The authors examined the perceptions of future school administrators regarding the role of the school counselor. The study was designed to assist counselor educators and school counselors in identifying potential barriers that could interfere with establishing comprehensive developmental counseling programs that are supervised by principals and superintendents. Future administrators rated crisis intervention, assisting with transitions, and personal counseling as the most important duties of school counselors; however, some respondents identified administrative and disciplinary duties as significant ones for the counselor.

School counselors often engage in functions that are only remotely related to either their training or their professionally determined roles or activities (Baker, 1996). Scheduling, participating in disciplinary functions, and conducting clerical duties absorb much of a school counselor's time. However, those duties are not considered core elements of a counselor's role by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 1990) or by many authors (Baker, 1996; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Gysbers & Henderson, 1994; Murray, 1995; Schmidt, 1999). The time that the school counselor spends performing noncounseling-related tasks compromises his or her ability to complete tasks that are associated with the training the individual received and with state (i.e., Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 1996) and national role standards. Individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, program coordination, and consultation have often been neglected in many schools because counselors must perform noncounseling tasks (Baker, 1996).

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The time spent by school counselors on noncounseling functions has been a topic of concern for many authors (e.g., High, 1993; Schmidt, 1999; Stalling, 1991). Studies have shown that school administrators view the role of the school counselor as different than that of the professional school counselor (Stalling, 1991). At most schools, administrators determine the role of the counselor; thus, the counselor’s duties are often incongruent with state and national role statements. This lack of agreement can be a source of frustration for school counselors and a source of conflict between counselors and school administrators (Kaplan, 1995). A recent study (Scruggs, Wasielewski, & Ash, 1999) highlighted the poor allocation of the school counselor’s time. In the K–12 school studied, only 52% of the polled parents, 76% of the staff, and 57% of the secondary students believed that counselors worked on appropriate tasks.

Although administrators have expanded their knowledge of school counseling programs, some continue to base their knowledge on their own experience with counselors when they were in school (Coy, 1999). Graduate programs for educational administration do not always mandate courses in school counseling nor do they necessarily focus on the role of the school counselor in a comprehensive school counseling program. The lack of focus on school counseling in an educational administrator’s training suggests to school counselors that their supervisors might lack knowledge of appropriate counselor roles. The purpose of our study was to examine the perceptions of students in two educational administration graduate programs regarding the role of the school counselor. Knowing the perceptions of future administrators regarding the role of the school counselor is important because it helps counselors anticipate areas of agreement and conflict when they attempt to gain administrative support for the counselor’s roles. For example, counselors need to be aware that administrators may expect them to be disciplinarians, and counselor educators need to teach counseling students how to address this situation. The research question was “Is there a difference in the way students in a graduate program for educational administration perceive the role of the professional school counselor and the role of the counselor as outlined in the state’s professional standards?” (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 1996).

**The Role of the School Counselor**

Role statements for school counselors are derived from several sources. First, the ASCA role statement, which was developed by professionals in school counseling (ASCA, 1990), assists individuals who train counselors and those who outline state standards of practice by offering general guidelines of practice. Second, state role statements
usually are developed by state education departments and are based on the ASCA role statement. For example, in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the New Counselor Standards (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 1996) have been published to provide districts with an outline of essential services that are performed by school counselors. Third, the literature on professional counseling offers role statements for counselors. It seems that there is a high level of agreement among professionals (Baker, 1996; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Schmidt, 1999) concerning the role of the school counselor. The literature identified three counselor roles: (a) counseling, (b) consulting, and (c) coordination (ASCA, 1990; Schmidt, 1999). In addition, several other functions, which we discuss later in this article, have been identified in the literature.

Counseling

Children and adolescents face many problems that help to create an at-risk society (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998). The problems McWhirter et al. cited included the high number of students who are living in poverty, the existence of more than 1 million confirmed cases per year of child and adolescent abuse or neglect, an increase in the divorce rate, the use of illegal drugs and the engaging in sexual behaviors at earlier ages, and suicide. The emotional distress resulting from these problems can cripple a student’s ability to function in the classroom. According to the ASCA (1990) role statement, professional school counselors provide services to help students learn more effectively. One of the ways that counselors remove barriers to student learning is through individual and group counseling (Myrick, 1993).

Consulting

The ASCA (1990) role statement defined consultation as helping individuals become more effective in working with others and also helping individuals think through problems and concerns, gain knowledge and skill, and become more objective and self-confident. For example, a teacher may need assistance in designing a strategy for working with a child who has been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. The counselor may train the teacher to have the child use relaxing self-statements or to use calming breathing exercises.

Coordination

The ASCA (1990) role statement defined coordination as a counselor intervention of various indirect services that assist students; thus, the counselor functions as a liaison between school and
community agencies. Because professional school counselors are interested in enhancing student success, they administer and conduct developmentally appropriate programs to help students achieve academic, social, and vocational goals. School counselors can reach a wide range of students through programming efforts.

**Common Counselor Duties Not Promoted by ASCA**

There are many duties that school counselors often perform that do not appear in published counselor role statements (Baker, 1996; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Niebuhr, Niebuhr, & Cleveland, 1999). Assuming these roles often means that the school counselor will be unable to provide essential counseling services. Therefore, it is important for the school counselor to be aware of how administrators view these administrative functions.

**Scheduling**

Course scheduling is an arduous task. In one study (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989), high school counselors reported that they spent more time on scheduling courses than they spent on any other function. However, scheduling is not specifically outlined in the ASCA (1990) role statement nor is it identified as the primary responsibility of the counselor, according to Kentucky's standards for counselors. It is simply a task that traditionally has been assigned to counselors by default. Although school counselors should assist in the overall functioning of the school, scheduling courses should be distributed equally among school personnel (Baker, 1996).

**Disciplinary Functions**

Students often experience tension and anxiety when they approach school counselors because students sometimes view them as disciplinarians (Baker, 1996). The roles of disciplinarian and counselor are mutually exclusive because counseling is based on trust and open communication. Lecturing and punishing are acts that undermine the counselor's relationship with students and are incongruent with the counselor's role. If administrators do not recognize this conflict, they will send students to counselors to be disciplined.

**Clerical Duties**

Maintaining student records, assisting with transcript requests, and collecting and organizing program materials are among some of the many clerical tasks that school counselors perform (Baker, 1996). When the school has no clerical support, clerical duties are
given to the counselor. When one considers the amount of time a counselor has spent obtaining specialized training and the lack of training he or she has in performing clerical duties, requiring counselors to perform clerical tasks seems to be an inefficient use of the counselor's energy.

**Method**

**Survey Development**

Our study attempted to assess how school administrators-in-training perceived the role of the school counselor. Because no surveys currently exist to assess perceptions of the school counselor role, we developed an inventory that was based on state and professional standards of practice for professional school counselors (ASCA, 1990; Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 1996). The 15-item survey included actual items from the standards and a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not significant, 5 = highly significant) on which participants rated the importance of specific tasks. Five items were selected from each of the counseling, coordination, and consulting sections of the standards.

Four counselors and educational leadership faculty members chose items from Kentucky's counselor role statement standards, which are based on the correlation of these items with the ASCA role statement. Because this study was descriptive, little reliability information is available for the survey instrument. However, face validity is provided because it is based on ASCA-sanctioned items. Participants were also asked to indicate if they planned to be elementary-, middle-, or secondary-level administrators. Examples of the 15 items are as follows: “respond to crisis,” “consult with community resources,” and “provide a safe setting for students to talk” (Counseling task; see Table 1).

Questions were also included on five other tasks and represented tasks that school counselors often perform (Baker, 1996); the tasks are noncounseling ones that are not explicitly mentioned in the ASCA role statement. These questions were related to such tasks as administering tests and assisting in carrying out disciplinary actions. These questions were included to compare how administrators-in-training perceived the importance of these noncounseling functions.

A pilot test of the survey was conducted with a class of 14 counseling students who held a master's degree in school counseling. The students provided feedback regarding the clarity and relevance of the items, resulting in the revision of several items on the final survey. All participants of the pilot test indicated that the items were relevant and clear after the revisions had been made.
### TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Future School Administrators’ Ratings of Most Significant School Counselor Duties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duty (Kentucky Standards)</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to crisis</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe and confidential setting for students to talk</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate empathy</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a variety of techniques and theories</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote wellness</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean for counseling duties</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with teachers in crisis situations</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with teachers and parents to enhance student goals</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide direct referral services to enhance student learning</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with councils, boards, and family resource centers</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with community and professional resources</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean for consulting duties</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist student transitions</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students for special programs and services</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify community agencies for referral</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate with school and community to provide resources</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain cooperative relationships with community</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean for coordination duties</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties not listed in Professional Standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in registration and scheduling</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administering achievement tests</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain student records and files</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in special education services</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in disciplinary intervention</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean for duties not listed in standards</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants**

We surveyed graduate students in the educational administration graduate programs at two universities in Kentucky. All students were in a master’s degree program for educational administration; their professional goals were to become either a principal, superintendent, or director of pupil personnel. The participants were required to be teacher certified to be admitted to the program. A total of 100 students were asked to respond to the survey; 86 respondents returned usable forms, yielding a response rate of 86%. Of the 86 participants, 30.2% were employed at elementary schools, 25.6% were employed at middle schools, and 44.2% were employed at high schools. Ninety-five percent ($n = 82$) of the respondents were Caucasian, and 5% ($n = 4$) were African American. Ninety percent ($n = 77$) of the participants were men, and 10% ($n = 9$) were women. Participants represented three states—Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia.
Procedure

Two faculty members in educational administration from two regional universities agreed to recruit participants in their classes, resulting in the participation of students in five graduate-level educational administration classes. The classes included first- and second-year students; however, none of the participants had completed their field experience requirements. The instructors explained the nature and purpose of the survey as well as informed consent. They emphasized that participation was voluntary and that there were no rewards for participation. If they wished to participate, the students were instructed to sign the informed consent statement and to complete the survey.

Results

A primary goal of this investigation was to determine how graduate students in educational administration perceived the role of the school counselor. In particular, we investigated whether the students supported the role of the school counselor as outlined in the professional literature and in state standards. Of the 20 items on the survey, 15 were directly related to the state’s standards for the counseling task. The remaining five items came from professional literature (Baker, 1996) regarding common noncounseling-related tasks often performed by counselors (e.g., registration, disciplinary actions). Participants rated the five noncounseling-related tasks (registration, testing, special education assistance, record keeping, discipline) as the five least important duties of school counselors (see Table 1). The five duties participants rated as most important were direct crisis response, providing a safe setting for students to talk, communicating empathy, helping teachers respond to crisis, and helping students with transitions.

We also examined participants’ perceptions of tasks that are often performed by counselors, even though the tasks are not directly related to the counselor’s role. The task of discipline was rated as significant or highly significant by 27.9% of the participants. The task of keeping records was rated as significant or highly significant by 57% of the participants. The task of registration was rated as significant or highly significant also by 57% of the participants. The task of assisting in special education services (beyond referral) was rated as significant or highly significant by 50% of the participants. Finally, the task of testing was rated as significant or highly significant by 54.7% of the participants.

Discussion and Implications

Professional school counselors work closely with school administrators to develop school counseling programs. This study identified
how graduate students in educational administration in eastern Kentucky viewed the importance of specific school counselor duties. The survey contained 15 items that were based on the counselor duties endorsed by ASCA (1990) and the New Counselor Standards (Kentucky Educational Standards Board, 1996). Five additional items were included consisting of duties that are unrelated to the counseling role but are often performed by school counselors. Overall, the results suggest that administrators-in-training believed that the counselor’s role, as defined by Kentucky’s professional standards (Kentucky Educational Standards Board, 1996), is important. However, many participants also viewed noncounselor-related functions, such as record keeping, as important parts of the school counseling program.

The main research question was “Do students in a graduate program for educational administration perceive the role of the professional school counselor differently than the counselor role outlined in Kentucky’s professional standards based on the ASCA role statement?” The results of this study show that regional administrators-in-training appropriately prioritized the counselor duties presented in Kentucky’s standards and in ASCA guidelines. This finding suggests that future administrators should know the roles that counselors themselves considered most important for school counselors. However, some inappropriate roles for the counselor, such as discipline, were rated as significant by almost 30% of the participants. Although the participants prioritized the school counselor role appropriately, many still rated discipline, record keeping, registration, special education assistance, and administering tests as significant or highly significant. These duties are crucial tasks in the school; however, they are not directly identified as counselor duties by state and national standards. More than 1 out of 4 future administrators rated discipline as a significant or highly significant duty of the school counselor. In addition, more than half of the sample viewed record keeping as a significant or highly significant responsibility of school counselors.

It is clear that discipline and the previously mentioned other duties are not primary functions of school counselors (ASCA, 1990; Baker, 1996; Schmidt, 1999) and that school counselors are taught to focus on counseling, consulting, and coordinating (Baker, 1996). However, they also need to be trained on how to respond when they are assigned inappropriate duties.

Another goal of this study was to see how future school administrators perceived the importance of the school counselor roles of counseling, consulting, and coordinating. Fortunately, the mean response for each of these items ranged between significant and highly significant. It seems that future administrators are aware
of the importance of the school counselor's duties and have an overall positive assessment of the purpose of the duties. When we compared participants' perceptions of the importance of counseling, consulting, and coordinating, the results showed that no single area was seen as more important than another. Although crisis response was of major importance, the three roles were rated almost equally. Counselor educators can use this information in preparing school counselors. For example, future counselors can be told that principals view crisis management as an essential task for counselors. Thus, new counselors may want to receive additional training in crisis management. In addition, school counselors should be trained to educate the school administrators that crisis management is a group effort; as such, proactive planning is paramount.

Six recommendations are offered to counselor educators regarding how to train future school counselors on collaborating with principals about their role in the school's operation.

1. The job interview. Teach students how to approach the job interview. During the initial interview for employment, the prospective counselor should present a summary of a comprehensive developmental guidance program and determine the chief school administrator's assessment of the proposed program. The nature of the counseling program begins with the interview. This is the counselor's first chance to obtain support for a solid program; an administrator's agreement with the prospective counselor's proposed program shows his or her commitment to a structured, professional program.

2. Publish a newsletter. Encourage students to publish a counselor's newsletter that is directed toward school staff, administration, and parents. Lack of information often leads to misinformation about a counselor's role. By providing clear statements about the goals and achievements of the guidance program, the prospective counselor can build consensus for his or her role. An organizational understanding of a counselor's role prevents it from being dictated by one person.

3. Assertiveness training. Teach students in school counseling how to be assertive. For example, they should role-play different techniques for communicating their needs and grievances. The role-playing sessions should show how assertive communication differs from aggressive communication; students should also be advised on how to choose their battles.

4. Consultation with the university's educational leadership program. Identify the training that members of leadership have received in counseling and offer to be a guest lecturer on the topic.
5. Conduct region-focused research on how principals view the school counselor's job. The results of the research can be used to advise future counselors on potential obstacles to their effectiveness.

6. Acknowledge administrative support of quality school counselor programs. When the prospective counselor identifies a high quality school counseling program, he or she should be encouraged to write a thank you letter to the principal, focusing on the principal's leadership and support of the counseling program.

Study Limitations

Limitations of this study include the use of a geographically restricted sample, the lack of a commonly used and validated instrument for studying the perceptions examined in this study, and the small number of minority participants. Future studies could include participants from a broader geographic region, use a higher percentage of minority respondents, and compare the perceptions of elementary and high school administrators regarding the school counselor's role.

Conclusion

School counselors often perform duties that are unrelated to their role (ASCA, 1990). As a consequence, many students do not receive individual and group counseling or the guidance they need to remove classroom barriers to learning. ASCA provides a clear role statement for professional school counselors, and most state education agencies base their role statements on these standards. However, school administrators lack training in these standards and frequently assign duties to counselors that are inappropriate (Baker, 1996). It is important for researchers to study how school administrators and future administrators perceive the counselor's role because these are the individuals who supervise school counseling programs. In addition, counselor educators can use this information to train school counselors-in-training to address misperceptions about the counselor's role.

The results of this study indicated that many misperceptions toward the role of the school counselor still exist. For example, almost one third of the sample of future administrators rated discipline as an important or highly important duty. This is contrary to ASCA's (1990) guideline regarding using counselors as disciplinarians. Also, more than half of the participants indicated that record keeping was a significant duty. We recognize that some administrative duties will be assumed by counselors; record keeping, however, should not be a primary task for them.
In conclusion, school counselors and counselor educators need to be aware of the influence that school administrators exert on a school's counseling program. Counselor–principal collaboration issues should be addressed in training programs, and school counselors need to be aware, prior to employment, of how their supervisors view the counselor's role. Ultimately, collaboration will be needed with educational leadership programs to ensure that graduates of these programs have a solid understanding of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

References