in my head of the man with the world on his shoulders. I
> think it's a huge weight. I don't know if it's necessarily my perception, but I think it's a lot
to bear. It's allowing people in the field who have worked on themselves and who are
healthy enough to do the work. And trusting that when they're not, they'll take the time
away. And that feels heavy to me. Like a huge responsibility. And yet if we don't really
work to understand where people are at and kind of clue into some of these warning signs
early on, we could potentially be putting people in the field that can do damage. And
that's scary, it's frightening. And it gives the field a bad name.

Sarah emphasized:

> I think the particularly meaningful part is just how heavy the responsibility is. And
knowing that we take that on because we're so passionate about what we do and what we
believe in. And, it's really hard for me to go back and think about people that we might've
put in the field that maybe didn't really earn it.

Sarah also stated:

> I think just how significant [gatekeeping] really is for all of us in the field. And the hope
to function with intentionality, but also consistency, so that we can protect others.
Sometimes it's protecting those prospective students and sometimes it's protecting clients.
But either way, I think if we take anything away from the gatekeeping conversation in
general, it's our duty and our responsibility to really function for the greater good.

Sarah concluded, “It’s tough, I think. It’s a heavy burden to carry.”
Rosa, serving in an administrative role within her Counseling Program, also highlighted the varied components of gatekeeping that contribute to the weight of the responsibility, explaining:

There’s so many measures of success. So, the university wants me to retain every student possible, right? The university wants me to make sure that we're not vulnerable to lawsuits and litigation, but ACA Code of Ethics and the field wants me to make sure that the right people are in the field, and then the student makes sure they stay in the field, and then the faculty member wants to be a good gatekeeper. Everybody's got their own agenda under the guise of gatekeeping. I'm in the middle of it.

Rosa and Sarah’s examples highlight the significance gatekeeping plays within counselor educators’ responsibilities.

**Theme 2: Learning to be Gatekeepers**

Ironically, given the value participants place on gatekeeping and the weight of responsibility they feel to be effective, ethical gatekeepers, overall, they had few educational or training opportunities to learn about it. Participants described minimal educational experiences in the area of gatekeeping, stating that most learning occurred through happenstance rather than formal instruction. They described classroom and experiential learning from their masters or doctoral counselor education as well as on-the-job experiences that contributed to their learning about gatekeeping.

**Learning sub-heme 2a: Educational experiences.** Participants described educational experiences in which they learned about gatekeeping during their masters or doctoral counselor training. These educational experiences sometimes took place in the classroom as formal lessons, occasionally as some type of experiential learning outside the classroom, but more often than
not, participants described having limited to no formal educational experiences related to gatekeeping.

**Classroom and academic learning.** Participants shared about how gatekeeping was taught throughout their counselor education. When asked about educational experiences he’d had, David replied:

Honestly, none. The term wasn’t clear as a master’s student. There were no professional dispositions that I’m aware of that they were using to evaluate me, so we didn’t really talk about them. As a PhD student, it didn’t come up either. The closest would be as a PhD student who’s supervising master’s level students. And, if they haven’t shown enough growth in their practicum, how can they move onto internship? So, that kind of came up, but it still—we weren’t using the term [gatekeeping] and it wasn’t real clear that that’s what we were doing.

And, when asked about her educational experiences in gatekeeping, Joyce indicated she’d had “not a whole lot . . . I don’t feel like I had any training with it at all. I’ve had the qualified supervisor training, but not gatekeeping.” Joyce first heard about gatekeeping in her master’s program, stating:

In my master’s program, toward the end of the program, our Chair spoke to us when we got our internship sites . . . She mentioned that in a meeting in sort of a flip, funny way, like ‘You know, you guys, we’ve had our eyes on you all along and it’s called gatekeeping.’ And I was really like, ‘Wow, I didn’t know that!’ I didn’t know the word gatekeeping until she told us in that meeting.

Rosa also had very little formal instruction related to gatekeeping. She said:

I can confidently say I had zero [training] in my master’s program . . . Then, in doc school, I want to say minimal formal training. I don’t remember specifically covering here’s how you do gatekeeping in my doc program. I think we talked about it, but I don’t think we actually had a module or something about it. My training around gatekeeping has been, by and large, on the job.

Similar to David, Joyce, and Rosa, Tonia had no training in gatekeeping in her master’s program, but first heard about it in her doctoral program. She explained:
In our master’s program, we didn’t really get any instruction on being a gatekeeper in the field. In my doctoral program is when I heard the term [gatekeeping]. I had never really understood it, and I don’t think that in my master’s program, that it was mentioned like that. So, in my doctoral program, they talked about us as counselor educators making sure that we are paying attention to those things that would be problematic in students and that would be problematic in the field. But prior to that, I hadn’t heard it at all.

Kristin and Sarah both had some understanding that some type of assessment was taking place during their master’s program, but they did know the term gatekeeping. Kristin stated that in her master’s program, “I probably was aware of gatekeeping, but not necessarily [the term]. I think it just might have been like, ‘Hey, that person can’t graduate.’” Sarah had a similar experience to Kristin in her master’s program, not knowing the term gatekeeping, but having some understanding that the process was taking place. “I don’t know if I knew it was gatekeeping; I just knew that they were doing like a screening process when I was applying to master’s programs.” Kristin and Sarah continued talking about how gatekeeping was taught in her doctoral program:

I would say I had no formal training until my doctoral program. We did take an Ethics course in my doctoral program—that Ethics course did have a large component of the content gatekeeping, and the role of a counselor educator. We were taught we had the responsibility . . . but more of just stating that it’s a role, an expectation of a counselor educator, without formal training [about how to do it].

Sarah described her experience:

In terms of what gatekeeping is and what our job and duty and responsibility is to advocate for the profession, I would say that came early on in the doc program, probably introduced in the Introduction to Professional Identity class—whatever that first class is called . . . We were taught the importance of recognizing impairment, the importance of understanding the difference between legal and ethical ramifications of practice, and the importance of even kind of trusting your intuition or leaning into what we’ve come to recognize as something—when something’s not right, say something.

Carol could not remember if gatekeeping was introduced in her master’s or doctoral program but did know she had heard the term in one of her classes, “as a graduate student. To be honest, they
didn’t spend a lot of time on gatekeeping. They just assumed you understand... it wasn’t really explained well.”

**Experiential academic learning.** Whereas participants did not have a lot of formal, classroom instruction about gatekeeping, many participants described learning about gatekeeping through structured, experiential activities that were part of their doctoral education. These experiences included co-teaching, supervision of master’s level students enrolled in practicum or internship, and involvement in the admissions process for incoming master’s counseling students.

**Co-teaching.** Participants described co-teaching as doctoral students with experienced faculty as significant learning experiences that increased their understanding of the role of gatekeeping in counselor education. For example, Sarah said:

> What I really valued was the co-teaching experience, so that I could process with [my faculty co-teacher and fellow doctoral students] from week to week what they were seeing and hearing in each of the students. Was there any cause for concern? Did they find anything alarming? If something stood out to me, was I able to bring that to them and ask some questions as well? That was helpful, that co-teaching piece.

And David also described a co-teaching experience:

> One time I was co-teaching—I served as a TA for a professor teaching an internship class, and he wasn’t going to be there. So, that day I had to provide supervision to the students. And, in one case, a student started sharing some challenges she was having at the site. And, based on the supervision training I was provided, I was able to ask questions around her as an individual needing counseling herself, versus the client’s issues. Again, it wasn’t gatekeeping [per se], but it was an example that stood out of how the way I addressed the student had implications for the client, but also for [the student]. And there were some areas of improvement that they could benefit from in their own personal life to be more fully prepared for the field... It wasn’t that they weren’t appropriate for the field, but it was that what we were discussing needed to be more focused on them as an individual who might benefit from their own counseling, than just their skills... but, at the time we didn’t use the term *gatekeeping.*
Rosa also talked about co-teaching as an important factor in learning about gatekeeping:

In my doc program, all our teaching internships were done in the program. We would first co-teach with tenured faculty and my faculty would supervise me and we’d have supervision discussions about students . . . The second class I co-taught was a skills and strategies class. Now, that one had a lot of opportunity for gatekeeping concerns to arise. So, it was totally in practice or on-the-job or learn-by-doing as we supervised our students, as we looked at their videos for their recordings, I would [talk] with my faculty and say, ‘This doesn’t seem right,’ and they would talk to me about gatekeeping then. That’s really how I learned about it.

**Supervision of master’s students.** A few participants highlighted the opportunity to supervise master students’ practicum and internship courses as key learning experiences that helped them develop as gatekeepers. For example, Carol explained, “I got to do some gatekeeping in my supervision relationships. Again, I didn’t know what [the term] was, but it was part of the system there, so that would probably be my first experience.” And, Tonia described her experience supervising master’s students:

I’m not sure if this was an opportunity that was afforded to all students, or if it was just me in my role. We became the university supervisors for [master’s students’] practicum and internship. Being the university supervisor was probably the biggest asset for me, or the biggest part of my [development as a gatekeeper]—I think it helped me tremendously, because again, I was coming from the perspective of being the clinician and not necessarily knowing that I was a gatekeeper and knowing that was something I would eventually have to do. And so, it really was helpful, because I was responsible for nine students, and so we were doing weekly check-ins and I was supervising their cases. We were processing things that were difficult for them. And so, I think the that was the absolute most helpful portion of the program for me, knowing exactly what I needed to do in order to monitor and prepare students, future clinicians, for the field.

**Participating in admissions interviews.** Another meaningful opportunity for experiential learning came from participating in the admissions process for incoming master’s students. Sarah described this admissions experience in her doctoral program that helped inform her gatekeeping knowledge:

As a doc student, not just reviewing [master’s students’] application packets and participating in the interviews themselves, but sitting down with the faculty members
afterward and hearing the way in which they processed what the experience was like for them. What did they see stand out in terms of a potential cue or professional disposition that I may or may not have missed out on? So, just being able to see that interview process from different perspectives and processing it in a safe environment was really helpful for me.

The participants highlighted the experiential learning opportunities as key turning points that helped deepen their understanding of how to engage in gatekeeping. Rather than textbook or classroom learning, the ability to practice gatekeeping skills with guidance and input from faculty was essential for learning to be gatekeepers.

**Learning subtheme 2b: On-the-job learning.** Although participants had some introduction to gatekeeping in their doctoral education, by and large, participants said most of their learning about gatekeeping happened on-the-job. However, rather than gaining formal training, the learning took place primarily through mentoring or experiential “happenstance” as situations arose. Sadly, many participants experienced a lack of support and described feeling “out on their own” when faced with gatekeeping responsibilities.

**Formal training.** Consistently, when asked to describe formal, on-the-job, training, participants reported they did not receive any intentional, structured training. Here are some of the starkest responses to the question, *After completing your doctoral degree, what kind of on-the-job training or professional mentoring, if any, did you have in the area of gatekeeping?*

Carol: “None.”

Joyce: “Nothing.”

David: “There was none. There was no professional training on it. No mentoring, I would call it.

Rosa: “No, I’ve not had any formal mentoring . . . I have not had any formal training around it.”
Sarah: “There was no formal training.”

**Informal mentoring.** Instead of formal training, participants suggested their on-the-job learning related to gatekeeping took place through on-the-job mentoring. David explained:

In my current position, as far as gatekeeping, there was no formal training when I came to [my current university], but I’ve always had kind of mentors throughout the process—informal mentorship, but mentorship, nonetheless . . . I don’t know if it was specifically related to gatekeeping, or just mentoring a new professor at the university—it was more showing me the ropes, answering my questions. Similar to what happened in my doctoral program, where ‘I’m there if you need me,’ but there’s nothing really formal in place.

Tonia had similar mentoring experiences:

One of my mentors, an informal mentor, [would] have discussions with me as difficulties would come up with different students. And we had conversations about that. And we talked about paying attention to different areas that they were struggling in. And maybe talking to students about if there were some areas where maybe they needed to pull back if we noticed that they were struggling and we noticed that they might not be a good fit. We had those conversations, but they would be on a basis of when it came up. So, if a student had an issue and we needed to talk about it, we would schedule a meeting.

Kristin explained she had some training on the job, but:

There wasn’t formal training in place . . . I was part of the team here at [my university] that created our remediation plan, and so that involved some formal training and mentoring with the director of the program . . . I was taught about the process, because I remember prior to that, we had a student that had some concerning behaviors, and so I was brought in as part of the disciplinary team. I was taught how to handle that student, and I was able to observe the meetings with the student. I didn’t create the remediation plan for her—it was outside my role at the time, but I was involved in, “Here’s the remediation plan,” and then the monitoring of the student post when the plan was put into place. That would have been considered more informal training though. There was no formal training; it was informal.

Sarah said, “In my first position [as a counselor educator], they didn’t have a formal mentor program or gatekeeping set up, but I had informal mentors or colleagues that I felt comfortable going to.”
So, while participants noted very little to no formal training, they did identify mentors who provided informal support when gatekeeping needs arose.

**Experiential learning.** In addition to learning through mentorship, some participants described *learning by doing* as significant to their development as gatekeepers. David and Joyce both described some key learning experiences where they were engaged in gatekeeping on the job. David described the first time he became involved with gatekeeping in his career.

I was at [university where I’d been employed early in my career as a counselor educator]. I didn’t have tenure yet, so I’d say like pre-tenure, in conversations about our CACREP-accreditation self-study—there’s conversations about how we monitor professional dispositions and growth over time. And the purpose was to come up with a strategy, then dismiss students that aren’t measuring up. So, that’s the first time that I sort of heard the idea of gatekeeping. It’s still loose; it’s still broad. I don’t know if we actually say gatekeeping, but that was the first time that the idea that we are responsible for monitoring those who enter into the field.

And, Joyce explained, “Since working at [my university] I’ve been more aware of the whole gatekeeping thing in the last maybe two years, three years, actually . . . And I think [the experience of] gatekeeping trains you when all of a sudden you have some problem students.”

Overall, participants described having very little formal, structured training in the area of gatekeeping on the job, yet they still experienced some gatekeeping responsibilities. Supportive mentoring seemed to be an important factor for learning about gatekeeping in participants’ early careers.

**Learning subtheme 2c: “I’m on my own.”** When participants did not learn about gatekeeping on the job, some described personal learning, or seeking their own knowledge in order to better understand the responsibilities related to gatekeeping. Some participants described feeling isolated or unsupported while learning about or engaging in gatekeeping.
**Isolation.** Joyce, Tonia, and Sarah all described moments of feeling isolated in their gatekeeping responsibilities.

Joyce reflected upon gatekeeping during her early teaching experiences and recalled that “at a couple of the places that I’d adjuncted for [names three different universities], there would be like a sheet to fill out, like a heads up from within the department if you had a problem person, but there wasn’t a lot.” Joyce explained the message she received about gatekeeping when she had been teaching as an adjunct was, “Handle it on your own. It’s your classroom. Do what you want.” Joyce described a few more situations in which she had been working as an adjunct and brought some concerns about a student to her Program Chair. She explained:

When I brought it up to the Chair, they were like, ‘Yeah, you know, whatever.’ They were graduating in June, so [the chair] was like, ‘Oh, you know, that’s so-and-so, let her just run with it’ . . . So, I guess what I’m learning is I really have just been concerned with it on my own. [The message I received was] it’s not worth the effort. And, that’s a problem.

And in another position, Joyce described the message she’s heard from her Program Chair when bringing up concerns about a student, “It’s kind of like, ‘Oh, you know, she’ll be alright. She’ll work well with that population one day. Let’s give her a hall pass.’”

And, Sarah provided another example of gatekeeping in isolation:

When it came to the [student admission] interview process or gatekeeping, I felt like nobody challenged what I said . . . yet, I was looking for some more guidance as a new faculty member . . . I found myself going through the application packets looking for anything that would stand out as potentially harming or really not in alignment with school counseling in particular. I did that with zero input, or training if you will, from other faculty members. It was just like, “This is one of your responsibilities. Here you go.”

When asked about gatekeeping support when she first started working as a counselor educator, Tonia indicated she had “not really much at all . . . there was no formal mentoring, or even informal mentoring. It was just you were pretty much out on your own.”
Feeling isolated, participants often had to engage in gatekeeping responsibilities or make gatekeeping decisions without input or support from their fellow faculty.

**Personal learning.** When formal instruction or support was not readily available, participants described the ways in which they sought gatekeeping knowledge on their own. Kristin explained, “I remember learning about remediation plans [in my doctoral program], that they were a component from a legal perspective. It was just learning about them—I did not have any formal training on how to create a remediation plan. I remember doing a bunch of searches on my own, looking at *What does this look like? What do the policies look like?*” Joyce learned about gatekeeping from “just my own reading and talking to friends [and colleagues].”

Others indicated that they intentionally sought gatekeeping training through professional conferences and workshops as their main source of education in this area. Sarah said what she found helpful was:

Going to conferences and looking for sessions that are perhaps tailored to gatekeeping and *How do we look for professional dispositions from the beginning?* Engaging in professional development and being able to bring that back [to my counseling faculty] was really the most significant [training].

And, Rosa also identified conference presentations as helpful in learning about gatekeeping, “It wasn’t necessarily formal gatekeeping training—I don’t think I’ve had any. Well, I guess conferences. I tend to attend any, if I see gatekeeping in the presentation, I go and try and stay up on what’s out there.”

Participants described learning about gatekeeping in a number of ways: first through minimal exposure to the concept of gatekeeping in their master’s program, then through some intentional, structured academic activities or informal, experiential opportunities in their doctoral
program, next by informal mentoring or happenstance on the job, and finally by personal learning through reading, collegial conversations, or professional conferences.

**Theme 3: Gatekeeping as a Developmental Process**

While reflecting upon the educational and training experiences the participants had that led to a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities as gatekeepers to the counseling profession, many participants also talked about gatekeeping as a developmental process. They shared experiences where they grew in their understanding of the process, gained deeper appreciation for engaging in gatekeeping, or increased their confidence in gatekeeping knowledge or skills. Many participants also talked about how they conceptualize student development, and the importance in considering student growth and potential, when making gatekeeping decisions.

**Development subtheme 3a: Growing as a gatekeeper.** Participants described the ways in which they have grown as gatekeepers during their careers in Counselor Education.

Joyce described her growth as a gatekeeping, stating:

Oh, I’m far more bold about it now. If I see something, I’ll call it out right away. Whereas before I was like, “Well, I’m an adjunct.” But now [what has changed is I’m] kind of a little impatient with [student behavior] almost. “Knock it off; this is the big leagues. You rise to this standard, we’re not going to take it down to you.” I’ve evolved in my comfort level of confronting those that need to be gatekept.

Rosa also reflected upon her development as a gatekeeper:

I think I’m a much better gatekeeper over time than I was five years ago when I started in a full-time position . . . Part of it is my own confidence in my assessment of gatekeeping concerns . . . Over time and practice, when you’re giving a student a chance, it was like 50/50 success stories—I remember those success stories. When I think, “The reason you’re here is because I thought I’d give you a chance and look what you’ve done with this,” then counseling is so social justice oriented and I think, *Yes, I did it!* Then, there’s
the ones that, oh my gosh, over time, they should not have been given [a chance]—I should have listed to that little voice. It’s here, when we start to have dispositional issues or academic issues and I go back to the admissions file and someone saw light shades of what we’re seeing now to the nth degree. How did we miss this? But, you learn. I learned every time that happened. So, that’s part of it . . . nothing beats experience. There’s just no way through it but through it. So, over time and with experience, I’ve improved my gatekeeping assessment skills.

Rosa also reflected upon developing more patience as a gatekeeper, explaining:

I think I’ve learned a lot more to pause rather than rush to judgment. I think there was a time when I would say, early on, I thought, “Nope, it’s done, clean cut; you’re out of here.” Let’s keep this person out. Now, I find myself pausing and being more student centered and saying, “Has the program provided the student with every opportunity to learn about this?” We’re in charge of educating them; Have we educated them?

David shared similar experiences with Rosa, explaining, “I’ve become more fair and balanced toward students, and have been less rigid in how I mentor or evaluate or review them.” And, Sarah also felt similarly to David and Rosa, developing more patience with the gatekeeping process over time. She explained, “I think what’s changed is my understanding that it’s a progression. Gatekeeping doesn’t just happen in the beginning. It takes place over time. And, it’s important to continually check in. I think that’s the part I wasn’t aware of in the beginning.” She explained that, “Maybe my expectations of what people should come into the field with were a little bit too harsh or rigorous . . . I was not necessarily aware of how much of a transition or transformation comes during the first quarter or first semester through a program.”

Sarah reflected on another aspect of her development as a gatekeeper in which she had to advocate for support from her colleagues as she wrestled with gatekeeping decisions. She explained

At my old position, [when bringing up gatekeeping dilemmas], people were like, “No, we trust your judgment. Just go with it.” I said, “Well, I appreciate that, but I really need you to hear where I’m at.” That was part of my own developmental process. Once I would ask for that, they would give that to me, but I really had to advocate for it. It was almost like, “Don’t give us another thing. Oh, you need this? Oh, okay. Let’s do it.” So, I think that
helps, just me knowing that I needed to advocate for that. It was part of my own growth process.

Sarah further reflected that gatekeeping developing continues to be an ongoing part of her growth as a counselor educator:

Just recognizing that [gatekeeping] is still a developmental process, that it’s still something that I have to be cognitively aware of on a daily basis, that my role is not limited to an application packet or an interview. It’s really making sure that I’m aware of what’s going on in the classroom and in my interactions with students . . . I try to be very diligent in terms of having those professional conversations and making sure that students understand those boundaries.

Tonia also talked about her development as a gatekeeper:

What has changed for me is, I am more adamant now than I was before about recognizing things earlier with a student—earlier in the program. Sometimes we allow students to get to field placement before we’re like, “Oh wait, something’s wrong.” And so, there had been some kind of little flags and little things going off in our head the entire time the student was in the program. And now, I’m at the point where I’m more adamant about recognizing it earlier so that we can maybe possibly coach them out, have them sit out, get them the support they need, point them in another direction that—this is not going to be a good fit for them. And so, that’s where my change—I’ve definitely evolved in that because in the beginning I was just like, “Oh, they’ll be fine. Oh, it’ll be okay.”

Tonia describe a specific example of how her conceptualization of gatekeeping has changed over time:

What I noticed was that students are more concerned with their grades than they were with the knowledge . . . I was irritated with the fact that everybody was coming to me to make sure that they had a 4.0 or an A average, but nobody was really concerned on whether or not they understood the material. And, that’s what really helped change my perspective on [gatekeeping]. And it was like, “Okay, you want to get to the end of the program, you want to have this personal goal of having the A average, but are you a good counselor? Do you really know what you’re doing? Do you really know theory? Do you really know technique?” So, that’s when it changed for me and that part starting shifting for me.

Upon reflection of the gatekeeping process, Tonia considered ways she can continue to grow as a gatekeeper. After our first interview Tonia had time to reflect, and came to the second interview describing her thoughts about what she still needs to learn as a gatekeeper:
My mind has been going on the ways we can promote the role more and ways we can get more training . . . to be more cognizant of students’ skills and abilities and those types of things, so that I can take my gatekeeper role more seriously, not that I was serious about it, but that I will be more diligent in the role of gatekeeper.

These participant stories suggest that gatekeeping is an ongoing developmental process, and that participants’ confidence, knowledge, and understanding of gatekeeping increases over time and with experience.

**Development subtheme 3b: Considering student development.** In addition to recognizing their own development as gatekeepers, participants also stressed the importance of considering student development when making gatekeeping decisions. Five of the six participants spoke at length about the intersection of student development and gatekeeping.

David explained, “There’s always room for growth and development once in the program.” He elaborated:

I believe we are all growing at different rates. So, in my mind, I think sometimes we have this great expectation that students will graduate from our master’s program and then they’re going to be expert therapists, but that’s not true. But the question is really like, well if that’s not true and they’re all going to grow and develop over time, what is the bare minimum that they need to be at, at this point? And people grow slower than others.

David wanted to remind counselor educators:

Not to forget how much they’ve grown over time or will grow over time, to keep them grounded in that. Oftentimes when we’re having conversations about these students, it’s like a snapshot. It’s like one place in time, but we have to look at the overarching growth over time. And, sometimes we’re rigid because they’re not measuring up in this moment, but how will we provide enough support and encouragement for them to actually grow? Don’t forget where you came from and how much you grew over time . . . Because you might be real rigid at first and then you’re overlooking or holding people back and not realizing, wait a minute—you don’t have enough data to even say that.

David further explained that growth can look and progress differently from student to student:

As a gatekeeper, I want to be one who is able to see the best and/or to pull out the best in the student and then if, in fact, their best doesn't meet the standard, they need to go
somewhere else really. It's okay, everybody doesn't have to be a counselor. You have some other skills and talents that might be utilized elsewhere but also recognizing if, in fact, one individual's best is here and another individual's best is here, but it's still their best and they were showing growth and development over time, that means given more time, they'll be ready for the field. And also, a lot of the growth and development that occurs professionally as a counselor is on-the-job training anyway. So, the philosophy would be one of which is fair and balanced and open but also recognizing that individually we have the potential to reach sort of this standard if you will and really trying to decide what is that standard for the individual. So how do you differentiate this process for the individual based on who they are and where they come from?

Kristin also stated that it’s important to consider the student’s individual needs and development:

What does the student need in order to do better? Where is the issue coming from? Is there a lack of knowledge on the student’s part? Is there a level of professional maturity that needs to be addressed? Being able to identify what’s going on behind the behavior—I appreciate that it wasn’t a punitive process—what does the student need that they maybe might have missed somewhere along the line?”

And Rosa shared a similar stance, recognizing that counselor educators need to recognize students’ ability to grow. She explained, “We always hope that we can educate our students and that they would be open to learn and grow based on just an awareness that they are still novice practitioners.” Sarah concurred:

I think I see now, as a faculty member, the importance of teaching out students what to look for and when to share things [of concern] so that we can work with students and say, ‘If this isn’t appropriate, what is? Why isn’t this?’ to be able to explain that . . . So, what do they need from us to be successful? I think it’s important for us to teach students that part, too.

Tonia also spoke of needing to provide opportunity for students to grow and teaching them when they had misperceptions about what it means to be a counselor:

I believe that there has to be a level of compassion. Because we're recognizing that students are] coming in a lot of times, and unless they've had previous experience in the field, they're coming in with little knowledge, very little knowledge about what counseling is. Everybody has their own idea of counseling, and a lot of times in the first couple of courses we have an opportunity to explore what that looks like for them, talking about going from a natural helper to a clinician. A lot of people feel like because I'm a natural helper, I'm automatically going to be a good clinician. We kind of dispel that myth in the beginning, towards the beginning of the program. So, you have to have
compassion and patience, understanding, that these students already are coming with a preconceived idea of what this role looks like and know who are they as a counselor. So you can't be so rigid that you're like, “Well no, this is not it. You're not going to be a good fit because you feel like giving advice is good.” No, you have to be compassionate and be able to teach them.

Tonia added that students:

Need someone to guide them. They need someone to help pull those things out of them. I've heard a lot of students say that from the beginning to end of the program their perspective has changed, and their ideas about counseling or even their personal awareness has changed. So, it's possible that the person that we see at the interview may not be the person that ends up graduating.

Kristin believes that a large component of gatekeeping is understanding the “developmental process of your student”. She explained, “When I look at gatekeeping, I have different expectations for beginning year students than I do for students at field placement and that even comes out in my grading of student work.” She elaborated that gatekeeping encompasses:

The ability of the counselor-educator to understand that developmental process because then the expectations I'm holding the student to are consistent with their level of education and experience in the program, so that developmental curve. Because, otherwise, I think you could maybe knock some students out unfairly because they just don't have the skillset, but, developmentally, they're not supposed to have the skillset. That would be important.

Kristin also noted that her student-development focused stance as a gatekeeper aligns with the mission of her university:

We're not a university that prides itself on top tier acceptance and turning away a lot of people who would get turned away in other programs. It's like, “Alright, where can we see potential and how can we help to grow that potential?” And it's just a mission that's thread throughout the undergraduate and into our graduate [programs]. And so, it's like, “How do we adapt that mission into our graduate programs, which do require a little bit more of the professional dispositional behavior as far as the classroom decorum, the field placement?” So, we're always looking at the end goal of, Okay, can this person be successful in the field?”
Development subtheme 3c: Recognizing student mental health issues. In addition to considering the developmental stages and needs of students, participants also spoke of the importance of considering mental health issues impacting students. As counselors first and foremost, counselor educators are uniquely positioned to recognize when students’ mental health may be impacting their counselor development. They also spoke of the fact that sometimes students study counseling as a way to address their own mental health issues. Participants noted that it becomes important to have compassion regarding the mental health of their students, while also ensuring that mental health issues do not negatively impact a student’s ability to succeed in their counselor education.

Carol explained, “I’m not looking for the bad . . . that’s not the thing, but why are people going into Counseling? Some people go into [a counseling program] because they need counseling. And then, they think they’re in the gate.” She expressed concern that “the gate has to be tight . . . because I know this for a fact, that people have gone into this program to be counseled, but might not be right for the field.”

And, Sarah also suggested that when student mental health issues emerge, gatekeepers can prevent students from entering or moving forward in a program. She suggested that gatekeeping is:

looking for goodness of fit and screening out individuals that maybe haven’t done their own work, and so they might not be a good fit yet for the field. So, a lot of times, I find myself saying, “Go do some work on yourself. And, when you’re ready, then come back. I think you would be a good fit after you’ve done your own work.”

Kristin explored the other side of this issue:

I think for me, the level of understanding is still the difficulty in balancing the personal rights of the student, when there are mental health issues at play, not so much academic performance. I think the academic performance is easier, but when there are other personal behaviors being displayed that have some roots in mental health issues, then I
think that what I’ve learned is that it’s a fine balance between being a helping profession and not having stigma about people. People are allowed to have mental health issues and move forward in a master’s program in counseling. And, so balancing that and the responsibility that a university has to the community, and who they graduate within the field of counseling. I think that, for me, the learning piece is how to do that balancing act . . . [Students] are allowed to have mental health issues. That’s what we commit our life to in a professional way, and so it’s like, “Well, you’re not going to be critical of a person struggling.” What services need to be put into place to help that person, and where does a line get drawn where it’s not the right field? I think the key in understanding how to do that is putting in a very objective remediation plan, and holding students accountable to doing the hard work to address those personal and professional issues.

Kristin explained when issues of student mental health arise, “We all want to be counselors in that moment because that’s our intuitive piece. [But], that’s not our role. Our role is not to be the clinician. Our role is to be the academic gatekeeper.”

Sarah also talked about the finding the balance between being a counselor and being an educator:

As a faculty member, it’s always ringing true that we have to toe that fine line between being somebody’s counselor and checking in making sure that our students are okay. So, when we noticed certain patterns are taking place, we can bring that concern to our faculty and say, “Is anybody else noticing this?” So that we can catch it sooner than later.

Sarah also noted that not all mental health issues generate concern regarding students’ appropriateness for the field, but it’s important to note when more serious issues emerge. She explained, “I think some anxiety being in a master’s program with the intensity is okay, but sometimes you start to see more clinically significant signs of depression or anxiety.”

David also addressed the need to determine when mental health issues might be impacting student performance. He wondered, as faculty, “What can we offer for them to actually work towards to get better?” He provided an example, “What if a student is not able to reflect feelings in their counseling sessions? Sometimes we’re not real clear what's limiting them from reflecting their feelings. Maybe there's some other issues in their life and maybe they need
to seek some counseling outside.” David suggested that gatekeeping is “answering those questions and providing some resources for students.”

Recognizing and addressing student mental health needs is an important component of gatekeeping. Participants emphasized that it is not their responsibility to be their students’ counselors, yet they must utilize some clinical skills when student mental health issues emerge. Being able to empathize, support, and provide resources for students to address mental health needs as is an additional piece of gatekeeping.

**Development subtheme 3d: Committed to student success.** Ultimately, participants expressed that throughout their gatekeeping duties, they are committed to student success. When gatekeeping issues emerge, whether developmental or dispositional in nature, the participants acknowledged their strong desire to help their students move forward in healthy and meaningful ways.

Rosa shared that her program is completely committed to student success as soon as the student is admitted to the program. She explained:

> We really want to demonstrate, as a program, that we’ve done everything we can to help a student be successful . . . once a student gets through Admissions, which is the first gate in a counseling program—to me, that’s the most critical phase, the most critical gate. Once students are admitted to a program, the program is then completely committed to their success. Our rehabilitation or remediation efforts must absolutely be exhausted in order for a dismissal to take place.

Joyce also identified a focus on student success, “Let’s just say there’s a lot of grace and mercy in our program, and I’m okay with that.” And Carol concurred, “I’m always eager to give somebody a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance, a fifth chance kind of thing.” And, David said, “We really want to best utilize [gatekeeping] to be helpful, not to just be an ‘I got you,’ but actually a way that promotes growth and development in way that students could learn
from.” And, Kristin also agreed that gatekeeping is “not an ‘I got you!’ philosophy.” Rather, she suggested it’s important to acknowledge to students, “Here’s what I’m noticing” when concerns arise. She explained, “As a counselor educator I have a split role that includes protection of the community that would be on the receiving end of the counseling services and a responsibility to the student to help them be successful.”

Development subtheme 3e: Students’ due process rights. Along with a commitment to student success, counselor educators also identified their legal obligation to follow due process procedure in gatekeeping to protect students’ rights.

Kristin explained, “Students have a right to remediate and you can’t take away that right. It’s that advocacy for our students, and our advocacy for the field. It’s always balancing the two.” Kristin further explained:

Gatekeeping is not, it's not a simple term. It's very fluid, complex, the balancing of [many factors]. I think my initial experience was like, “Alright, this is about the benefit of the program in not having to deal with it because the resources that a student takes from a program,” but I've definitely evolved to, “Well, no, the students have a right in this process, and so gatekeeping [considers] the ultimate welfare of the client, benefit of the university, and the benefit of the student. It's not just about being the holder of the power. It's about a counseling program's responsibility to helping a student to improve. I think, initially, it's like that knee-jerk reaction of like, “What are we doing? Get this person out,” like that. But it's like, “Well, no, no, what is our [responsibility]?” The role of the gatekeeper isn't to kick people out. It's to identify potential concerns and help to remediate the process and, if a student can't remediate, then at least you've done the due process part of it.

Rosa described a similar shift in her thinking, explaining:

I’ve gotten a bit more student-centered . . . I think earlier on, I had this real idealistic perspective on gatekeeping and fit for the field. And, as I’ve become an administrator, I’ve really had to understand the nuances and the legalities around gatekeeping and having to deal with the university at large, and the graduate school at large, to discuss gatekeeping concerns. It is so hard to dismiss students. It’s so difficult.
Rosa also shared:

I think what gets lost at times in the movement of the gate is the fact that we're dealing with human souls. Especially with some of my colleagues and some of the things we deal with right now, they are very quick to be like, “Well, we need to move them out of the program.” I say, “Well, actually, there's a whole due process.” I'm constantly having to remind them there's a due process here. The student is entitled to that.

Carol suggested it is important to follow due process procedures to assure gatekeeping actions are legal and non-discriminatory. She explained:

Even if [a student is] not totally qualified, it’s almost like a marriage. You can get married real quick, but it’s hard to get the divorce. Well, the same thing applies with this. You’ve accepted them, so, now how do you, legally, without running into any issues with discrimination, get out of this? And, it’s hard to get out of it, without showing some kind of discrimination. Or, at least, students will interpret it that way. And then you get sued.

And Sarah also shared the importance of transparency and communication when adhering to due process in gatekeeping:

I think we have to be really careful as counselor educators to make sure that we’re monitoring progress, but also being transparent in terms of when we see something that [students] might be struggling with, and talking with them, and calling them out on that, and holding them accountable—slowing them down sometimes, so that even if it’s not ideal and going according to plan, we need to make sure that they’re truly understanding the content material so that we don’t do harm.

Understanding the legal and ethical guidelines and due process procedures is an important factor of gatekeeping. Knowing the laws and engaging in fair, unbiased procedures helps counselor educators support students when gatekeeping issues arise.

Counselor educators’ development as gatekeepers was a significant theme the emerged in my participants’ exploration of gatekeeping. They recognized not only their own development as gatekeepers, but the capacity for development within their students. They consistently focused on student success, student support, and students’ due process rights as important features of gatekeeping.
Theme 4: Gatekeeping Competence

As participants reflected upon their development as gatekeepers and the ways in which they engage in and conceptualize gatekeeping, the theme of gatekeeping competence emerged. Each participant provided a definition of gatekeeping competence and identified some essential skills, knowledge, and characteristics that are essential components of gatekeeping competence. Additionally, participants spoke of the interpersonal relationship between faculty and students, as well as multicultural considerations that contribute to overall gatekeeping competence.

Competence subtheme 4a: Defining gatekeeping competence. Each participant shared a definition of gatekeeping competence.

Tonia described gatekeeping competence as having “the skills and the knowledge necessary to guide a student through the process of becoming a student to a clinician and be able to recognize when that student needs additional help and support.”

And Joyce suggested gatekeeping competence is less an issue of actual competence, but more related to the relative importance a program places on gatekeeping. She explained:

I’m not sure if I think of it as competence issue or an importance, priority issue. In other words, at [one university] I’m sure they’re all really competent. It’s a really great program, and it’s got a great reputation. I’ve been in there, so I know inside. They didn’t really seem to care [about gatekeeping]. Whereas, [at another university], they didn’t care, and they didn’t have the competence. They should have been shut down basically. Finally, they got CACREP [accreditation], and maybe they got it together . . . But, do you know what I mean? I don’t know if it’s a competence thing as much as it’s like any business with a business plan. “This is our mission statement, and we need to hold to this, and these are the three components of why this is important. Oh, by the way, gatekeeping’s way down there, 56 on the list.” Naturally, they may be competent, but if it’s not a high priority, oh well. Only the important things will get done, like anything.

Carol defined gatekeeping competence as simply, “just constantly being aware of what a true counselor does.”
And David explored gatekeeping competence, suggesting:

I think really good counselors are people who are able to acknowledge their biases and things of that nature and hold them at bay. To also be able to recognize that there’s some potential goodness in every individual. I mean, I believe that, and that the individual kind has the answers to their own problems . . . a counselor educator has the potential to utilize a similar frame when working on gatekeeping, meaning that, I believe all students have the potential to grow and develop and so that’s why I try to be fair and balanced in giving them the opportunity that maybe this is the first time they've ever heard that, “You’re not excelling in this area.” Because all our graduate students, they've been doing really well in undergrad and high school, fine, and then they get to a point where it's not really about your grades anymore; it's about you as an individual as sort of the instrument, what are you bringing to the table? If you never had problems in your life, how can you really counsel other people? So the knowledge that we need as counselor educators how to translate our clinical practice and skillset to one in which we are no longer just seeing the outcome of the individual client but seeing the potential for the student to one day be a counselor who makes a more significant impact in the community, that could be good or bad . . . A counselor who isn’t put in place or checked or sort of provided the sort of feedback could get into the field and actually do more harm than good to multiple people.

David also suggested defining gatekeeper competence is:

kind of a tricky way of looking at it because competence, to me, would imply that we have some clear-cut stuff to measure that there’s, like a standard, like a standard of gatekeeping, like ‘here it is’ and we’re either at that level or above that. And so, when you say [define gatekeeping competence], I have no idea. It all feels very subjective to me . . . I just don’t really have a clear-cut sense of like, well, where’s the standard? Where’s the competency? I think it’s still moving.

David later suggested a tentative definition, and stated that gatekeeping competence:

is taking a collective approach to the gatekeeping process. So never acting in isolation and to me, that gives me great hope that collectively, our minds, and my peers and colleagues putting together, sort of working on this student or to the cases that we might be working on, are held accountable. So not doing it by myself gives me great confidence that we'll negotiate, push and tug and over time, trust one another's judgment in that we all have strengths and talents.

Sarah had a similar response to David’s, questioning:

Is anybody truly competent ever? Or is it more about lessons in humility and being able to understand? So how would I define gatekeeping competence might be more along the lines of having counselor educators, holding them true to having the opportunity to have these discussions with one another. And being able to learn from one another; How are we gatekeeping? How do we operationalize it from this perspective? And what can we
take away from one another so that this looks similar across the board? Why is it that a student might get rejected from several programs but then accepted to another? And I think the more we can have these conversations, the easier it might be to define competence. But again, I mean, I don't know if there's a clear definition of competence except for the consistent screening over time. I think it's really important that gatekeeping, those that are defined as gatekeepers, do so in a way that is consistent over time.

Kristin identified important questions to ask oneself in order to assess gatekeeping competence, such as, “What did I miss? How could that have been caught? What are the things we want to look out for so that we can try to make sure we’re not missing some critical pieces?” She then went on to ponder, when working with students, “Can you teach [as student] integrity? Can you teach the honesty attached to being someone who has high integrity?” Kristin further defined gatekeeping competence as “knowledge of the processes, awareness of legal ramifications.” She suggested this knowledge is:

- a critical piece because nobody wants to get themselves or the university [in trouble] or violating the student's rights, so legal knowledge, understanding of remediation plans, and a competence in the ability to follow through on the identified remediation plans, and then the ability to hold somebody accountable to that plan.

The above examples demonstrate how participants conceptualize and operationalize gatekeeping competence. Although some participants found competence a challenging concept to define, they all spoke of the importance of engaging in the gatekeeping process.

**Competence subtheme 4b: Knowledge.** Participants further broke down their definition of gatekeeping competence by describing the type of knowledge that is essential for effective gatekeeping.

Tonia suggested:

You have to be knowledgeable of [professional] standards and what's going on with current trends in the field so that you can be able to communicate that to your students. I think that's really an essential part of being a gatekeeper; it’s not just being
knowledgeable but, being very knowledgeable. So you have to be kind of ahead of the game . . . you have to definitely be knowledgeable about what's going on in the field, have your finger on the pulse of what's happening . . . you also have to be knowledgeable about the Code of Ethics because there may be some ethical violations that you're noticing, which if you don't know that this is an ethical violation, how can you address it with the student?"

Sarah struggled to specify gatekeeping knowledge, stating:

I keep getting stuck on the knowledge part. Unless it's really just about knowing the importance of our role and what it means to be a gatekeeper and the amount of weight that it carries. I think maybe that's the knowledge. Just that awareness of what this means to the field. Because to me, it's more than, “What knowledge do I have?” It's more or less, “How do I utilize what I'm taking in, to ensure that those people that might be impacted by this person later on, will be okay?” And there's sometimes that I think certain [students] could be a great fit, yet they haven't done the work [on themselves] and that's apparent.

Rosa stressed that competent gatekeepers need knowledge of “policies and procedures and gatekeeping kind of mandates . . . all those kind of empirical things.” Rosa also suggested that gatekeeping competence is having “a consistency of assessment of gatekeeping concerns, an ability to articulate clearly and communicate effectively why a gatekeeping concern is raised, and then to provide supporting documents and data around it.”

**Competence subtheme 4c: Skills.** Participants also identified a number of skills that are essential for gatekeeping competence. Some categories of skills they discussed were counseling skills, skills in providing feedback, and career counseling skills.

**Counseling skills.** Clinical counseling skills were some of the most common gatekeeping skills participants identified.

Kristin talked about using her clinical skills when assessing students:

The student can be fantastic on paper, but then they enter into your classroom and your clinical radar goes off, but it’s a balancing act between your academic role and your clinical role. It’s hard not to see things though, as a counselor.
And Rosa also spoke about gatekeeping through a clinical lens:

For me, the first bell that went off was a clinical one, frankly . . . So, I would say my gatekeeping lens early on was informed by my clinical lens—that if there was some clinical intuition that drew me into a particular situation, I use that information to filter it through my gatekeeping lens as a counselor educator.

Joyce described how her clinical skills have helped hone her gatekeeping skills:

My private practice has probably informed the gatekeeping, because they’re going to be future counselors one day . . . [students need] maturity, skills, and rising up to a professional standard . . . Picturing them with a future supervisor one day, and so they don’t drive that clinical supervisor nuts and maybe get fired from a job.

Joyce further explained that gatekeepers need to have “all around great counseling skills, attending skills, confrontational skills . . . because it’s like when you’re confronting a client, lovingly, but you just, you’ve got to hit it right on the head.” Joyce also suggested “assertiveness skills and really sound leadership skills” are essential skills for gatekeepers.

Tonia also described gatekeeping skills as:

Similar to what we do as counselors: being able to listen, actively listen, being able to see beyond what's being presented. I think that's a skill that you definitely need to be able to [gatekeeper] because a student can present themselves a certain way on paper. They do good assignments, they get As on all of their tests and quizzes, but they might not be self-aware. So you have to look beyond what you actually see.

Carol said gatekeeping skills are “your listening skills, your understanding . . . I mean, it really is using counseling.”

Sarah concurred that gatekeeping competence is:

Really feeling grounded and secure in just basic helping skills. So, what did we learn as counselors in our master's program that help us hear our clients? That help us screen and conceptualize things in a way that our clients may not be able to do, but yet we're able to help them because of the way in which we see what's going on. So, I think that that is really helpful when we're screening individuals to come into the field and when we're serving as gatekeepers when students are in the field or in our programs. So, it's really listening and being able to take a look at what's taking place for them in this holistic lens? And being able to say, “Yes, this person might be struggling. But look at what they have going on.” So, it's recognizing, “Do they need more support? How do we do that?” as a
way of helping to gatekeep so they don't get overwhelmed or where they become so overwhelmed they can't function. Because that can happen. So, I feel like I really lean into the skills that I would use as a clinician. And yet again, not diagnosing, but really just listening to the story.

**The ability to gently confront and provide feedback.** Providing feedback was also an important, though sometimes difficult, skill participants identified as a component of gatekeeping competence.

Kristin said:

The ability to give constructive feedback is a gatekeeping skill. I think, in giving constructive feedback, not being afraid of hurting somebody's feelings. There's that ability to give constructive feedback in a way that's not unfair and people's feelings aren't going to get hurt. Dealing with student reactions and then the holding them accountable—so, being able to do that, I think, is an important skillset of a counselor-educator because, otherwise, you'll let your own issues get into play and not address feedback or not address student concerns early on because you're afraid of how the conversation might go and then you end up with a big problem at the end.

Sarah also talked about giving feedback and gently confronting students as an important gatekeeping skill:

I feel like that's probably one of the major things that I lean into, is just being able to hear their story, provide empathy, and yet also be direct and be honest when I need to. So confronting students when they're struggling and not letting them get away with it, is really important. And I think sometimes it can be really easy to allow students to kind of slip through the cracks if you don't push them a little bit. So that confrontation and empathy is really important in terms of gatekeeping . . . and giving feedback is really important. We need to be able to navigate that well.

**Career counseling skills.** Many participants identified career counseling skills as essential components of gatekeeping competence.

Carol made quite a few connections between gatekeeping and career counseling. She explained:
People go into counseling because they want to help people. All the students will say that, and that’s well and good; that’s not a bad thing. But when they want to help people, they refer to their friends and say, “Well, she came and talked to me, or he came and talked to me, and I told him what to do.: You’re like, “No, that’s not how this works. Let’s talk about what a counselor does.”

Carol suggested:

If you had a workshop, or something, where you put students in that kind of position . . . So, how do you get that experience, so that you’re sure that this is what you want to do? And we’re sure that this is what you’re good at?” The student has to see it first. It’s our job to do some of this, but you’ve got to figure this out. You’ve got to see if this is what you want to do.”

Carol said she tries to do this type of career counseling with her students to assure counseling is a good fit for their career paths. She stated, “I ask them what they want to do in their career as a counselor. I’ll ask them the same question in the beginning and at the end, ‘So now, after you’ve gotten this far, what do you think?’” And then, she explained:

You can counsel somebody out of this. I have done that already. Where it isn’t, “You can’t stay in this program,” . . . but to counsel somebody out of it, we have to use our counseling skills to do that and give them an opportunity to go into some other program or other school, and go into what they should be going into, what they’re interested in . . . I do sincerely believe that what we’re teaching is not necessarily for everybody.

David also talked about helping mentor students to assure they’ve chosen the right career:

When we’re interviewing students for our master’s program, there’s already this professional development or grooming process, or even mentoring, that’s happening there because we’re trying to present to them, not just coming here if you’re interested or think it’s a good match, but what you’ll end up becoming over time. So, I think that process starts early on there. Later, David reiterated the importance of helping students determine career fit. He stated an important component of gatekeeping is helping students “clarify what [their] goal in life is professionally, and they we can help [them] decide if they want to stay [in the Counseling Program] or transition into a more appropriate lane.”
Kristin and Rosa both talked about helping students find the right track within the counseling field. That sometimes it’s not a matter of steering them away from counseling altogether, but helping them find the particular niche in which they can succeed. Kristin suggested:

If people can perform the job, there’s a minimal level of competency that you can have and you can graduate. That doesn’t mean you would hire that person, but they possess a minimal level of competency . . . And, sometimes it’s a matter of population specific, where it’s like, “Yeah, that person would do great in these areas, and they should probably stay away from this [other area].”

Rosa highlighted:

In some ways, gatekeeping is a career counseling kind of role. It’s really looking at the right person in the field. Not everybody can work with trauma, not everybody can work with children and adolescents, not everybody can work with perhaps clients who are self-injuring.

Understanding career development and providing students the opportunity to better understand what counseling entails, and to help determine whether or not they are suited for the field, becomes an important skill for counselor educators to develop when honing their gatekeeping competence.

**Competence subtheme 4d: Counselor-educator dispositions.** In addition to knowledge and skills, participants also identified dispositions, or characteristics, of competent gatekeepers.

**Self-awareness.** Self-awareness, or personal insight, was a characteristic of competency identified by many of the participants.

David considered his own self-awareness, and recognizing his biases, as an important factor in helping him make gatekeeping decisions. He explained:

What I would offer is that this idea that while gatekeeping is in some respects like we’re looking at who gets to enter into the gates and who doesn’t—sort of the role we play as
gatekeepers is to actually influence the people coming through the gate. Meaning, this person may or may not be ready: is it me or them? And, if it is them, then what influence do I have, or ability do I have, to help get them ready? And if it’s me, then how can I do the work on myself so that I’m more open to seeing the potential in somebody that challenges the biases that I have?

David also talked about, “holding my biases at bay and/or at least first being aware of what they could potentially be and how that frame or lens is influencing the way I’m looking at the student's reaction to me.” David said that gatekeeping requires:

Having a keen sense of awareness of when and where and how you go about applying these [skills] towards students. When it is really necessary and when it just becomes sort of a struggle or a fight that might not really be necessary? And I don't know how you always decide that.

Carol also identified self-awareness as a key component of gatekeeping competence, “So, assessing myself, watching myself and not letting personal stuff get into it, because there’s some things I feel strongly [about] . . . so I have learned not to hold that . . . I have to watch how I interpret things students do or say.”

Sarah talked about self-awareness related to her own boundaries: “I have to be aware of my own boundaries that, ‘I’m not your counselor, I’m your teacher.’” Sarah also explained keying in to her “perception” about a student is an important part of the gatekeeping process:

If I’m feeling a certain way, there has to be a reason. So, what is that feeling? Why is it hitting me that way? And again, I think we have to be very specific. It can’t just be like, “Well I feel like I didn’t like this person.” I need to make sure that I am as clear headed as I can be and non-biased in the moment. And I think when we come into an interview or we are screening or working with students, it can be very easy to have other outside factors come in, just as when we're counseling clients. So how do we ensure that we're giving them the opportunity that they deserve?

Sarah also talked about self-awareness, being able to self-assess:

Would I have rated somebody similarly yesterday when I was less crabby? Right? Having that internal dialogue is really important. I notice if I'm tired, I've been grading or I've been teaching and then I get five new application packets, probably not the best time for me to do it. So being able to check in with myself is really important. And even
sometimes saying it out loud with a colleague like, “Uh, I probably shouldn't be doing this right now,” is helpful. So just knowing my own boundaries when it comes to, “Okay I've pushed myself too hard today.” Or, maybe I have too much going on, let me start fresh tomorrow where I can look at this with a fresh set of eyes and give this person the opportunity to look how they wanted to look without my own stuff coming in.

Rosa also identified self-awareness as an important characteristic of gatekeeping competence. She provided an example, such as:

> Asking myself and being aware when something’s really getting at me, someone. I ask myself, “Why is this student or situation bothering me so much?” Rather than saying, “Man, this student. They're just so—.” I ask myself, “Why are they bothering me so much?” And really being mindful and intentional to carve out ways to manage my own emotional response to the whole thing and having my grounded self.

Kristin also talked about the importance of self-awareness when assessing students. She said she looks within and considers:

> Here's the reaction I'm having. What's this about? Is there a reaction I'm having to this specific student or is this a reaction other people are having? And then we use that self-awareness to bring things up to our students, like, “Here's what I'm noticing, as far as my reaction to your tone or to your overall presentation or this or that,” but I think I first look at is it me to be like, “Am I just reacting because of my own stuff or are the rest of my colleagues also experiencing the student in this way?”

These examples clearly demonstrate the importance participants place on their own insight and self-awareness within the gatekeeping process. Being able to differentiate when reactions to students are in response to personal triggers versus when those reactions are universally experienced by all program faculty is an important characteristic of competent gatekeepers.

**Flexibility.** Flexibility is another characteristic participants identified leading toward gatekeeping competence.

Tonia said:

> I don’t want to be so rigid that I’m like, “No one can get in; you have to meet my standards in order to, you know, be a counselor.” Because there’s some students I’ve been like, hmmm, but they’ve turned out to be amazing counselors. So, I don’t want to
base it on my standard. I do want to have some flexibility in terms of how I view students and their ability.

Carol stated that she doesn’t want preconceived ideas to influence her perception of students. She said, “There was a reason why we didn’t want to talk about students, that it’s almost like if I tell you that [so-and-so student] is a real pain, then you’re ready for the pain walking in.”

David explained:

The perception I have as an individual, as myself like when I look in the mirror, I just want to be one who's like fair and balanced and also open to helping individuals grow who don't necessarily look like me or think the same way. So, it's just being open and flexible in that have a set of values and standards and sort of ideals I believe but the world continues to change and how I can be open and flexible in that context and maybe realize things that I didn't know either about myself or about how I react to other people.

Kristin also indicated flexibility in gatekeeping is important. She explained she strives for not being “super critical while also not letting things go because you don't know necessarily what the behavior means until you understand it, sometimes in multiple contexts. I look at my ability to have those hard conversations with students when needed.”

Rosa emphasized the importance of flexibility in gatekeeping policies and procedures:

The tighter and more robust a program's policies and procedures are, the better our ability to gatekeep. Concurrently, the policies and procedures can't be so tight that there's no flexibility for interpretation. So, if we lock it down too much, the gate may be too narrow, where gatekeeping can be a life-changing event for someone done effectively. It could be the turning point for a student in the program and in their lives if the policies and procedures support that kind of effort.”

Compassion. Compassion was another characteristic that emerged when participants were talking about characteristics of competent gatekeepers.

Rosa described compassion with the term the “heart of the gatekeeper,” explaining:

The heart of the gatekeeper matters. The heart of the counselor educator matters. The heart of the supervisor matters. The heart of the—who I am matters, and I think it adds an extra level or layer of calling to self-care that we don't think about. We think about
self-care for rest. We think about self-care for food. We think about self-care for pleasure or fun. But self-care is also coming back and remembering who we are, what we stand for, and what our goals are.

Tonia also suggested that a competent gatekeeper has compassion. She mentioned having “compassion and the patience,” are essential, explaining you need both in order “to be a teacher, a coach, and a mentor all at the same time.” She suggested, “we're wearing several hats as gatekeepers. You have to have a knowledge of the field in order to be a gatekeeper, and compassion to work with students who are struggling.” Kristin also identified “objectivity and compassion” as important characteristics of a competent gatekeeper.

Humility. Humility was another characteristic that was important to some participants.

Rosa identified humility as an important characteristic, explaining gatekeeping “requires humility. If my goal is to have a successful outcome, I’ve got to be humble and not get sucked into a power struggle.” David also suggested while gatekeeping, a counselor educator needs to be humble:

The characteristic of gatekeeping is where it’s not about me being the one who’s holding folks at bay, not letting them in or not letting them advance, but one of which is humble in that the role we’re playing is really to advocate on behalf of clients, families and community members and as a result, how do we, with humility, really be honest and open when a student isn’t measuring up? We might like them. We might have had conversations that were very positive and favorable, but just something’s not measuring up and how do we, with humble attitudes and hearts, really put ourselves out there? So, I think another one [characteristic] would be humility and risk taking, like put ourselves out there to say, “You know what? You’re not measuring up and we care enough about you and/or the work we’re engaging in to bring that to your attention.”

Courage and leadership. David and Rosa also identified courage and leadership as characteristics of competent gatekeepers.

David talked about the importance of courage, providing an example:
If we're at a committee meeting and one student is brought up and three or four of us are having the same issue, sometimes it's easier to just pass the buck and say, “You deal with it,” versus stepping up and being the leader in that to say, “You know what, I'm going to take a fair and balanced approach. I'm going to be humble in my work with this student, going to take the risk of putting myself out there to actually engage them,” and then to make that happen. That would be effective and the risk taking is important because sometimes we make mistakes where that we didn't notice that there was bias coming through, so putting ourselves out there really is kind of risky.

Rosa also mentioned courage as an important component of gatekeeping. She explained:

I have to have the courage to say [to a student], “Okay, the way you're going about this, what I'm hearing you say, is this. This is not moving you towards getting to stay, or this is not moving you away from consequences.” I just want to be really clear about that, and I have to be able to stand in that heat. So, courage, I think is important.

Rosa also spoke the need for courage to tolerate the difficult, ambiguous situations that arise while gatekeeping. She stated that gatekeeping competence includes “the ability to tolerate ambiguity . . . because every single gatekeeping case is going to be ambiguous.” She suggested it is an important trait in counselor education as a whole; “it’s the very same thing that we’re asking our students.”

Gatekeeping competence requires more than just knowledge and skill; it requires specific dispositional characteristics such as self-awareness, flexibility, compassion, humility, and courage. Many of these dispositions of competent gatekeepers are the same characteristics they are looking for within their students.

**Competence subtheme 4e: The relationship.** Another important component participants identified in assessing gatekeeping competence is the ability to consider the relationship between faculty and students.

When giving feedback to a practicum student about her skills in a session, Carol described that the student started to cry because “she thought I was telling her that she was
terrible, awful. . . And then, afterwards, she started to cry in appreciation for the help. But, I mean, she was just so afraid she was going to fail.” Carol further highlighted the importance of building relationships with students, explaining, “You’ve got to get [students] comfortable. [Students] trust me. So then, with that trust, we can build a relationship to work on things together.” She questioned, “But, I don’t know if that’s gatekeeping, so much, but it’s building the trust and the understanding of each other. Yeah, I guess, it’s a little bit like gatekeeping.”

Joyce also identified the importance of relationship, stating, “I think there has to be a level of trust and rapport, just that should be built in there, because this is not a prison and you’re not the warden. You care about the person—but just being able to confront, coach, and lead.”

Sarah, too, identified the relationship with students as an important factor in her role as a gatekeeper. She explained:

When I notice that things could be a little off, it's taking the time to have meetings and getting to know what's going on with the student a little bit better, but within my boundaries. I can only take it this far and then I say, “You know what? It sounds like you might really be struggling and this might be an opportunity for me to refer you to our student support team and maybe they can talk to you.” So proper referrals and following up I think become part of it as well.

And, Rosa said:

I believe that gatekeeping is relational. You can’t have successful gatekeeping outcomes without a relationship with the student. You can have all the rigor you want. If there is no relationship—they may fulfill my expectations, but they may not make the soul change that I’m hoping for . . . Gatekeeping is reliant upon a meaningful and trusted relationship . . . We’re not going to make change in a person’s mind, in their heart, unless we have a relationship.

Similar to the counseling relationship between client and counselor, the relationship between student and faculty sits at the core of gatekeeping.
Competence subtheme 4f: Multicultural considerations. Participants suggested multicultural competence translates into gatekeeping competence. They identified how of issues of diversity come into play when making gatekeeping decisions.

Tonia talked about the impact of diversity on her role as a gatekeeper, indicating that she sometimes holds her African American students to a higher standard than students from other racial or ethnic groups:

And maybe it might seem like I'm harder on similar ethnic backgrounds to my own. It may seem like I am a bit harder on them, and they say that all the time. Like, “You're very strict” and I'm like, “Well, this is my expectation.” In some ways we, from an African American perspective, we have to be better and we have to achieve higher or be more excellent because of the perception in society. So, we have to be on point. You don't have an opportunity not to. But that's my expectation, and there's no leniency when it comes to that. Because I know when you get out in the field, that's going to be the expectation, that you have to perform at a certain level just because of who you are.

When asked about multicultural considerations for gatekeeping, Joyce responded, “You know what, I can’t say that that’s a big factor.” On the other hand, David said, “I think they are significant,” elaborating:

It's significant. The interaction, the intersection of our identities. To me, my own personal spirituality and/or what people see, what I see and how I react to that and then their reaction to me, how well they'll receive feedback by a man depending on who it is, from a black man depending on who it is, from someone who maybe doesn't present like they've been in the field as long as I actually have been, things of that nature. Then collectively, when I'm talking about the student or presenting the student to my peers, What are their reactions to that? What if they really like the student? The student is this way or that way? How I hear or receive feedback that my peers are giving about students that they're bringing up, are they all low-income students? Are they all students who are returning? Do they have children at home; they're coming late and there're some other things that we're not really taking into consideration? Do they have student loans? Are they wealthy kids who are just out of college, just hanging out? So, to answer your question, diversity plays a big role in gatekeeping.

Carol talked about the impact of religion as a multicultural consideration for gatekeeping:

Right now, we have some very religious people that concern me. Because, although we are a religious institution, I'm not training people to be religious counselors. So, we get
into this thing about certain groups of people. We also get into the thing that, “God will take care . . .” and that’s all good and well, from a religious point of view. But you cannot counsel like that. So, to try to do that in a way to get them to understand that that's not [how counseling works]; that's an aha. It's a religious institution, so how do you get them to understand that unless you're going to do that kind of counseling, which is fine, you can do church counseling, church work. That's great. But if you're going to be counseling in the school system or in a not-for-profit that's not religiously affiliated, and doesn't have this as one of their things that they talk about, you cannot go at people like this. Well, I mean that's just a different kind of a prejudice.

Kristin said she and her department have talked about generational differences as multicultural issues, recognizing “the generational aspects of the changing student population. How do we, as a program, adjust to those changes?” She also stated that “we have a diverse faculty and so we are all monitoring each other for could be potential biases or judgments.”

Kristin emphasized the importance of creating equal opportunity for all students, explaining:

As far as diversity concern in gatekeeping, looking at disadvantaged or non-privileged social classes that are coming into our program and making sure that it's a level playing field as far as there are resources being put into the students across the board, not population specific or social class specific. And we have varying levels of social class in our program. I think, in higher education, you start to see, based upon the university, that social class becomes an issue. That's not something we have here at [my university] and I think that goes, again, back to our [diverse] admission base.

Sarah explained her program faculty are hoping to help “people that are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, talking about diversity from that perspective and providing equity and access to certain things, I think is meaningful for many of us. And we want to make that happen.”

Rosa said she feels sometimes “there’s a doublespeak when it comes to social justice initiatives.” She explained:

Aspiring social justice versus reality based social justice are, in my opinion, worlds apart, because I can't undo the things that disempower people. I can't undo that. I can only take so much liberty with the academic expectations of [my university]. If I look at someone who has clearly less of an education or a compromised educational background, and it's clear to me, perhaps based on a writing sample, based on transcripts, or even based on
their own narrative and their story, and I see that they're not a fit, because they're about to spend $150,000 a minimum to come to this program, and if I see on paper they're not going to make it, they're just not going to be successful, they're not going to get caught up, I believe that it would be best to not admit them to the program, because I just can't see the wisdom in that. Yet, social justice initiatives tell us to take poverty or compromised education situations into consideration when we're looking at admissions.

Rosa questioned:

Am I really helping the student by admitting them to a program where they will likely fail? I can't undo the compromised education situation. I just can't. But if I don't admit them, am I upholding the boundary of the learning gap? When they say folks just need to have a seat at the table, they need to be able to be exposed to this level of education as those who were privileged about it. So, this is where I get frustrated with diversity, multiculturalism.

Rosa also further described some nuances considering gatekeeping from a multicultural perspective:

Then once [disempowered, marginalized students] get here, how do we have meaningful and productive, productive I think is the keyword here, conversations around cultural diversity? For me to tell someone who has been in a marginalized population not to present as angry at the injustice could effectively be seen as silencing them, yet I am also called to uphold a level of professional behavior that is acceptable, not intimidating. And so, the person on the receiving end, perhaps, of that student's anger, may feel threatened and unsafe. And that student also has rights. So, that makes it complicated, right?

Participants noted that diversity impacts their gatekeeping competence in multiple ways. Most participants saw elements of multicultural competence emerging within their conceptualization of gatekeeping competence, whereas others felt diversity played a less significant role. Overall, participants discussed the ways in which cultural considerations factor into their gatekeeping decision-making.

Participants identified many components of gatekeeping competence. Skills, knowledge, and characteristics play a role in how participants conceptualize gatekeeping competence, but they also spoke of aspects such as the interpersonal process of the student/teacher relationship and multicultural competencies embedded within gatekeeping competence.
Theme 5: Barriers to Effective Gatekeeping

Although participants identified the skills, knowledge, and characteristics essential for effective gatekeeping, they also recognized some barriers to competently carrying out their roles and responsibilities as gatekeepers in the counseling profession.

Barriers subtheme 5a: Lack of clearly-defined guidelines. Some participants identified the subjectivity inherent in gatekeeping and a lack of clearly defined guidelines as barriers to effective gatekeeping.

Sara said:

Maybe one of the most difficult challenges that we have as faculty when we come together is we all see things slightly differently, or we all have ideas, and I think we’re trying to be more solution-focused instead of problem-focused, but the system that we’re set up in just takes so much time to implement anything slightly different, that the conversation’s almost left hanging . . . I think it’s being able to have those conversations, but also being willing to change and shift through that process.

Joyce described her experience with a lack of clearly defined guidelines, stating:

Although I mentioned concerns, I never really felt it was a priority for them to explore the behaviors of students. [There was] super nice rapport in the department, but not much direction or guidelines. Only being told to do what I thought was best. I felt trusted, but out on a limb.

Barriers subtheme 5b: University administration. University administration was another commonality all participants identified as a barrier to gatekeeping. The participants suggested that university administrators often do not understand the nuances of gatekeeping and are more concerned with admitting and retaining high numbers of students than ensuring proper gatekeeping procedures are addressed.
Carol gave an example:

If I find that [a student] doesn’t fit, then I encourage them to drop the program. The university as a whole doesn’t like that . . . And, I’ve told the vice president of academic affairs, so he knows this, but the students will always be first . . . so the students get what they need . . . And this idea of gatekeeping, I’ll bring things from the outside, I’ll do what I need to do, over and above what the university thinks you should do . . . but the university doesn’t encourage us to remove students.”

Tonia expressed challenges with balancing university expectations with what is appropriate for the field:

So, I know we talk about graduation rates and retention and all of that, and we're going to have to figure out how to balance that with gatekeeping because when we start doing more staunch gatekeeping, that may impact our graduation rate and our retention rate . . . I don't even know how CACREP would feel about it, but from a program level if we're not allowing students to move forward into the field because they're not suited for the profession, we're doing a really good job, but the university might be like, "But now your graduation rate is so much lower." And so, if we're at odds with how we're defining success, that'll be hard, and I think too the issue of just even enrollment and admissions into the program, there's such a push to be accepting and getting high numbers, and we need to meet a certain number to make the cohort run, and it's like well, “but if they're not really suited [it’s a problem].”

David shared a similar experience:

One perception I have is to be the gatekeeper and be really intentional about who we allow into our program from the beginning. I think doing the hard work then pays off in the long run. The rub there, if you will, or the tension is that our university School of Ed would love to have more numbers, so then get them in and try to get them through versus don't let them in because they might not make it.

And, Sarah, too talked about this issue:

I think sometimes it’s a numbers game. Universities want to see certain numbers [of students admitted]. And if the numbers are down, there’s that pressure to [admit sometimes questionable applicants]. If we needed to push for the numbers because that’s what the administration was saying, we did it. And it didn’t feel good . . . Those are the typical students that end up eating up much more time once they’re in. Because these people will be in the classroom. And how much time will they take up, that can damage the potential for learning [for other students] along the way? And then our time, right? If we're trying to meet with them to help them navigate it, it eats up a lot of time that might not be necessary.
Rosa suggested:

I think gatekeeping relies on the institutional policies and procedures . . . having to protect the program and having our decisions, our gatekeeping decisions and practices, challenged by an institution that doesn’t understand counseling and doesn’t understand all of our gatekeeping lenses and having to justify that . . . the university fears lawsuits.

Additionally, Joyce said, “Gatekeeping is really like the personality of the school, like what the administration puts forth.” Later, Joyce reiterated this idea:

Gatekeeping is only as strong as the policies of the university . . . It depends on the system . . . [Counseling Programs] all have different personalities; they all have different procedures . . . So, gatekeeping depends on those decisions—it goes from the top down.”

Pressures from the university administration often negatively impact counselor educators’ ability to perform gatekeeping responsibilities, particularly regarding admission and retention rates. Participants spoke of feeling torn between the need to perform gatekeeping in an ethical, responsible way and adhering to a directive from their administrators to increase the numbers of students within their programs.

**Barriers subtheme 5c: Missed opportunities for gatekeeping.** In addition to interference from university administration, participants identified some other barriers to gatekeeping, in which gatekeeping responsibilities sometimes are pushed aside. They identified that faculty can be so overwhelmed with other responsibilities that some minor gatekeeping needs might fall aside to more immediate, pressing concerns. When these concerns are put on the backburner, sometimes gatekeeping issues are identified or addressed too late to take action.

**Counseling faculty are overwhelmed with responsibilities.** Many participants suggested that counselor educators’ myriad responsibilities can create barriers to gatekeeping.

Joyce admitted that gatekeeping “hasn’t seemed like it’s been a top priority in all the places I’ve worked.” She explained:
It's not necessarily a willingness factor. It's an innocent, “Oh, we don't have a system for that” or “I'm too busy.” “The CACREP visit is happening,” or “Oh, my gosh, we're hiring, and so-and-so quit.” And it's like, “Alright, we have bigger fish to fry.” That's what it is . . . We've just got to get the bigger picture and move [students] along. Unless it's really bad.

Sarah described the time commitment related to gatekeeping responsibilities, pondering:

So, after how many meetings are you going to check in with students in order to resolve a gatekeeping issue? Help the student understand, are they meeting the expectations? And can we hold to that? I think we tend to take a lot on as well. So, it would be very difficult, I think, for me to say, “Oh yeah, I'll take on six weeks of meetings with somebody.” And then things come up or it doesn't happen. We can't do that. Before we know it, we're pushed on to the next task or the next thing, so it kind of falls to the wayside.

Carol suggested, “many [faculty] are not going to want to put that kind of work into it, and that’s part of the problem.”

Rosa also identified busyness, overwhelm, and a lack of organization as a barriers to effective gatekeeping. In her administrative role, she often needs solid evidence from her faculty to take action on gatekeeping concerns. She said:

When I'm asking people for "Where's your data? Where's your information that supports your concern?” Folks have post-it notes, they have emails, they have—I don't think they're trying to be sloppy. I think we're all incredibly busy, and we want to assume the best of our students. And then, by the time [a situation] escalates to a gatekeeping level of concern, when this may have been percolating for weeks or months, assembling all that [evidence] is [challenging].

**Students have come so far.** Many participants said that they sometimes catch gatekeeping issues “too late,” when students have already advanced significantly in their course sequence. They expressed feeling that it would be unfair to prevent students from continuing to move forward after they have come so far in the program. They suggested that sometimes gatekeeping concerns are not as apparent in academic courses, but can become more pronounced when a student begins working with clients during their field placement. They blame their own
lack of intervention in earlier courses for getting in the way of effective gatekeeping at the
practicum or internship level.

Carol said:

We get in positions where we see people who are not really the best qualified, but they’ve
taken all the courses, they’ve passed the courses, and then when they get to internship,
that’s where we have some problems sometimes because they are not fit for that
particular job in the same way the other students are. But, there’s nothing we can do
about that . . . there should be something early on to direct them someplace else . . . to
counsel them out of counseling. But the university doesn’t have to do anything, unless
[the student has] done something terrible.

Carol also identified a lack of consistent contact with students throughout their program as an
additional factor that impedes gatekeeping early in the program, explaining:

The issue with teaching is, you don’t have them all the way through. And, you don’t see
these kind of things until you’re at the end, because you’ve never put them in that kind of
[real life] situation . . . but they’re not being who they’re going to be until you see them
when they’re with a situation on the job.

Carol elaborated:

You’re thinking, “How the heck did this person get here?” And so, it’s very, very scary. And then, things they’ve done in their internship [like] telling people how to live their
lives, what to do, it’s like, “Oh, my gosh!” But, again, you’ve taken them this far, this is
the end, so now what do you do? How do you turn that around? And then, you’ve taken
this tuition, all this time like, “You’re good. You’re going to [graduate].” And now
you’re going to say they can’t finish. But, we’ve had people that had to do their
internship three times because they failed their internship . . . Three times was the key,
but we’re talking a long period of time, another whole year because [we] didn’t catch
anything along the way.

Kristin also spoke about gatekeeping issues that arise when students do well academically in
courses leading up to field placement:

It’s more concerning when a student can academically perform, and then they get to field
placement and it all blows up—because there’s a difference between being able to
perform academically in a course, and being able to apply and manage oneself in a
professional manner on site. That’s usually where the issues blow up. Then, it’s like,
“Well, this student has completed thousands of dollars’ worth of education.” How do we
navigate the process of, “You can’t continue,” which means they can’t graduate?
Tonia identified this concern as well and suggested that, since supervising practicum and internship courses, she has become more cognizant of the need to catch gatekeeping concerns earlier:

Having [students] for one or two courses and seeing a couple things versus having them throughout practicum and internship and seeing gaping holes in their knowledge or awareness—that’s what kind of shook things up for me . . . During my first year teaching practicum and internship, that’s when I was like, “Oh no, we cannot let them get to this point.”

And, David shared his unease over the injustice to students, saying, “Imagine getting all the way to practicum and then having to let students go. It seems kind of crazy.”

Carol spoke about an additional concern related to gatekeeping “too late.” She described losing particular internships sites because of problematic students at the field placement level. She said, “I think what’s happening is having problems with students in the internship and practicum, serious problems. Then, losing sites because of those problems.” Carol said in these cases, gatekeeping is “not so much even for the benefit of the student, but [to keep from] losing sites.” She pondered, “So how do we try to eliminate that?”

Participants identified clear problems that emerge when gatekeeping issues are not identified prior to field placement. They suggested it is unfair to prevent students from moving forward after they have invested so much time, money, and effort in their education without receiving any previous feedback or recognition of areas of concern. However, participants also noted that allowing students to continue in field placement despite these gatekeeping concerns is equally problematic. This dilemma is clearly a barrier to effective gatekeeping and an area that participants identified as needing to be remedied.
Barriers subtheme 5d: Personal costs. Some participants spoke about the personal costs of gatekeeping, stating that sometimes the impact of gatekeeping can be so personally difficult, that they might shy away from carrying out the challenging aspects of gatekeeping, creating another barrier to gatekeeping competence. This avoidance of gatekeeping leads to other concerns, so participants recognized the importance of finding a balance between protecting themselves from the emotional pain of gatekeeping while also protecting the profession from the consequences of failed gatekeeping.

Rosa identified some personal barriers, stating, “I think the harder part of it is, as counselors, we really care for the human condition and we want to help people feel good about themselves and gatekeeping is counterintuitive to that.” She spoke in depth about not being prepared for the personal cost of gatekeeping prior to actually experiencing it:

I will always pay a price for gatekeeping. It's not like balancing a checkbook or balancing a budget—I will always pay a price. Sometimes the price is grieving alongside a student, because I'm the instrument. So, I will always pay a price for gatekeeping, and I don't think that's ever talked about in the literature; the personal and professional cost of gatekeeping, that gatekeeping will cause people to scrutinize you in ways that you had never been scrutinized before. So, in some ways, gatekeeping requires a tough skin, but not so tough that it can't be influenced or shaped. Gatekeeping is a vulnerable position. But, again, and the ACA Code of Ethics can call us to all kind of aspirational ethics, and I get it and I agree and I support it, but no one talks about the cost. And it costs. Every single time it costs . . . The meaningful and important part is I didn't know that this was going to cost me so much and that I've had to learn how not to personalize the scrutiny even though I am being scrutinized, which that's a tall order.

And, Carol spoke about the personal impact when students are angry. She said:

I watch when we get in sessions with the student, as a group, how the faculty back off a little bit. Because the student can get really belligerent. They think this is what they should be doing. [The student says,] “How can you tell me this is not what I'm supposed to be doing? How do you know?” And, “I got an A in my class last time.”

Carol suggested that these types of reactions from students call into question the faculty member’s competence or integrity and can be quite hurtful or intimidating.
On the other hand, Carol also recognized the personal costs of failing to gatekeep, suggesting, “Our profession is being affected by us not doing the gatekeeping. [When we fail to gatekeep], people out there will say, ‘That [counselor] I talked to, she didn't know a thing—didn't know what she was talking about.’” Carol suggested when counselor educators fail to prevent inappropriate counselors from entering the field, they do so at great cost to the profession. She said an ill-suited counselor:

negates what counselors really know how to do. Because if people meet up with them, that kind of [inappropriate] person first, they're not going to anybody again. So, I think that to maintain our profession, in a way that presents what we really know how to do well, we need to do [gatekeeping].

Later in the interview, Carol reiterated this point, saying, “If you want to keep your job as a counselor, you have to get rid of the people who don’t counsel well and are making us all look bad.” Carol recognized an additional cost related to ineffective gatekeeping, suggesting that counselor educators “are responsible, in some ways, as a mentor, as a facilitator, for whatever the student is doing. So, your license is on the line.”

These examples speak to the many barriers that counselor educators face when presented with gatekeeping challenges. From poorly outlined policies and procedures, to university administrators concerned with the bottom line, to failure to gatekeep due to lack of opportunity to observe skills in action prior to field placement, or fear of angry, belligerent students, participants clearly feel unable to competently engage in gatekeeping consistently. They recognize the need for effective gatekeeping, but acknowledge that, sometimes, some barriers prevent them from following through as effectively as they may aspire to.
Theme 6: Improving Gatekeeping

Given the importance participants place on the ethical responsibilities of gatekeeping and on maintaining gatekeeping competence, as well as the barriers they identified, participants acknowledged the need to improve gatekeeping policies, procedures, and practices in order to enhance gatekeeping competence within the profession. Participants spoke of the types of educational experiences or on-the-job training they wish they would have had, identified some gatekeeping needs they have in their current work, provided examples of what is currently working for them as gatekeepers, and offered some suggestions of how to improve gatekeeping in counselor education.

Improvements subtheme 6a: Improving Gatekeeping at the Doctoral Level.

Participants spoke about what they wish they would have had within their doctoral programs to better prepare them for the responsibilities inherent in gatekeeping. Now that they have worked in the field for a few years, they are able to recognize what was missing and are positioned to provide some recommendations regarding improving gatekeeping education within doctoral Counselor Education and Supervision programs.

Kristin suggested, “it would have been helpful to have a course in the doctoral program that talked about ethics and then professional behavior, to actually really go over remediation plans, and really go over the legal aspect of it. She elaborated, “I think we can talk all day about our responsibility as counselor educators to the field of counseling, but unless you bring in the legal aspect and the rights of the student, you’re really left out there to hang.” She would have
answers to questions such as, “How far can you go as a counselor educator in stopping a person, when it’s really subjective? How can you make the subjective objective?” She recommended:

Doing some classroom assignments and creating remediation plans—I think it would be helpful to do a devil’s advocate piece of What are the legal rights of the student compared to the limitations of a university, and how far can you go? There’s federal pieces as far as you’re accepting student aid money for these students and their courses, and if they’re paying out of pocket, you’re accepting their money. How much can you actually do to prevent them from graduating if they’re passing their courses? I think doctoral programs and class education should include those conversations, those debates, about where are the limits, how far can we go as counselor educators, and even practice writing remediation plans that are legally sound.

Rosa said in her doctoral program:

We talked about developmental model of supervision; we talk about student competency and how that’s developed and I wish gatekeeping was folded into each stage of development. Because the truth is, it looks different at every stage. I wish we talked more about the four pillars of Admission—that we should be evaluating for student admission—I wish I was trained on that. That was another on-the-job thing I learned. So, I wish that there was a cohesive, cogent, gatekeeping training that really, like your pedagogy class or in your Intro to Counselor Ed—On Becoming a Doctoral Student class, whatever it is—that gatekeeping is folded in through everything . . . gatekeeping should be covered in every developmental stage. That is what I wish I was taught.

Sarah said:

I think it would have been helpful to perhaps participate in some of those meetings [in which gatekeeping issues were addressed] with faculty as a doc student, but yet I know we also were kind of toeing the line between confidentiality and faculty roles versus our roles [as doctoral supervisors or instructors]. It was often confusing, I think. We were students, but we had a little bit of a power dynamic over a lot of the [master’s] students, especially as we were teaching. So, I think I was able to report out what I was seeing and was maybe even, at the time, even thankful for being able to walk away from it. I didn’t have to deal with the repercussions that came afterward for the most part. But, I do wish that there had been, now looking back, maybe some more dialogue with the faculty. “This is what we’re thinking of doing. This is our process and procedure. Do you have any questions?” I don’t recall that ever really taking place.

Tonia also suggested what could have been helpful at the doctoral level:

I think I would have loved to have consistent, ongoing training on how to address—I mean, we know how to address certain situations because we’re counselors. But, I think it would be better for us to have formal training and formal mentorship on how to be
effective gatekeepers—how to coach students, how to address those issues and red flags that we see. I think like the experience I had at [my doctoral university] where I was able to supervise students that were in the program while I was a student—that would give them an opportunity to see what a gatekeeper is. And I think that [experiential training] probably would be really good across the board—across all programs. I think that would be really beneficial.

The participants suggested some advice they would have for doctoral students, or things they would want to teach them about gatekeeping. Carol recommended sharing “experiences and insights into what worked and what didn’t work. Probably mostly what didn’t work . . . And then, I would be like a mentor or facilitator; I’d be more than happy to help somebody with this.” Joyce suggested:

I would [provide students] with examples of things I’ve run into and explain the differences in university policies and advise them find out the policies of your university—is it loose? Is it really tight? I would really coach the person to know the rules of the road of where you are.

Rosa said, “I would tell them to consult frequently and to be prepared to be challenged.” Rosa also recommended that students understand “how disciplinary policy and procedure supports gatekeeping. Any policy, and procedure, in my opinion, should be able to be articulated or connected to gatekeeping efforts.” And, Sarah advised that gatekeeping education can be improved by:

Really hitting home the importance of recognizing when something doesn’t feel right. Being able to share and report out when you know that something is going on that’s not right, whether that’s a legal or an ethical issue, or just somebody struggling.

The examples suggest what was missing from participants’ education at the doctoral level.

Contemplating what they wish they would have had, enabled participants to reflect and share some ideas for improvements to gatekeeping education at the doctoral level.
Improvements subtheme 6b: Improving gatekeeping for new faculty. In addition to considerations for gatekeeping education at the doctoral level, participants also had recommendations for supporting new faculty in their role as gatekeepers, primarily in the area of on-the-job training and professional development opportunities.

**Formal training.** Participants identified the need for gatekeeping specific training as part of the onboarding process for new faculty.

Tonia recognized the need for faculty:

To learn how to do [gatekeeping] effectively . . . I think more training would be good—I think that we should have something in place that will give us the opportunity to train appropriately and have ideas and feedback. A kind of give-and-take process of preparing someone to be a gatekeeper.

Tonia suggested that gatekeeping training should address the following questions and provide guidelines for faculty:

What is it that we should be looking for [when training] clinician? If something comes up, how should we remediate it? What else? How we should remediate it if that does come up, and then putting a plan in place at a program or at a department level saying this is how [to remediate]. I mean, we say, “Remediation plan. Remediation plan,” but what does that mean? And how are we measuring or assessing when the student has completed the remediation plan? What are our benchmarks? How are we paying attention to that student? Are we the ones in charge of continuing to mentor that student if we come up with this remediation plan? Then when is the remediation plan over? What’s the final outcome? I think learning how to do those things will be helpful.

Like Tonia, Kristin also lacks clarity on carrying out remediation plans and wish she had been taught more about them as a new faculty member:

I think it’s one thing to know that [remediation plans] need to be in place, but when you make those plans specific to the student, it’s hard to come up with objective things for a student to do when so much of what we do as a counselor is subjective, and so being able to take the subjective into the objective, as far as student behavior. It’s easy when it’s academic related, but it’s not easy when it’s professional dispositions. And you just can’t say, “You’re not good for this field. You’re not a fit.” You can’t say that because it’s a useless statement and, when you look at a remediation plan, it’s not like, “Oh, well, you
don’t fit the picture of a counselor.” You can’t do that, so it’s like, “Alright, how do I take what we’re reacting to, what clients, if it’s happening at a field placement, what the site supervisor is noticing, whether it be client dropout rates or whatever are we noticing, and then objectifying it? That’s my, I would say, main learning process still to go.

Kristin also suggested:

There needs to be formal training overall. It should be part of employee orientation. Well, I would say though, and seriously, a development of some type of standardized training for the field of counselor education that it’s irrelevant which type of program or specialty, private or public university, size of the program. Some standard benchmarks that would be part of training in counselor education would be [essential].

Along these lines, Rosa said, “For all the emphasis that we as an institution place on gatekeeping, we should really have . . . like a faculty in-service around gatekeeping.” And, Sarah suggested it would be helpful to “be trained in a way that’s consistent . . . How do we make sure we are scoring and assessing in quantifiable ways across the board, instead of just, ‘This didn’t feel right to me?’”

Clearly, more opportunities for faculty training would benefit counselor educators when embarking on gatekeeping responsibilities early in their careers.

**Professional development opportunities.** Participants suggested that attending workshops or conference presentations on gatekeeping could be meaningful ways for new faculty to learn more about gatekeeping.

Joyce said, “Looking back, it would’ve been great, whether I had to pay for it or not, a two-day seminar on gatekeeping, maybe have to read a book on it and get a certain certification.” She suggested, “If we had some sort of formal eight-hour seminar, like a structured class or workshop would be good.” And Sarah said, “I think those professional development opportunities that we engage in are probably the most helpful, and then just that open space to be
able to share.” She provided an example of a workshop she had attended that impacted how she thinks about gatekeeping:

I think one of the coolest things I’ve seen so far was at ACES not too long ago. They had a session . . . from [a university] where they actually have a standardized [admission] assessment that they use. In their presentation, they were showing video clips of the interview and asking us to rank based on the description that they had. The majority of us in the audience were able to come up with a similar scaling because we had been trained—this is what a six means; this is what a seven means . . . How can [my colleagues and I] standardize [our] process just a little bit more so we’re on the same page?

In addition to on-the-job training, continuing education and professional development resources could be helpful tools for new faculty to hone their gatekeeping competence.

**Improvements subtheme 6c: Programmatic improvements for gatekeeping.**

Participants recommend many areas for improvement within their programs. Their suggestions included clear gatekeeping policies and procedures, faculty collaboration, preventative measures, and communicating to students about gatekeeping.

**Gatekeeping policies and procedures.** The need for clear, specific gatekeeping policies and procedures was a frequent topic that emerged in the interviews. Participants suggested that gatekeeping could be vastly improved by developing and incorporating precise gatekeeping rules and practices within their counseling programs.

**Definitions.** Some participants suggested that definitions related to gatekeeping would be helpful in assuring gatekeeping compliance.

David said, “what I suspect would be quite helpful is articulating what the definition [of gatekeeping] is, sort of how we do it in a respectful and ethical way, but also how important it is
that you do it.” And, Rosa also identified the need for clarity around gatekeeping-related definitions. She pondered:

What are the dispositions? What are the behaviors that inform bad-fit dispositions? We talk about it; it’s in the code of Ethics; CACREP mentions it, but how do we measure it? So, if we say a disposition is a rigidity of thought, how do we operationalize that? What does that look like? How do we measure it? How do we score it? What is the appropriate amount of flexibility? Can we make a scale? Can we make a measure? How do we measure an openness to feedback?

Sarah concurred there is a need for faculty to be able to “quantify what we’re looking for [as gatekeepers].”

**Rubrics.** One way to define and measure dispositional characteristics or student performance is through rubrics. Many participants identified evaluative rubrics as essential tools that enhance gatekeeping.

Sarah gave an example of the benefit of utilizing rubrics when assessing students:

Having clear rubrics in terms of what we’re looking for is really important. I noticed when things are a little bit too ambiguous, it’s difficult to rate somebody. So, just because I get a weird feeling from somebody doesn’t mean that it justified not letting somebody in [to the program . . . It is important to outline]: These are the behaviors that I’m looking for, and did this application meet that?

David described a student disposition rubric they use in his Counseling Program as a useful tool; he explained:

I think the point we try to raise is that these professional dispositions are, in some ways, utilized for gatekeeping in that it gives us a way to provide feedback to students apart from their grades. So if there are other things that are going on, how do we correct or bring to light these challenges? And a student can get an A in the class but still be difficult to work with or disrespectful or not open to multiculturalism and diversity and things of that nature and so the professional dispositions gives us room to [assess] that.

He noted some challenges with the form, however, indicating it is “still subjective, even with the quantitative numbers. [For example,] is the student that we're targeting, are they like that in every class or just this class? What's that about?” He further described the process of using the
form in all courses in the program in order to increase reliability by having multiple faculty
review the same student throughout the program. He explained:

We had dialogue about initially doing these reviews every few classes, not every class, so
like one or two in the beginning, one or two in the middle, and then the practicum on
internship. What we decided, let's say that student was in my class, so I evaluated them
on professional disposition three or four different times and there's some consistent
issues—might it be the subjectivity of the professor versus the student, will the student
say “No fair, he's picking on me? So, we decide d just to do it in every class.

David described the benefits of the student disposition rubric:

So this [rubric], to me, provides some more structure and accountability guidance in a
framework of okay, we're going to do it every class, we're going to meet more regularly,
we're going to notify students this is what we're doing and therefore, it forces us to have a
systematic way of going about the work so that we don't let people slip through the
cracks. It's not a lot of students that end up needing some remediation but the one or two
that actually do, they could become problematic and so it's a big deal to know that in
some cases if we don't address it now, it has implications of their professional practice in
the future and why not address it while we can.

He further explained, “it’s sort of a work in progress, an exercise to engage in, that will be fair
and equitable, but still recognizing it’s not perfect.”

Although not perfect, rubrics can provide structure and a standard way of assessing
students, which can help counselor educators be consistent and fair in their gatekeeping
practices.

**Methods.** Participants also recommended having clear guidelines of *how-to* put
gatekeeping into practice. Some suggestions included gatekeeping handbooks, check-lists, or
procedural manuals to outline gatekeeping procedures and practices.

Rosa suggested a standardized, “*Gatekeeping 101* manual that everyone can buy and use”
would be helpful, but she followed up, explaining, “That's impossible though, because it's going
to vary by university.” Tonia also recommended having a manual. She said:
I think you set a guidebook. That would be beneficial. What to look for, how to recognize it, roleplays, and different things that would develop our skills. If it can't be at the doctoral level, maybe it could be something that would be kind of a continuing education thing for us . . . and, I think that it's easier to have something like that where everything is in one place, and that you can get your hands on it, and you can flip to the section you need. So, a manual. I'm a fan of structure and systems, and to me, that's part of the system.

Joyce suggested:

There could almost be a gatekeeping checklist—a clear policy about the navigation of Gatekeeping from A to Z . . . [something] very concrete. I feel we should have structured system in place for each student. We don’t have a law book. How can you enforce the law if there is no law?

Kristin also recommended a:

Do’s and Don’ts Checklist [describing]: Where do your boundaries lie as a counselor educator, in what you can and cannot do? What are the legal rights of a student? What are the legal rights of a university, as far as what you can stop a student from doing? What are your limits? You’ve got to address these things and also, you don’t want to get yourself sued.

Some of the information that could be included in these guidebooks or manuals would help participants better understand the policies and procedures of gatekeeping within their programs.

Rosa said, “if there was a better articulated policy around documenting behaviors that are a concern, I think a lot of [problems] can be mitigated.” She suggested, “there should be many steps that demonstrate the program’s investment in the student, in remediating the student and retention, retaining the student.” Rosa suggested having a “gatekeeping method” would be helpful. For example, when faculty identified gatekeeping issues within her program, she wondered:

How do I pull all of the information? Sometimes it'll be multiple faculty that have a concern about a student, and they're all reporting it to me. So, I can say, “Oh, wow. There's four people concerned about something about this student.” Now I have to go back to all four of them and say, “I need you to write this up.” So, how do they write it up
then? Do I give them a format? Do I give them a table? Do I give them a Word
document? Then what do they put in there? Do they copy and paste emails? Oh, gosh, the
method is incredibly complicated, and there is no template.

Given these issues, Rosa began implementing a process to address these concerns. She provided
an example of the method she had created at her university:

One of the things that I’ve put in place is something called a summary of conversation.
So, we [students and faculty] can have these conversations face-to-face like this, but then,
as soon as that’s done, I’m sending an email saying, “Thank you for meeting with
[faculty member] and [faculty member]. We talked about this. You said this; I said that.
Here’s our solution.” That has helped our gatekeeping process so much to do that. It’s
cumbersome; it’s a lot of work, but it has facilitated gatekeeping intentionality, which is
to protect the integrity of the field.

Like Rosa, David also identified the need for clear methods, providing examples of some
questions he currently has around the procedures of gatekeeping:

When we evaluate the students, do we keep it to ourselves or do we share with them? Do
we only share with them if it’s a problem? But, why don’t I tell them they’re doing a
good job? What’s the difference between this [evaluation] and their actual grade? So,
what I’m learning is the need for consistency . . . What do we mean by gatekeeping or
professional dispositions in this case, and how do we communicate that to the students?
And then, what are the areas or ways students can grow and develop or overcome some
of the challenges, if there are any that exist. And right now, that’s not clear.

Kristin also shared David’s need for clarity on gatekeeping:

I think it would be helpful for universities to have purposeful conversations around
remediation before it happens. I think that [currently] gatekeeping tends to be a reactive
role, and the emphasis should really be on the product. How can we do this differently
moving forward for faculty members that join our team so that it’s not a learn by fire
process?

Joyce recognized a need for consistency in gatekeeping practices across her program. She said:

I think the thing that would really be helpful for me is to understand, full-on, what is the
philosophy of our university? And I mean, I’m a rule follower for the most part. I’ll just
go in line like a duck with what I’m told to do. But I don't want to be like, “Hail Mary,”
and if no one else cares, I’m not going to reinvent the wheel . . . Or to get five students in
trouble where the others will be like, “No, it's okay.” And then it would be confusing to
the student.
Participants identified the need for standardized methods, measures, policies, and procedures. They suggested that clarifying these processes and communicating expectations would help improve gatekeeping practices in counselor education.

**Team approach.** Some participants indicated they rely on colleagues when issues of gatekeeping emerge on the job. They stressed the importance of a collaborative approach to gatekeeping and recommended utilizing a faculty team to improve gatekeeping within a counselor education program.

Kristin explained:

> What was helpful was we always had a team in place. There were always multiple professional opinions involved. The team would discuss legal ramifications for the university . . . It was a matter of identifying what’s going on here and how can we help remediate the problem, while also balancing the liability piece for the university, which is important.

She described the specific team approach to gatekeeping they utilize at her university:

> Faculty and staff, anybody who notices any behavior that is of concern, they can put in, we call it a ticket, put in a request for the Care Team, which is made up of the Director of Services, the Director of the Counseling Center, and then they would bring in at least two members of the department, so there’s always multiple viewpoints . . . We meet as a team and discuss [students’] behavior, saying, “Are there other people noticing this?”

Sarah, too, stressed the importance of “not operating alone . . . there has to be some sort of connection to others, just to make sure we’re not [making decisions] by ourselves and that we’re being fair.” She suggested that:

> finding [a colleague] I feel comfortable enough to just reach out and consult with on a consistent basis has been really helpful . . . I think we can learn from each other, especially people who have been in the field for a while. I tend to lean into them and say, “Okay, how did this come across to you?”

Sarah said that recently, they have made these types of gatekeeping part of their routine faculty meetings. She explained:
It’s part of our standard protocol . . . We meet every week as a faculty. If there are things that come up in between, we try to give a heads up. Either it’s documented via email, or we have a meeting outside our regular scheduled meetings to make sure that we are addressing the different situations that might be coming up as a potential red flag. I think making [gatekeeping] part of the process and procedure is really important.

David also talked about the benefit of a team-approach to gatekeeping:

I never try to work with a student by myself or evaluate the student on my own. I always open the dialogue about how is it going for you? Is me being a man of color, me being too friendly or not mean enough . . . so, I try not to do it by myself . . . it's like comparing the student amongst their peer group and working collectively with faculty to make sure that that's not . . . It's not just me, that it's actually them and then trying to provide some real clear cut, concrete strategies for growth and development.

David further explained that some of the conversations he’s had with his faculty team have been helpful in conceptualizing gatekeeping:

We don't use the term gatekeeping but the professional disposition I think is really the closest, it's like how do we hold students accountable towards their growth and development outside of their academic abilities? So the conversation had been around the process, when and where, how we document, who's responsible, can we agree on the terminology, where does it go in the handbook or in the application process, how do we revisit it, how do we communicate to students what's going on, who's responsible for meeting with the students? Is it just the advisor? Is it the professor who notified, is it both? Is that too many adults in one room with the student? Those are the conversations that we've had and they've centered primarily around accreditation because I think prior to [seeking] this accreditation, there was no procedure in place. It was only when I would say the shit hit the fan or it got really bad where faculty were reacting like this is what we need to do and we're scrambling and at this point, there's no real clear cut individual we're struggling with, so the timing is good to do it now because of the accreditation.

David suggested that through these conversations with his colleagues, the importance of a team approach to gatekeeping came to the surface. He said they began to question, “Shouldn’t we all share the load? Let’s say I’m the one who’s constantly telling these students, ‘Hey, you’ve got issues,’ then now I’m the bad guy. So, there’s a need for clarity, for consistency [among faculty].”
Similar to David, Joyce suggested that faculty relationships and team communication are key, explaining that “if we spent more time as a department knowing each other better and how we feel about gatekeeping, I think that would strengthen all of us so much.” Sarah concurred that faculty relationships are an essential piece of gatekeeping. She said, “I think having colleagues that were open to listening, having somebody that I could go to that I trusted, like, ‘Hey, I’m struggling with this person. Can we bring this up?’ and feeling supported in doing so.”

Rosa concurred, “Consultation is number one.”

Tonia talked about some of the conversations she’s had with her team:

We have conversations about students that we're concerned about, and it's recently been a lot of conversation about gatekeeping, not necessarily using that term, but talking about how to migrate through the program. [Students] that may not be a good fit and what we need to do as a campus in recognizing that earlier and giving them the support they need to either improve or remove themselves from the program. So we've been talking about that a lot probably this year, the end of last school year, and the beginning of this year. Because we've been noticing a lot of things that are, I'm not even going to say red flags. We'll say pink flags that make us say, “Well wait a minute, is this a student that should continue on in the program, or is this a student that may need some remediation or support? And maybe return to the program later, or you know take a pause.” But we're having those conversations about how we can better monitor the students that come to the program.

In addition to collegial conversations about gatekeeping with her program faculty, Tonia expanded the team approach to include university administration. She suggested that communication of expectations is an important piece of helping the program faculty, as well as university administrators, better understand the importance of gatekeeping within counselor education. Tonia stated:

What’s important to me is that it becomes more of a focus . . . I think it really needs to be communicated as one of the primary foci of what we do . . . it’s beyond just giving grades and all that. It’s really at the core of what we do. And I think that needs to be communicated more.

When prompted to elaborate to whom it needs to be communicated, she replied:
To us as a faculty. Because I don't know that everybody knows that. I think we're all counselor educators, and we all wanted to teach people how to be counselors, but we focus more on the education aspect than the gatekeeping aspect. So, I think that it should be once it's communicated to us and we adopt that mentality, then it'll be easier to communicate to deans and higher ups and people at the university level because we'll all be on the same page that this is how we operate as a counselor education program.

Participants suggested that gatekeeping works best when it is not an isolated process. Making decisions with colleagues, sharing experiences, and having support of the program faculty and university administration strengthens gatekeeping within counselor education.

**Communicating to students about gatekeeping.** Some participants also spoke about the importance of openly sharing gatekeeping processes and procedures, as well as dispositional or performance expectations with students.

Joyce recommended having open, transparent conversations with students about gatekeeping. She said, “I think [students] should know what [gatekeeping] is, if we’re going to be doing it.” Joyce added, that a function of gatekeeping is “setting the stage” regarding expectations for students.

And, Sarah cautioned:

> When we don’t speak about [gatekeeping] in a way that's open and transparent, I think it leaves [students] more vulnerable to, not slipping through the cracks, necessarily, but, maybe not remembering just how important it is to keep yourself in check along the way . . . So, how do you address those pieces so that individuals know when they are or are not behaving in a way that’s expected?

She provided an example identifying of potential problems that might arise when gatekeeping expectations vary among instructors. She stressed the importance of setting very clear guidelines for students:

> We ask a lot of our students in terms of self-reflection and sharing a lot of themselves. So, what's the border with that? Where's the line that they shouldn't cross? We might say,
“On a scale of one to ten, share between a three and a five.” Well, your three might be very different than my three. So, I [explain] that openly. But I'm not sure that everybody does. And I don't want to see a student get hurt because they share, because they're comfortable and they're trying to learn and then get kind of smacked on the hand a little bit. Faculty say, “So, here, share a lot of yourself, know that I'm going to be looking at it, and I'm also responsible for assessing professional disposition and demeanor.” I think it causes a lot of anxiety for students.

One way to minimize that confusion is to document expectations for students. Sarah suggested,

Gatekeeping starts with your syllabus. Making sure that those pieces are included, but then going over that and explaining what that means to you. And setting up clear expectations for your students, as well as having them have the opportunity to share their expectations with you. And not that we can always meet everything that they have, but having an open dialogue of, “Well this is doable, this is not, and this is why.” I think when students understand or have an inkling of the idea behind why you can or can't do something, they tend to respect it more.

Having clear, transparent communication with students about gatekeeping expectations, as well as making policies, practices, and procedures available to students is an important way to maintain effective gatekeeping.

**Establishing gatekeeping preventively.** Reflecting on the gatekeeping barrier that occurs when students *have come so far* that dismissal becomes problematic, participants suggested that gatekeeping efforts need to be done much earlier within the program.

Joyce indicated that gatekeeping is easier if it’s put into place from the start of the program; she recommended developing clear expectations as students enter the program. She explained:

Prevention is better than fixing it as it goes. I have found that it's easier for me if I'm fresh with the students or cohort to put structure in place than correcting someone else's problems. Or you hear [from students], “Oh, we had no idea because so-and-so let us do it this way.” I think prevention is the cure. I feel the departments that probably would really be right on top of things consistently and not waiting till the end of the program, like, “it’s too late now, let them graduate.” I feel like if this was really put in place, starting with the interview process and even talked about with the students, so they had some accountability—some really strict thing like that.
David also identified the need to practice gatekeeping sooner rather than later, he suggested:

Maybe we can turn the tide and help the student versus like, “Uh-oh, it's too late. They've been this-and-that; and therefore, they've never received this type of feedback and they want to take us to court,” and all these other things that sometimes happen.

Kristin agreed that early identification of concerns is essential for effective gatekeeping:

That’s something we’ve actually talked about in our program: How can we catch things early—early identification of whether it be academic or behavioral dispositions that are being displayed by students, acknowledging those concerning behaviors or academic-related concerns early in order to put a remediation plan in place for a student to be successful. That way, at least there’s evidence in place that behaviors have been noticed and addressed, so when [a student] goes out into field placement, if there’s concerns, it like “Well, we’ve been addressing this.” It’s not a surprise if [the student] ends up getting pulled from field placement or something like that.

Kristin further suggested it the importance of recognizing the legal considerations that support addressing gatekeeping issues sooner rather than later. She explained:

It’s a university issue—what’s the liability of the university when a student has paid all this money? It’s like looking back, “Alright, what have we missed that we could do differently?” We’re really trying as a program to catch these behaviors early on and talk about them as a team, and like, “Okay, you noticed this. I noticed this.” What does that mean in addressing those behaviors so we don’t end up at that professional potential liability issue? [Our program faculty] even met with the university lawyers to say, “Hey, where is our line? What can we do? What can’t we do? We have levels for our remediation, Level One, Two, and Three. How can we start to address these things early on [and document] evidence of concern?”

Some participants recommended improving gatekeeping by examining and potentially changing their admission practices. For example, Joyce indicated:

Our interviewing to get them in the program is a little willy-nilly, and I don’t think it’s hardcore enough to find those things out. So that, to me, it where the gatekeeping starts, at the group interview . . . but I’m thinking the group interview isn’t enough. There should be a one-on-one as well.

Sarah agreed:

The [initial] screening process is so important . . . we have this keen sense that we need to instill more gatekeeping practices [early on] because we have too many students that now require the growth plan or helping them meet their needs so they can be successful.
Kristin also wondered about how to improve admission policies and procedures:

What are some of the initial signs that we can catch at admission so that we don't end up with having to deal reactively? How there can be a more proactive piece of identifying some things, if possible, at admission? In certain cases, when we go back, we look at admission applications, we look, it's like, “We didn't miss anything. That's just the way it goes.” But it's still that piece of what can we do before they enter into the program, the student enters into the program, to keep a high level of integrity in the quality of students entered into the program, while monitoring for all the other pieces?

But, Kristin also identified a shadow side to gatekeeping too early. She explained:

I think I'm currently in a “I'm not sold on this yet” process with my level of engagement in that gatekeeping process from an admissions piece, only because, when I look at ... there's always those outliers, where it's like, “Yeah, that's clear.” We don't have formal interviews as part of our admission process, so that's something that we're going back and forth on, and I'm in the air, like, “Well, but isn't that a level of subjectivity that then adds to biases and turns somebody away because of a temperament mismatch or a personality mismatch?” and I'm not in favor of that. And there could be things we catch, but then we're saying that it's not teachable and aren't we, in the program, saying that these are things are teachable? So, I'm still in a quite a quandary about that.

Participants identified the importance of recognizing, assessing, and attending to gatekeeping issues as early as possible in order to address concerns before students advance too far into their counselor education. They suggested that early intervention is key in order to best support students from the start of a counseling program. Recognizing gatekeeping issues as soon as possible creates greater opportunity for remediation efforts to address concerns, and when dismissal becomes necessary, if caught early enough, prevents students from needlessly investing money, time, and effort on a career path for which they ultimately are not suited.

Participants offered valuable recommendations for improving gatekeeping in the field of education. They reflected upon what was missing from their own doctoral education or professional development early in their careers as counselor educators, and suggested ideas of how to fill in some of those gaps with training or further educational opportunities. They offered some suggestions of the types of policies or guides they wish they had in place to make their
work as gatekeepers run more smoothly. They posed some meaningful questions for counselor educators to consider when reflecting upon the efficacy of their current gatekeeping practices and shared valuable insights regarding some practices that have been implemented within their programs, providing examples of tools or methods that have helped them improve their gatekeeping competence.

**Theme 7: Reconceptualizing “The Gate”**

A particularly interesting and unexpected theme that emerged from the data was participants’ desire to reconceptualize “the gate” in counselor education. Many participants suggested that gatekeeping is a nuanced and not particularly well-defined aspect of their work. Whereas they all felt that gatekeeping is an important role, they shared some existential concern over the power differential inherent in gatekeeping. They posed questions such as:

- Are we seeking to open or close the gate, widen or narrow the gate?
- Do we need to revise how we view the gate?
- Is it ever too late to shut the gate?
- Might we wrongly enforce the gate?
- Can we open the gate on another career path?
- Who sets the gate—the profession, CACREP, the program, the “majority”? What about those students who don’t clearly fit through the gate?

Given these questions, participants explored what it might mean for the profession to redefine or reconceptualize the gate.

**Reconceptualizing “The Gate” subtheme 7a: Redefining gatekeeping.** Many participants said they do not routinely use the word gatekeeping to describe the work that they do and prefer to think of gatekeeping in other terms.
Carol stated:

I have to admit, I don’t use that term [gatekeeping], so it’s not something, if you ask my students, even after graduation. “What is a gatekeeper? They may have to stop and think about that, because they don’t really think in that term . . . I don’t say, “Okay, this is gatekeeping, so you understand what that is.” I haven’t done that so much.

Carol also suggested that the reasons she does not use the term is, “gatekeeper can have kind of a negative connotation, too, that choice of words. So, it would be nice to be some other choice of words. I don’t know what that would be.” Tonia also likes to think of herself in terms other than gatekeeper. She said:

I see myself as more of a collaborator, or mentor, when it comes to gatekeeping, so I’m noticing things early on or whatever stage they are in the program and I can coach and mentor them through their skill development.

Joyce explained that as a gatekeeper, she “just kind of encourages and warns . . . I guess I look at my [role] almost like a coach.”

David shared a similar opinion to some of the other participants, explaining:

The term [gatekeeping] really has a negative connotation as far as I'm concerned. Just, I don't know historically what it means, but when I hear it, when I say it, I don't want to go around saying “I'm a gatekeeper,” but at the same time, Am I? Absolutely. I play a role in gatekeeping because it's important. Sometimes I look at the counselors that I'm working with and I wonder how I would feel if this counselor was serving my student, my child? Is that okay? And that really holds me accountable as well.

When prompted to come up with a word he prefers, he suggested:

Mentoring. That would be it. So it's like the role and responsibility the faculty take in terms of mentoring students because again, if I took the student who was causing a little bit of grief earlier and I mentor her, perhaps the relationship that we establish will allow her to be more open to the feedback and therefore, she will grow versus me kind of like, sort of, put off by the student, [believing], “She's disrespectful, who cares? She already proved that she's like that type of person towards me.” Again, if I take and look at it and say that’s a self-fulfilling prophecy that she will never be a good school counselor to work with my daughter or son, what if I flipped it and said “Okay, how am I going to be intentional about mentoring this student to make sure he or she is ready?” That's the best I can do.
After more thought, David suggested:

If I take this mentality of mentoring those students who might be the at-risk bunch, because there's always one or two, how might that look differently in terms of my professional growth for helping folks really get prepared for the field? I'm not sure, but that resonates with me that if, in fact, I can massage the term from gatekeeping to mentorship, how might that change my view of difficult students?"

He suggested, those difficult students could “likely reach populations we’re unable to reach, because they can relate. It’s hard to relate to something you’ve never had to deal with and sometimes, those students, those outliers, are individuals who will be able to reach other outliers.”

Considering the terminology of gatekeeping was an important factor upon which my participants reflected. Many were adverse to the word gatekeeping and preferred to think of themselves in what they considered more supportive terms, such as mentors or coaches. Thinking more positively of their role also enabled them to think more positively about supporting or encouraging students, rather on focusing on the more negative aspects of gatekeeping such as dismissing students from their program or stopping them from moving forward into their careers.

Reconceptualizing “The Gate” subtheme 7b: Where is the gate? In addition to potentially renaming gatekeeping, some participants were particularly interested in exploring the purpose and position of the gate.

Rosa explained that “Gatekeeping is something that occurs throughout the entire educational experience and even after. There are several gates throughout one’s experience, educational experience and clinical experience, much like stair stepping to the next level.” But she also suggested:
Not enough attention is being paid to the open-gate. I think that’s often undersold. I also think it’s equally important that we pay attention to gatekeeping efforts with the open gate. I think too often gatekeeping is conceptualized about keeping people out. So, I think just as much analysis should and attention needs to be paid to the open gate.

David also pondered the difference between the open and closed gates and he questioned where he stands in relation to the gate:

Where am I standing? Am I standing at the gate opening the door for folks or am I standing at the gate deciding who comes in and who doesn't come in and then when? Or, am I standing at the gate preventing people from leaving?

David explained:

I think the major thing lacking for me would be clarity on what gatekeeping actually looks like at each stage, and then the process which we utilize to make sure that it happens [at those different stages in the program], and then a discussion on the different gates that we might be sanding at when it comes to students—like before they get into the program, the conversations that occur when they’re in the program, and then sort of right before they transition into the field.

Sarah also acknowledged the different stages of gatekeeping. She suggested, “It’s one thing to gatekeep before people get into the program; it’s another thing to gatekeep throughout.”

And, a few participants spoke to the need to challenge the status-quo of the gate. For example, Carol said, “I’m pretty much a person who likes to go out of the gate, versus gatekeeping . . . I’m big on pushing the gate.” And, David brought up the importance of “flexibility around cultural implications” when considering the position or purpose of the gate.

He wondered:

Who’s responsible for gatekeeping? Who set those standards? Did the participants from racially and culturally and ethnically, and all those types of [diversity], did they have any input on this? And, who’s to decide that these are the things for gatekeeping? There’s got to be more, there’s not just one way of counseling. And we haven’t even discovered or tapped in to all the variation of that . . . It’s something that I feel strongly about that I don’t think we’ve arrived at like, “Okay, when we mean gatekeeping, this is exactly how it is. And, if you don’t measure up—,” you know? And if we do that, who will we leave behind? Who won’t eventually become counselors, depending on what that benchmark actually is?
Participants brought interesting perspectives and questions regarding the purpose and meaning of gatekeeping. They encouraged exploration regarding the cultural implications of gatekeeping and concern over who might get unfairly shut out of the profession due to the decisions made by an elite few. They suggested it is important to unpack the meaning of the word gatekeeping and the potential connotation it imparts on the field of counselor education. They recommend thoughtful consideration be made to questions such as Who controls the gate? And, What about the open gate?

Summary

This chapter presented findings of data gathered and analyzed through Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological method. Phenomenology seeks to understand participants’ “experience through their stories” (Seidman, 2013, p. 5). Using this method allowed participants to share their unique perspectives and understandings of what it means to be a gatekeeper in the counseling profession. The interview process engaged in meaning-making and shared understanding of the client’s lived experiences related to gatekeeping in counselor education.

1. How do counselor educators describe what it means to be a gatekeeper in the counseling profession?

2. What educational experiences or critical incidents do counselor educators identify as key learning (turning points) in their preparation to be gatekeepers?

3. How do counselor educators define/describe gatekeeping competency?

4. What recommendations do counselor educators suggest to maintain or improve gatekeeping competence in counselor education?
Through analyzing interview transcripts, participant artifacts, participant demographic information, and reflective memos, seven themes emerged: *Professional Responsibility Toward Gatekeeping*, *Learning to be Gatekeepers*, *Gatekeeping as a Developmental Process*, *Gatekeeping Competence*, *Barriers to Effective Gatekeeping*, *Improving Gatekeeping*, and *Reconceptualizing the Gate*. The themes were explored in detail, often with emergent subthemes, which provided rich examples of participants’ experiences. Honoring the participants’ unique perspectives and creating a space in which their voices could be heard, was an important goal of this work. Being able to bring these stories to light in hopes of providing a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences in gatekeeping, and being able to share these findings with others in the profession, deepens the value of this process.

In closing, it feels important to share these thoughts from Rosa, who, when asked what she hoped I would glean from our time together, called on me to communicate the “sense of the importance of gatekeeping as well as the complexity of gatekeeping.” She implored:

> I really hope that you bring in more dimensions or the layers of the complexity of gatekeeping, that it is a complex, multidimensional process and effort, and that we're not just talking about a gate, that it's so complicated. I think the literature does say that, but I still think we need to do a better job of connecting aspirational gatekeeping to the reality of gatekeeping in a way that doesn't penalize the university, in a way that doesn't penalize the gatekeeper or the student. Sometimes I feel the literature is polarizing, rather than reality based. So, to kind of really eliminate the blaming and shaming and all of that, that to me is just a function of our own stuff. Gatekeeping, while it's an emotional process, while it's a vulnerable process, it's also a process. It calls on us to do our own personal and emotional work, being vulnerable and paying a price and all of that, and that it's a part of the job, and this is a job you signed up for. But I would say to you, no matter how much we teach and teach and teach people how to do it, it will still be ambiguous. It will still be unique to every single situation. It will still cost us. It will still be difficult. There's no teaching it, and now it's easy. I kind of wonder of how many people would say, “Well, I was never taught how to do this, or I was never told this was going to be like that.” So, if you were, does that mean you wouldn't do this job now? Is that what you're saying to me? You know what I mean? Is that statement or that question a function of—is that one way of them expressing how hard this is for them to do? Or not supported. And I would say to everyone, “That's the process.” Every single case is unique. Can you prepare for...
every unique case? Can you be supported in every single one consistently the same way? I don't think you can. So, I think the nature of gatekeeping itself is dynamic. It's wrought with tension and vulnerability, and yet it needs to happen. It should never be easy, frankly. Should it be easy if I'm making a decision to kick a student out of a program? Should that ever be easy?

Chapter five addresses some of these complexities of gatekeeping, incorporates discussion of the findings, attempts to answer some of the questions posed by my participants, and suggests implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study explored the gatekeeping experiences of seven counselor educators currently teaching within master’s level counseling programs. The goal was to learn about their perceptions of gatekeeping by seeking answers to the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1. How do counselor educators describe what it means to be a gatekeeper in the counseling profession?

RQ 2. What educational experiences or critical incidents do counselor educators identify as key learning in their preparation to be gatekeepers?

RQ 3. How do counselor educators define/describe gatekeeping competency?

RQ 4. What recommendations do counselor educators suggest to maintain or improve gatekeeping competence in counselor education?

Chapter 4 highlighted participant stories and captured narrative responses, organized into themes and subthemes that related back to the research questions. This chapter provides interpretations about those findings and offers suggestions on implications for the field of counselor education, faculty training and support, and areas of further research.

**RQ1: Defining Gatekeeping**

Similar to Bernard and Goodyear (2009), participants described gatekeeping as a professional responsibility that serves to protect the field of counseling by determining a
potential counselor’s readiness and appropriateness to work with clients. They described

gatekeepers as the “eyes and ears” of the profession, people who are responsible for moving

students through professional training and education toward successful functioning as

professional counselors. As suggested in gatekeeping literature (Donati & Watts, 2005; Duba,

Paez, & Kindsvatter, 2010; Homrich et al., 2014; Irving & Williams, 1999; Lumabue & Duffey,

1999), participants also explained gatekeepers assess not only academic ability, knowledge and

skill, but also dispositional characteristics necessary to work as a counselor. Participants

suggested gatekeepers need to recognize when students are not performing adequately or may

not be suited for the profession, and must be willing to provide opportunity for remediation, or to

potentially redirect students to a more appropriate field. The participant gatekeeping descriptions

align with the American Counseling Association’s (2014) Code of Ethics and Professional

Standards, which defines gatekeeping as the “initial and ongoing academic, skill, and

dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice including remediation

and termination as appropriate” (p. 20). Gatekeeping is more than just providing feedback about

a student’s performance on an assignment; it incorporates the assessment of a whole person, the

very instrument with potential to make a great impact on the lives of future clients.

Participants suggested gatekeeping is a professional responsibility that underlies all that

they do as counselor educators. They said gatekeeping is constant, and ongoing, and insisted they

feel a deep obligation to perform gatekeeping in an ethical and intentional way. Participants

suggested that gatekeeping serves to protect many stakeholders, from the counseling students

themselves, to the faculty and integrity of the counseling program and university, and finally,

and arguably most importantly, the future clients of the counselors-in-training. Participants also

spoke of the weight the responsibility of gatekeeping carries, as the assessments they make and
outcomes they determine, may have great impact on their students’ careers, as well as the lives of future clients. These decisions are not made lightly, and participants described feeling overwhelmed at times by the magnitude the impact their choices could have on others. These experiences mirror similar studies reflecting upon the emotional complexities of gatekeeping (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Daigle, 2005; Frame et al., 1995; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Handlesman, 2010; Hanna and Smith, 1997; Kerl & Eichler, 2005; Wissel, 2011).

These findings suggest that gatekeeping is integral to counselor education and sits at the very foundation of counselor training. Indeed, gatekeeping is interwoven through all aspects of counselor education, from admissions, through skill-development courses and field placement, and ultimately into the real-world community of the counseling field (Daigle & Christensen, 2010; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Counselor educators are called upon to perform these gatekeeping responsibilities in all aspects of their work. Therefore, counselor educators would seem to need a solid foundation of gatekeeping knowledge and skills upon entering the field.

**RQ2: Gatekeeping Preparation**

Given the magnitude of responsibility gatekeeping presents, it was very unsettling to find that this study’s participants, by and large, had little to no formal education or training in the area of gatekeeping. Indeed, an extensive examination of the literature did not reveal any studies on how and where counselor educators are learning to be gatekeepers, which presents a significant gap in understanding the training and education, or lack thereof, within gatekeeper preparation. For the most part, participants described learning about gatekeeping from circumstantial experience rather than formal instruction or curriculum related to gatekeeping within their
doctoral programs. Many participants first experienced gatekeeping as doctoral students while co-instructing or co-supervising master’s students at their university. At that time in their education, most participants were not familiar with the term gatekeeping, per se, but instead, recognized the importance of assessing the students’ skill development or counseling aptitude. Other participants spoke of participating in the admission process for master’s students while they were enrolled within their doctoral programs. Frequently, these opportunities to learn about or engage in gatekeeping were not embedded requirements within participants’ doctoral curricula, but instead, were optional or elective events that participants selected for themselves. Some participants described the gatekeeping experiences as “unique” opportunities that were not afforded to all doctoral students within their program. These participant reports suggest that gatekeeping is or was not widely taught across their overall CES doctoral education: Participants had to actively seek out opportunities to learn about gatekeeping on their own. Furthermore, while instructing courses or supervising master’s level practicum or internship, if gatekeeping issues did not organically arise, participants may not have had much opportunity to practice gatekeeping. These findings suggest that gatekeeping instruction and the opportunity to practice gatekeeping within CES doctoral programs tends to be highly incidental rather than intentionally structured through coursework or other program requirements.

Many participants said they would have liked to have had more formal instruction about gatekeeping while enrolled in their doctoral program. They said the opportunity to apply gatekeeping knowledge or practice skills in their doctoral courses would have been very beneficial in preparing them for the future gatekeeping responsibilities they faced while working as counselor educators. Participants talked about how most of their gatekeeping experience
happened on-the-job, and that, often, they did not feel adequately prepared to engage in gatekeeping early in their careers.

All participants indicated that they had no formal orientation or on-the-job training in the area of gatekeeping, but instead relied on colleagues to help mentor them through the process whenever gatekeeping issues arose. Similar to Gaubatz and Vera’s (2002) reflections on barriers to gatekeeping, many participants described feeling isolated in their gatekeeping responsibilities. Frequently participants’ colleagues would tell them to handle it on their own, suggesting “I trust your judgment,” when really what participants wanted was someone to tell help them or tell them what to do. Often, participants resorted to learning about gatekeeping by attending conferences or reading articles about gatekeeping processes or issues. They felt the professional responsibility to perform as gatekeepers, but lacked the knowledge, experience, or confidence to feel efficacious in their gatekeeping ability.

Participants suggested that some of their most meaningful learning experiences came when faced with gatekeeping dilemmas that enabled them to work with colleagues and come to a shared understanding of how to approach the situation. Learning from others and teamwork provided participants the opportunity to engage in gatekeeping without the heavy burden of making impactful decisions without input from others. It was through this process of shared responsibility that participants began to feel more capable as gatekeepers. These experiences suggest that being able to practice gatekeeping with others is an important step in gaining confidence and efficacy.

Participants stories about learning to be gatekeepers suggest they did not feel adequately prepared as gatekeepers upon entering counselor education. In fact, even while on the job, participants reported often feeling like they lacked the skills, knowledge, or expertise to
adequately perform gatekeeping responsibilities. For a task that participants identify as a constant, foundational, all-encompassing, weighty, ethical responsibility, there seems to be a disproportionately low level of preparation that goes into training counselor educators for the magnitude of this aspect of their work.

**RQ3: Gatekeeping Competence**

Many participants described gatekeeping competence as an evolution in their knowledge and skills, as they developed a deeper understanding of their role and responsibilities as gatekeepers in the counseling profession. They spoke of the importance of understanding professional ethics and laws related to counseling, as well as due process procedures regarding giving feedback to students, and the importance of adhering to policies regarding remediation or dismissal of students, when necessary. Bodner (2012) and Homrich et al. (2014) also identify due process considerations as important aspects of gatekeeping. Participants compared gatekeeping skills to counseling skills, suggesting empathy, honesty, and genuineness are equally important within gatekeeping as they are within a counseling relationship. Participants suggested gatekeeping has an element of career counseling, as counselor educators are sometimes tasked with helping students better understand what a career as a counselor entails, and to help them make decisions regarding whether or not becoming a counselor is a good fit for them. Participants spoke of the importance of the relationship between student and faculty, and suggested that this relationship is foundational to being an effective gatekeeper.

Another important component of gatekeeping competence that participants identified is dispositional characteristics. Similar to the dispositions that faculty look for to determine students’ appropriateness for the field of counseling, participants suggested certain counselor
educator dispositions are equally essential for effective gatekeeping. Being self-aware, with the ability to recognize biases or personal triggers, was a key disposition identified by all participants. Flexibility, compassion, humility, and courage were other traits participants identified as fundamental characteristics of competent gatekeepers. An interesting finding that emerged in this study, which was not otherwise suggested in current literature on gatekeeping, are the many parallels between counselor competence and gatekeeper competence. For example, knowledge, skill, and professional dispositions are important components of both counselor and gatekeeper development.

Many participants also talked about the intersection of multiculturalism and gatekeeping. They suggested that multicultural competence is an important subset of gatekeeping competence. Considering the diverse educational backgrounds, experiences, and access to resources that students bring to a counseling program is essential to assure that counselor educators provide fair and equitable opportunity to all students (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Vasquez, 1999). Participants identified social justice as a professional value within the field of counselor education and suggested that gatekeepers should strive to keep social justice initiatives at the forefront of gatekeeping.

Many parallels exist between counseling competencies and gatekeeping competencies. Knowledge and skills are essential in performing tasks of counseling in much the same way knowledge and skill are applied throughout gatekeeping. Personal or professional aptitudes, characteristics, or dispositions are essential factors counselor educators assess when determining students’ fitness for the counseling profession. Many of the successful counselor traits such as empathy, flexibility, self-awareness, and compassion are also necessary for effective
gatekeeping. These parallels suggest that the development of gatekeeping competence may follow a similar pattern to the development of counseling competence.

In addition to highlighting the types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for gatekeeping competence, participants also acknowledged that some barriers can interfere with effective gatekeeping. One thing that can impede successful gatekeeping is a lack of defined policies or procedures. When clear gatekeeping methods are not clearly in place or effectively communicated to students or faculty, gatekeeping may fail to happen in a timely manner. In these instances, gatekeeping occurs reactively rather than proactively, and sometimes at a point that participants felt was too late to successfully remediate or effectively work with a student toward dismissal from the program. Many barriers participants identified mirror the barriers discussed in the gatekeeping literature (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Bradley & Post, 1991; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). These barriers further illuminate the need for opportunities to learn about and practice gatekeeping while counselor educators are still in their doctoral training programs. If, as doctoral students, they are exposed to gatekeeping practices, gain the necessary knowledge, and develop the skills and dispositions to competently carry out gatekeeping responsibilities, counselor educators may have more efficacy and feel better prepared to gatekeep proactively, rather than reactively, when on the job.

Clear communication of gatekeeping policies and procedures was again identified as a barrier as it related to relationships between counselor education faculty and university administrators. Faculty and administrators are often at odds regarding admission decisions impacted by gatekeeping areas of concern. Barlow and Coleman (2003) identified institutional pressures not to screen deficient students as a potential barrier to gatekeeping. Many participants disclosed feeling pressure from their university administrators to admit large numbers of
students, regardless of their appropriateness for the profession. This discrepancy between adhering to professional ethics while also wanting to contribute to robust numbers of students in the counseling program creates dissonance for counselor educators in their gatekeeper role.

Another barrier participants identified was feeling overwhelmed by their many other counselor-educator responsibilities; they suggested sometimes their heavy workload might cause them to push gatekeeping concerns to the back burner until it was again, too late, to effectively act on gatekeeping concerns. This practice of putting off gatekeeping responsibilities seems at odds to the gatekeeping descriptions participants had shared (i.e., a great, ethical mandate and a constant, ongoing, weighty responsibility). When describing gatekeeping, participants underscored the importance of gatekeeping as a fundamental component that underlies all that they do as counselor educators. Yet, when faced with barriers, participants often felt incapable of carrying out their gatekeeping responsibilities as effectively as they would like. These findings further suggest gatekeeping efficacy may impact participants’ ability to confidently and efficiently perform gatekeeping tasks. Perhaps the lack of training and practice opportunities within their doctoral program failed to prepare the participants for the rigors of gatekeeping in the CES field. This lack of preparation possibly contributes to decreased assertiveness in their gatekeeping role.

**RQ4: Improvements in Gatekeeping**

Participants provided many suggestions for improving gatekeeping. They highlighted the need for improved preparation at the doctoral level. This need for gatekeeper preparation at the doctoral level has not been identified within existing gatekeeping literature. Participants suggested creating gatekeeping-specific curriculum, which would provide information regarding
student assessment, gatekeeping practices, and models of “how-to” do gatekeeping. They wanted their professors to teach them about gatekeeping to help them increase their knowledge, skills, and awareness of gatekeeping. They recommended implementing lessons, activities, and assignments geared toward teaching gatekeeping, which could help doctoral students feel more prepared to face these responsibilities as they transition to their role as counseling faculty. They wished for more opportunity to engage with their doctoral faculty when gatekeeping decisions were made, whether as part of an admission process, or as issues related to remediation or dismissal emerged. They wanted more hand-on learning, with the ability to apply and practice gatekeeping within the safety of their doctoral programs, under supervision, before embarking upon those decisions and practices on their own. Clearly, increased gatekeeping training and practice opportunities are needed at the doctoral level.

Another unique finding of this study was that in addition to learning the skills and developing gatekeeping competence at the doctoral level, participants also identified a need for program-specific training upon entering positions as new faculty members. They suggested this training could include explanation of their program’s gatekeeping philosophy, policies, and procedures, including detailed examples or step-by-step manuals with instructions for carrying out different types or levels of gatekeeping practices. Participants addressed a need for professional development opportunities to deepen their gatekeeping competence.

Participants also spoke frequently about the importance of gatekeeping within a team framework. They did not appreciate having to make gatekeeping decisions alone, and found benefit in being able to consult with others when gatekeeping issues emerged. Indeed, Gaubatz and Vera (2002) identified a lack of departmental support, or teamwork, as a significant barrier to effective gatekeeping. Participants recommended creating a collegial environment in which to
approach gatekeeping decision-making within counseling programs. This team approach could help lessen the stress some participants describing feeling in their gatekeeper role.

A final recommendation participants suggested was to begin to engage in dialogue about the meaning of gatekeeping in counselor education. Whereas, their previous recommendations focused on tangible, specific improvements, such as developing gatekeeping curriculum, activities, policies, and procedures, this recommendation turned toward the more philosophical concepts of gatekeeping, inviting counselor educators to seek answers to questions such as “Where is the gate?” and “Where I am standing in relation to the gate?” And, “What about those students who don’t clearly fit though the gate?” The ambiguity within the answers to these questions presents a challenge to counselor educators as they wrestle with the complexities of gatekeeping. This is yet another area previously untapped within the gatekeeping literature. Therefore, exploring the nuances of gatekeeping and allowing for diverse perspectives and professional discourse may help counselor educators gain deeper understanding of the meaning of gatekeeping in counselor education.

Gatekeeper Development

Delving into participants’ responses in order to make connections to the research questions has been a meaningful and thought-provoking process. As I reflected upon each person’s phenomenological experiences, I have gained deeper understanding into how gatekeeping has impacted their development as counselor educators. In fact, as I have thought about the answers to my research questions, and this study’s overarching goal to gain insight into how counselor educators learn about gatekeeping, I have come to recognize the developmental aspect of becoming a gatekeeper. Although this developmental process was underlying my
inquiry all along, upon putting the gatekeeping inquiry components together, I began to understand more clearly the parallels between master’s students’ counselor identity development and doctoral-student CES gatekeeper development. In other words, like the developmental process through which Masters’ students emerge as counselors, a similar process takes place for CES doctoral students in their development as gatekeepers.

**Contextual Influences and Personal Reflection**

Learning from my participants and reflecting on my findings played a significant role in my conceptualization of gatekeeper development, but I would be remiss if I did not also recognize the importance the current social and political context had on my personal reflections regarding gatekeeper development. Right now, the world is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter Movement; these current events have highlighted the political and racial divide in the United States.

**COVID-19 Pandemic**

Analyzing my data during the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated some additional considerations for gatekeeping in counselor education. My Spring 2020 courses were unexpectedly and suddenly moved from a classroom setting to a fully online, synchronous remote learning environment with classes held via Zoom. In my courses, students spoke of low motivation and increased anxiety or depression negatively impacting the quality of their work and commitment to their counseling studies. Increased childcare or complicated work responsibilities also impacted students’ ability to invest in their counselor education. Indeed, I experienced many of these barriers myself while struggling to find time and motivation to
complete my dissertation amidst working from home, caring for two school-aged children, and trying to quell the fears and uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. I considered how the context of living within the pandemic might impact my students’ dispositional characteristics, work quality, or skill development and realized that I needed to adapt and develop as a gatekeeper. I could no longer hold rigid views about *fitness for the profession*, but has to adapt and develop a greater capacity to recognize the complexities of gatekeeping in a changing world.

**Black Lives Matter Movement**

The murder of George Floyd on May 25th and the intensification of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) Movement further impacted my conceptualization of my gatekeeper role, as I reflected upon how my experiences as a White counselor educator have impacted my gatekeeper development. I contemplated my own racial identity development while also making meaning of my participants’ stories as they spoke of the impact of diversity on their gatekeeping experiences. One of my white participants stated that diversity “isn’t really a factor,” yet participants of color indicated that diversity plays a “significant” role in gatekeeping. These divergent viewpoints may be attributable to their lived experiences and very much parallel the discourse in the BLM movement.

Not acknowledging diversity, racial identities, or the impact of race on students’ experiences, alludes to a position of privilege, which may come from a well-intentioned position, but fails to address the experience many students of color may be facing within their counselor education. It is important to consider whether or not gatekeeping policies might be biased against particular groups. When assessing dispositional characteristics attributable to fitness for the
profession, I wondered about how cultural norms impact the metric for what *is* or *is not* considered “appropriate.”

The gatekeeping literature suggests there is need to standardize gatekeeping; indeed, many of my participants also spoke of a desire for a clear, uniform gatekeeping process. However, in standardizing gatekeeping, how might the counseling profession be further marginalizing already disadvantaged groups? Do we need to change the metric? Or, make the metric culture specific? What happens when counselor educators utilize different measure to assess students going into the same profession? *Is that fair?* There is no clear answer here, but ongoing conversation on these topics in counselor education is clearly needed.

Reflecting upon the influence of current world events in combination with my participants’ diverse perspectives, racial identities, and lived experiences, while also considering my own position of privilege as a white counselor educator, heightened my conceptualization of gatekeeper development; through these connections, I began to think more deeply of the process of gatekeeper development through a constructivist lens.

**Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development**

McAuliffe (2011) presented a constructivist developmental model for counselor education that seems to parallel the stages of gatekeeper development participants described. McAuliffe suggested that counselors’ epistemologies, or *ways of knowing*, inform how they approach or conceptualize ideas. These ways of knowing exist along a continuum, and students can move among stages when they are exposed to different developmental challenges. Participants talked about different ways of conceptualizing gatekeeping at various stages within their counselor education and subsequent careers.
Received/Conventional Knowing

Similar to McAuliffe’s Received/Conventional Knowing stage of counselor development, in which students tend to rely on external sources for what to think or how to behave, participants described instances in their gatekeeper development when they sought advice or direction from “authorities” to tell them how to engage in gatekeeping. Many participants described feeling isolated in their gatekeeping responsibilities and did not feel capable of making gatekeeping decisions on their own. They wanted directions and rules, guidelines to follow, just as students operating at this stage of development often seek concrete answers from their teachers. For example, Sarah described an instance when she was a new faculty member asking for direction from her colleagues when faced with a gatekeeping decision; she identified advocating for help as part of her “growth process.” In this instance, Sarah’s colleagues provided support, while also encouraging Sarah to contribute to the decision-making process. McAuliffe explained that when students are faced with dilemmas that challenge their current way of knowing, and are nurtured by faculty to think in more complex ways, they can evolve toward the next phase of development. Similarly, when counselor educators are supported by their fellow faculty and provided opportunity to expand their current way of knowing, they may be able to advance to the next stage of gatekeeper development.

Self-Authorized Knowing

Self-Authorized Knowing is the next stage McAuliffe identified in his constructivist developmental model. At this stage, he explained, students consistently use their own judgement rather than relying on external sources and are able to recognize that knowledge varies according
to context. “Self-authorized thinking enables counselors to make more nuanced counseling
decisions in the midst of what is inherently ambiguous and complex work,” (McAuliffe, p. 9).
Again, a parallel to self-authorized knowing appears to exist within gatekeeper development.
With experience and increased knowledge about gatekeeping, many participants suggested they
began to feel more confident in their ability to competently perform gatekeeping tasks on their
own, without external guidance. Participants described this increased confidence: “I’m far more
bold about it now,” “I’m a much better gatekeeper than I was five years ago,” and “over time and
with experience I’ve improved my gatekeeping assessment skills.”

In addition to gaining confidence, participants also indicated they improved in their
ability to consider the context of a gatekeeping situation rather than relying on a set of concrete
rules to inform their decision-making process. Participants described this level of development:
“I’ve learned to pause more, rather than rush to judgement” and “I’ve become more fair and
balanced toward students, and have been less rigid in how I mentor or evaluate or review them.”

And, “Don’t forget where you came from and how much you grew over time . . . Because you
might be real rigid at first and then you’re overlooking or holding people back and not realizing,
wait a minute—you don’t have enough data to even say that.” These examples demonstrate a
more advanced way of knowing; similar to students who come to make more nuanced counseling
decisions at this stage of development, so too, are counselor educators able to recognize the
ambiguity and complexity of their gatekeeping work.

Dialectical Knowing

The final stage of development McAuliffe described is Dialectical Knowing. At this
stage, McAuliffe suggests students are able to consider many perspectives and question their
certainities. He suggested students operating in this phase of development are attuned to the fact that knowledge, ideas, and values are socially constructed through shared discourse, and multiple, opposing worldviews can be equally valid. Again, a comparable stage of development appears to exist within gatekeeper development. For example, many participants recognized that there is still a lot to learn about gatekeeping and they do not have all the answers. Indeed, some participants even questioned whether or not the counseling profession would be wise to reexamine how gatekeeping is performed. The theme *Reconceptualizing the Gate* speaks to this initiative, encouraging counselor educators to look at potential systemic barriers or biases that might underlie current assumptions about gatekeeping. Creating a safe space to engage in dialogue regarding gatekeeping practices, and inviting diverse voices and perspectives to these discussions, can create avenues for illuminating potential injustices in order to bring change.

Many participants developed as gatekeepers on the job, while actively engaged in gatekeeping, rather than through formal preparation at the doctoral level. They were not awarded the opportunity to *practice* gatekeeping prior to doing actually *doing* gatekeeping, which may have impacted their confidence or efficacy as gatekeepers. They were immersed in a job they did not yet know how to do. Developmentally, they were still at the *Received/Conventional* stage of knowing, yet were being tasked with making decisions that required them to be operating at the *Self-Authorized* or sometimes at the most advanced, *Dialectical Knowing*, stage of development. Expecting counselor educators to make such a great leap in their development, without appropriate supports in place, might create significant dissonance rendering counselor educators unable to successfully transition between developmental stages. Therefore, conceptualizing gatekeeping competency through a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development, may be helpful in better addressing gatekeeper needs.
Implications

Conceptualizing gatekeeping through a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development has implications across many areas within field of counselor education.

Implications for CES Doctoral Programs

It seems Counselor Education, as a profession, expects counseling faculty to be adept, competent gatekeepers upon entering the field but fails to provide the mechanism in which to develop these competencies. It is therefore important that CES doctoral programs create curriculum to scaffold this developmental process to assure graduates of their programs are equipped with the knowledge, skill, and dispositions to be competent gatekeepers.

By conceptualizing gatekeeping through a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development, CES doctoral programs can create developmentally appropriate curriculum throughout the different stages of their program. For example, CES doctoral programs could initiate gatekeeper development through classroom assignments such as assigned readings or course discussions to increase knowledge and exposure to gatekeeping concepts including gatekeeping definitions, policies and procedures, and ethical and legal considerations. Next, CES doctoral programs could provide case studies or mock-scenarios in which students could begin to apply their gatekeeping knowledge in simulated activities. Then, CES doctoral programs could provide in-vivo opportunities to engage in gatekeeping under supervision or in collaboration with doctoral faculty, such as co-teaching or co-supervision of master’s level counselors-in-training. Finally, CES doctoral programs could provide opportunity for doctoral students to participate with faculty in admission processes or decision-making when gatekeeping issues arise.
Requiring gatekeeping instruction and training through intentional, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities at the doctoral level, would enable CES doctoral programs to build a solid foundation for counselor educators to enter the field better equipped for their gatekeeping responsibilities.

Implications for CES Doctoral Students

In instances where CES doctoral programs do not have required gatekeeping content or experiential assignments infused within their curriculum, doctoral students could expedite their gatekeeper development by intentionally seeking out opportunities to learn about and practice gatekeeping throughout their doctoral education. For example, doctoral students could select internship opportunities that would allow them to co-teach or co-supervise master’s students. Or, doctoral students might consider volunteering to review master’s students’ counseling program applications and participate in admission decision-making with program faculty. Doctoral students can review their university’s gatekeeping policies and ask their faculty to talk about how the policies were developed and how they are utilized within the counseling program. When gatekeeping instruction is not formalized, doctoral students may need to be proactive in advocating for opportunities to develop their gatekeeping competence.

Implications for Master’s Counseling Programs

Counseling programs could benefit from developing clear gatekeeping policies and procedures, as well as engaging in open communication about gatekeeping within their program. Counseling program faculty might consider developing a gatekeeping manual or checklist to assure policies are documented, accessible, and due process is followed. Additionally,
Counseling Programs could benefit from including gatekeeping training as part of their orientation or onboarding of new faculty. Counseling Programs might consider adding intentional dialogue about gatekeeping as part of their routine conversations or faculty meeting agendas. Additionally, including junior faculty in gatekeeping practices and decisions-making may provide opportunities to deepen their gatekeeping competence and support their gatekeeper development.

**Implications for Accreditation**

This study has implications for CACREP accreditation of CES doctoral programs. Specifically, this study provides the motivation to consider adding a gatekeeping course or other types of structured experiential gatekeeping activities into required doctoral curriculum in order to support gatekeeper development. A vast majority of participants indicated having no formal instruction in gatekeeping in their CES doctoral programs; and those who did have opportunity to learn about or experience gatekeeping, did so mainly through optional or extra-curricular, rather than required, assignments. These findings may indicate an area for improvement in the next revision of the CACREP standards. CACREP could also incorporate gatekeeping training into their doctoral standards by explicitly highlighting the importance of gatekeeper identity development or gatekeeping competencies.

CACREP can further support Counselor Education and Supervision programs by advocating for gatekeeping within the profession. When working with university on accreditation efforts, CACREP can emphasize the importance of due diligence in gatekeeping. When university administration focuses on enrollment and retention without considering the importance of student appropriateness for the profession, they put counseling faculty in a
difficult position in which counselor educators are faced with the dilemma of potentially violating their ethical code by admitting or retaining unfit students versus going against their administrators’ directive to increase student numbers. CACREP can advocate on behalf of Counseling Programs by asserting the importance of admitting students who have potential to be successful counselors, rather than strictly meeting a desirable quota.

**Implications for the Field of Counselor Education**

Conceptualizing gatekeeping through a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development can have meaningful implications for the field of counselor education as a whole. When gatekeeping is viewed through a developmental lens, counselor educators might become increasingly mindful of assessing their own gatekeeper development and seek opportunities to continue to grow in this area. Counselor educators can come together for shared discourse and reflection on gatekeeper development as they explore the meaning of gatekeeping at the university, local, state, and national level within counseling associations and coalitions. Through a process of shared meaning-making, counselor educators may begin to find that they, themselves, not only benefit from gatekeeper development, but the profession as a whole has the opportunity to grow in the area of gatekeeping.

**Implications for Research**

Having a theoretical model of gatekeeper development may help frame the emergence of gatekeeping competence in counselor education. A constructivist model of gatekeeper development may inform current thinking about gatekeeping and has the potential to move the field forward in conceptualizing gatekeeping through a developmental perspective.
Limitations

This study had some limitations which may have impacted the quality and outcomes.

Interview Format

I had initially wanted to conduct all interviews face-to-face. Given scheduling constraints and distance, this goal was not realistic; therefore, I interviewed participants in person and met with others via online video conferencing (Zoom). Zoom was a welcome tool that allowed me to conduct interviews that I otherwise might not have been able to complete; however, internet connectivity and sound quality was occasionally a barrier. At times, I could not understand my participants and asked them to repeat themselves; over time the frequent requests for my participants to reiterate what they had shared, possibly became a nuisance. Participants would alter their subsequent responses, frequently shortening the response in their second or third telling, which may have caused some valuable information to be omitted. Additionally, one of the interviews took place while the participant was driving. During this time, we had some dropped or garbled connections. Additionally, although she seemed engaged and responsive, she undoubtedly had her attention diverted in a way that likely would not have happened if we were sitting together face-to-face in her faculty office, rather than completing the interview with her behind the wheel of a moving vehicle. Finally, although I conducted the interview in a private setting on my end, I cannot assure the privacy of the location in which they attended the interview; therefore, confidentiality of responses cannot be absolutely guaranteed.
Familiarity with Participants and the Potential Impact of Social Desirability

Although I did not know my participants particularly well, I have had some type of professional interaction or minimal professional relationship with each participant prior to the study; therefore, social desirability needs to be taken into consideration when examining the trustworthiness of this study. For example, participants may have altered their responses in a conscious or unconscious desire to appeal to me, or to provide information they felt they “should” say. Participants may have provided answers they assumed I was looking for or only divulged information that would present them in a favorable way. Additionally, our preexisting relationship, or participants’ knowledge that we may continue to interact professionally in some other manner in the future, may have impacted the participants’ responses. Possibly they were not as open and forthcoming about their experiences as they might have been with a complete stranger with whom they would never again interact; therefore, it is important to consider the impact of social desirability when considering the “truth” within participants’ responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future gatekeeping research could examine potential parallels between gatekeeper development and other types of development. Some participants spoke about the intersection of multicultural competence and gatekeeping competence. It could be meaningful to further examine how counselor educators’ racial identity development impacts their development as gatekeepers. Additionally, investigating other types of development in relation to gatekeeper development, such as cognitive development (Paiget, 1969) or moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Gilligan, 1993) could provide further insight into the process of gatekeeper development.
The participants in this study were all counselor educators teaching within counseling programs at the master’s level. Interviewing counselor educators who teach at the doctoral level within CES programs may provide additional insight into gatekeeper development; for example, are the training needs of counselor educators working with doctoral students the same as those working strictly with master’s students? And, what does gatekeeper development look like at the doctoral faculty level? It may be worthwhile to explore the gatekeeper development of those doctoral faculty, who are the gatekeepers of the future gatekeepers of the counseling profession.

**Final Reflection**

In recognizing the developmental process within my participants, I also came to better understand my own development as a gatekeeper in counselor education. I thought about my first experiences with gatekeeping during my doctoral education and my early professional experiences. I reflected upon learning the term *gatekeeping*, and the relief and excitement I had felt when I realized there was an actual *name* for this process I was trying to understand. I was eager to learn more about gatekeeping, hoping to validate my experiences by talking with other CES doctoral students or counseling faculty about this aspect of counselor education. I wanted to find the *correct* way to gatekeep and was intent on finding or, ambitiously developing, a *Guide to Best Practices in Gatekeeping in Counselor Education*. I had hoped that my dissertation research would bring me closer to understanding *the* universal approach to gatekeeping.

Clearly, during the early stages of my dissertation process, my development as a gatekeeper mirrored the lower ordered ways of knowing. I had a very concrete understanding of gatekeeping, and saw the process in very dichotomous terms. I was confident there was a *best* way to engage in gatekeeping, and if I could just uncover what that way was, by learning from
the “experts,” I would be able to share those findings with others to improve gatekeeping in the field of counselor education. It was with those lofty goals in mind that I began my review of the literature and developed my research questions. The counseling literature supported my belief that gatekeeping was rife with uncertainties and that counseling programs would benefit from standardizing their process to gatekeeping. “Wow,” I thought, “I’m really on to something.” I continued this exploration, seeking to support my ideas with external sources, which further confirmed my belief system (Received/Conventional Knowing).

For the past 14 years, since first beginning my dissertation, I have worked as a counselor educator (and gatekeeper) and have had myriad gatekeeping experiences, opportunities, and conversations through which I have gained a deeper understanding of gatekeeping in counselor education. During this time, I worked intermittently on my dissertation, but it mostly sat unattended as I focused my attention on my other responsibilities as counseling faculty, wife, and mother. In many ways, taking so long to complete this journey has provided the time and space for my deep reflection and personal gatekeeper development to occur.

Through the process of completing this dissertation, I have come to realize that gatekeeping is far more complex and nuanced than I originally thought. There is no cookie-cutter method to doing this work. In fact, trying to engage in gatekeeping through a ridged, one-size-fits-all approach is likely detrimental in many situations. I now realize gatekeeping is a social construct and I have begun to challenge some of my certainties and expectations about what it means to be a gatekeeper. Whereas, I still believe it is helpful to have clear gatekeeping policies and procedures available, I now recognize the need for flexibility in conceptualizing the gatekeeping process. I have come to acknowledge the ambiguity inherent in gatekeeping, and in
fact, believe that embracing this ambiguity is an essential step toward the dialectical knowing stage of gatekeeper development.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the developmental learning process of becoming a gatekeeper in the counseling profession, specifically focusing on counselor educators’ reflections on their education, training, and professional experiences leading toward perceived gatekeeping competence. This process illuminated the complexities and nuances of gatekeeping in counselor education. There is clearly a need for more intentional instructional strategies to help CES doctoral students become better prepared for this important work as they transition to their faculty roles. Additionally, there is a need for policies and procedures to help inform gatekeeping practices within the profession; however, this study also uncovered that a one-size-fits-all approach is not always beneficial for gatekeeping. In fact, one of the most meaningful outcomes of this study was the emergence of a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeping Development, which focuses less on specific gatekeeping tasks, but instead highlights the progressive stages of gatekeeper development. By shifting the focus away from the how’s and when’s of gatekeeping toward why’s and wherefore’s, we can gain greater insight into what it means to be a gatekeeper. Nurturing the developmental process of the counseling profession’s gatekeepers will have great impact on their ability to learn, grow, develop competence and efficacy, and ultimately will enable them to more effectively perform their gatekeeper role. This focus on development has the potential to vastly improve gatekeeping within the field of counselor education.

When starting this dissertation journey fourteen years ago, I had a strong desire to bring about gatekeeping improvements in the field of counselor education, and, I believe I have been
successful in suggesting how to do so. However, as I have undergone my own personal
developmental gatekeeper journey through this dissertation process, I have discovered that those
improvements look vastly different than I had originally envisioned: I will no longer provide the
field of counselor education with a Gatekeeping Best Practices Guidebook, but instead will offer
the field a Constructivist Model of Gatekeeper Development, which I ultimately believe has the
potential to make an even greater impact on the field than I had ever dreamed. And, experiencing
this shift in my study’s original purpose, and recognizing how much I have grown throughout
this process, shines a light upon my own personal developmental journey of becoming a
gatekeeper in counselor education.
REFERENCES


Connelly v. University of Vermont and State Agriculture College, 244 F. Supp. 156 (D Vt. 1965).


Harris v. Blake and the Board of Trustees of the University of Northern Colorado, 798 F. 2d 419 (CO 10 1986).


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO CICO PARTICIPANTS
Recruitment Email to CICO participants

Dear (Name of Counselor Educator),

I hope you remember me—I’m Natasha Schnell, a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Northern Illinois University. We met last year at the CICO conference. During that time, I was recruiting participants for my dissertation exploring Gatekeeping in Counselor Education and you had shared your contact info with me and indicated that you would be interested in being interviewed regarding your experiences.

I am ready to begin gathering data and I’m writing to see if you remain interested in participating in my study. In order to participate, you must identify as a Counselor Educator, meet the CACREP requirements of a Core faculty member (regardless of whether or not you currently teach in a CACREP accredited program), and have a minimum of 2-years full-time teaching experience within a masters or doctoral level Counseling program.

I am conducting a phenomenological study, which means I seek to explore the lived-experiences and perceptions around the topic of my study: gatekeeping in counselor education. The phenomenological protocol I’m utilizing recommends conducting two interviews (of 45-90 minutes each) between 3-7 days apart. As a counselor educator, I imagine your time commitments are many, so if you agree to participate, I will gladly work around your schedule and will meet you at a private, confidential location of your choosing, such as your faculty office. To show appreciation for engaging in this research, participants will be provided a $25.00 Visa gift card at the conclusion of the second interview.

Prior to participation, you will be required to review an informed consent form, which describes your rights as a participant. Participation is voluntary, and participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks involved in your participation in this study. All responses obtained will be held confidential and pseudonyms will be utilized to protect participant privacy.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at [phone number] or [email address] so I can arrange a time to meet with you to discuss this study further via phone or in person.

Please forward this email to any colleagues who may be interested in participating in this study.

Thank you for considering participating in my study.

Sincerely,

Natasha Schnell

IRB Protocol # HS20-0078
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO CACREP/Core COUNSELOR EDUCATORS
Recruitment Email to CACREP/Core Counselor Educators

Dear (Name of Counselor Educator),

My name is Natasha Schnell, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Northern Illinois University. I am seeking to interview individuals who teach full-time within a CACREP-accredited Counseling Program regarding their experiences with gatekeeping within the field of counselor education. If this topic is of interest to you, I hope you will consider participating in my study.

In order to participate, you must identify as a Counselor Educator, meet the CACREP requirements of a Core faculty member, and have a minimum of 2-years full-time teaching experience within a masters or doctoral level Counseling program.

I am conducting a phenomenological study, which means I seek to explore the lived-experiences and perceptions around the topic of my study: gatekeeping in counselor education. The phenomenological protocol I’m utilizing recommends conducting two interviews (of 45-90 minutes each) between 3-7 days apart. As a counselor educator, I imagine your time commitments are many, so if you agree to participate, I will gladly work around your schedule and will meet you at a private, confidential location of your choosing, such as your faculty office. To show appreciation for engaging in this research, participants will be provided a $25.00 Visa gift card at the conclusion of the second interview.

Prior to participation, you will be required to review an informed consent form, which describes your rights as a participant. Participation is voluntary, and participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks involved in your participation in this study. All responses obtained will be held confidential and pseudonyms will be utilized to protect participant privacy.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at [phone number] or [email address] so I can arrange a time to meet with you to discuss this study further via phone or in person.

Please feel free to forward this email to any colleagues who may be interested in participating in this study.

Thank you for considering participating in my study.

Sincerely,
Natasha Schnell
IRB Protocol # HS20-0078
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDES
Interview Guides

Interview Guide/Interview #1

1. Tell me about what brought you to the field of counselor education. 
   If necessary, follow-up: Tell me about your professional background.

2. How would you describe your role as a counselor educator to someone unfamiliar with the profession?

3. What is your understanding of the term “gatekeeper” as it relates to the field of counselor education?

4. How would you describe gatekeeping to someone unfamiliar with the process?

5. How and when did you first learn about gatekeeping in counselor education?

3. How does gatekeeping fit into your understanding of your role as a counselor educator?

6. What sort of formal instruction, educational experiences, or preparation during your masters or doctoral program did you receive to become a gatekeeper?

7. Of those experiences, what stands out as particularly helpful or meaningful?

8. After completing your doctoral degree, what kind of on-the-job training or professional mentoring, if any, did you have in the area of gatekeeping?

9. Of those experiences, what stands out as particularly helpful or meaningful?

10. Please describe your first encounter with gatekeeping as a counselor educator. Follow up: What did you learn about gatekeeping from that experience?

11. Please describe your most recent encounter with gatekeeping as a counselor educator.

12. What, if anything, has changed for you in your understanding/conceptualization of gatekeeping between those two events (described in questions 10 & 11)?

13. What lead to that change? (if applicable)

14. Please describe any additional situations or incidents that made a difference in how you think about, or how you engage in, the gatekeeping process.

15. What experiences do you wish you would have had to better prepare you for your work as a gatekeeper?
16. How would you prepare someone else to be a gatekeeper? What would you tell them about it? What advice would you give them?

17. What else would you like to share with me to help me better understand your experiences with gatekeeping?

18. For our next meeting, I’m wondering if you would be willing to bring in something that represents your professional journey toward becoming a gatekeeper or anything that demonstrates how you currently engage in the gatekeeping process.

**Interview Guide/Interview #2**

1. Tell me about the artifact you brought today (if applicable).
   - In what ways is this artifact representative of gatekeeping in your perspective?
   - Of all the artifacts you could have brought in, what about this one in particular describes/represents your experiences with gatekeeping?

2. As you reflect on our last interview, please describe any new insights or thoughts you have about what it means to be a gatekeeper to the counseling profession.

3. What is your perception of who you are as a gatekeeper?

4. How would you describe your philosophy of gatekeeping?

5. What can you tell me about the process you utilize when making decisions related to gatekeeping (or student assessment) issues?

6. What kind of conversations have you had around the area of gatekeeping? What are some of the things you talk about?

7. How do issues of diversity make a difference in your experience of gatekeeping?

8. What skills do you think a counselor educator needs to be a good, competent gatekeeper? Knowledge? Qualities or personal characteristics?

9. How would you describe or define “gatekeeping competence”?

10. How do you assess gatekeeping competence within yourself?

11. What do you still need to learn about gatekeeping?

12. As we draw to a close, what, if anything, stands out as particularly meaningful or significantly important as you’ve reflected upon your experiences as a gatekeeper?
13. And, finally, what do you most hope I take from our time here together and incorporate into my research study?
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Informed Consent Form for Participating Counselor Educators

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:
• Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
• Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction
My name is Natasha Schnell. I am a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University. Under the supervision of Dr. Scott Wickman, PhD, I am conducting a research study exploring Counselor Educators’ experiences with Gatekeeping in the Counseling Profession. I am inviting you to participate in my research study. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about this research and you can take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. You may ask questions at any time throughout the research process.

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study is to examine the developmental learning process of becoming a gatekeeper to the counseling profession, specifically focusing on counselor educators’ reflections on their education, training, and professional experiences (critical incidents) leading toward perceived gatekeeping competence. After completing this study, I am planning to publish the results in professional journals as well as present at professional conferences.

Type of Research Intervention
Research participants will be involved in a semi-structured two-part interview series, with interviews scheduled between 3-7 days apart. Interviews will each last between 45-90 minutes. Interview questions will ask the participants to share information regarding their experiences as gatekeepers in the counseling profession. Interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings will be transcribed verbatim. Participants will be asked to provide artifacts/items that exemplify their experiences as gatekeepers in the counseling profession (for example: photos, letters, examples of ways in which they assess students/grading/feedback). Artifacts will be photographed by the researcher. The data collection will end when the second interview has been conducted and all questions in the interview guide (attached) have been addressed.
Inclusion Criteria
There are two criteria for identifying participants for this study:

3. Participants are counselor educators who meet the CACREP criteria for Core Faculty, specifically.
   Core counselor education program faculty have earned doctoral degrees in counselor education, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program, or have related doctoral degrees and have been employed as full-time faculty members in a counselor education program for a minimum of one full academic year before July 1, 2013. (CACREP, 2016, p. 8).
   This criterion serves to ensure that participants are trained in and identify with the counseling field.

2. Participants have experience (a minimum of two-years) teaching full-time in a Master or Doctoral level counseling program.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Participants may change their mind at any time and stop participating even if they agreed earlier. Participants may cease participation in this research study at any time and for any reason. A reason does not need to be provided. The participant can give verbal or written notice of their desire to withdraw from the study. There are no repercussions for the withdrawal from the study.

Procedures
I am asking you to help me learn more about your experiences with gatekeeping methods and practices in Counselor Education. I am inviting you to take part in this research study. If you accept, you will be asked to answer questions relating to this subject, your perceptions, and your experiences. Participants will interview with me, Natasha Schnell. Interviews will take place in a confidential setting of your choosing and will be recorded for transcription and analysis at a later date. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. No one else but I will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The recording will be saved on a password protected personal computer. Audio recordings will be deleted upon completed transcription. To protect confidentiality of data, all identifying information (participant and university/program names) will be replaced with pseudonyms and care will be taken to minimize in-text quotations from participants that could be identifying in nature.

Duration
You will be interviewed twice over a one-week period of time. Following the one week involvement, I may contact you to follow up only for clarification or if additional information is needed.

Risks
I am asking you to share some personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give us any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to take part in the interview.
Benefits
Understanding how gatekeeping skills are acquired and developed can provide relevant information to doctoral counselor education and supervision training programs, as they seek to prepare their graduates to be effective gatekeepers. Additionally, examining early professional experiences in gatekeeping could also provide valuable information to counseling faculty as they seek to support junior faculty in their role as gatekeepers. Gaining insight into what types of experiences were meaningful, informative, and helpful in the development of gatekeeping knowledge and skills, while also seeking to explore what was missing, confusing, or unhelpful in training on gatekeeping, may provide useful information to counselor education departments when refining educational and training protocol to best meet the needs of students and/or faculty in gatekeeping.

Reimbursements
You will be provided with a $25 Visa Gift Card upon completion of the second interview.

Sharing the Results
To protect confidentiality of data, all identifying information (participant and university/program names) will be replaced with pseudonyms and care will be taken to minimize in-text quotations from participants that could be identifying in nature. Following the interviews, the results will be published so that other interested people may learn from this research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and choosing to participate will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in any way. You may stop participating in the discussion/interview at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview/discussion to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact
You can ask the questions now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me in any of the following ways: natasha.schnell@mac.com or (847) 770-2708.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the international review board, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm (IRB Protocol # HS20-0078). Additionally, if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Northern Illinois University Office of Research Compliance at (815)753-8588.
Part II: Certificate of Consent
I have been invited to participate in research about Counselor Educator’s preparation and experiences with gatekeeping in the counseling profession. I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant: __________________________________________________________

Participant’s Signature for Research Participation: ________________________________

Participant’s Signature for Consent for Audio recording: ____________________________

Date:
Day/month/year

Contact number and Email Address: ________________________________________________

Statement by the person taking consent
I have accurately read the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research procedures. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent: ________________________________

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent: ________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________
Day/month/year
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Age: 25-35 _____ 36-45 _____ 46-55 _____ 56-65 _____ 66+ _____

Gender Identity: ___________________ Preferred Pronouns: ___________________

Racial/Ethnic Identification: _______________________________________________

Do you meet the CACREP Requirements for Core Faculty? Core counselor education program faculty have earned doctoral degrees in counselor education, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program, or have related doctoral degrees and have been employed as full-time faculty members in a counselor education program for a minimum of one full academic year before July 1, 2013. (CACREP, 2016, p. 8) Yes _______ No _______

What is your highest degree? (Please circle one)

Ph.D.  Ed.D.  Psy.D.  Other: __________________

What is the education level of the counseling students you currently teach? (Please circle one)

Master’s Students  Doctoral Students  Master & Doctoral Students  Other: _______

What is the type of institution in which you are currently employed?

Public University/College  Private University/College  Other: __________________

Does your current institution have a religious affiliation? Yes _______ No _______

Is the program in which you teach CACREP Accredited? Yes _______ No _______

How many years experience do you have working as a full-time faculty member? _______

What is the type of institution in which you earned your doctoral degree? (please circle one)

Public University/College  Private University/College  Other: __________________

Does your doctoral degree granting institution have a religious affiliation?

Yes _______ No _______

Is the program where you earned your doctoral degree CACREP Accredited?

Yes _______ No _______
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<th>Racial/Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Private, non-religious</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Private, non-religious</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Private, Non-religious</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>In progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Public, non-religious</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Private, non-religious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Filipino American</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Public, non-religious</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
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<td>Public, Non-religious</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>NO</td>
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