

UCA School Counseling Advisory Board

Feb. 11, 2026 10 am

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

- Donna Wilchie - Ida Burns Elementary School, School Counselor
- Esther Murdock - Ruth Barker Middle School at Old High Middle School, School Counselor
- Millie Bryant- Greenbrier School Junior High School, School Counselor
- Dr. Valerie Couture - UCA, Associate Professor/SCCN Field Experience Coordinator
- Dr. Odunola Oyeniya - UCA, Associate Professor/SCCN Program Director

1. School Counseling Program Updates

- a. **ARCA-Recognized School Counselor Preparation Program -SPA Review** - Dr. Couture shared that the School Counseling Program is now among only seven programs nationwide to earn recognition from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). This prestigious recognition is valid for seven years and reflects the program's commitment to excellence in school counselor preparation. ASCA recognition affirms that the program offers a rigorous and specialized curriculum aligned with national standards for school counseling. The curriculum emphasizes data-driven decision-making, comprehensive school counseling practices, and the effective use of student outcome data. Additionally, the program prioritizes supervised field experiences, ethical and professional behavior, and evidence-based training designed to support students' academic achievement, career development, and social/emotional well-being. This distinction underscores the program's quality, relevance, and alignment with best practices in the preparation of future school counselors.
- b. **LAC Certificate Program Development** - Dr. Oyeniya shared updates on ongoing efforts to establish a Licensed Associate Counselor (LAC) certificate program. In January, a planning meeting was held with Kimberly Sbusbs and Drs. Michael Mills, Kurt Boniecki, and Jeff Whittingham to discuss pathways for school counselors interested in pursuing LAC licensure as mental health counselors. As an outcome of this meeting, it was determined that the LAC certificate program would be housed within the School Counseling Program. This integration is intended to streamline program administration, enhance student access to financial aid, and provide a clearer licensure pathway for school counseling students and graduates. The proposed certificate is expected to require approximately 12 additional credit hours, supporting students' transition toward mental health counseling licensure while maintaining alignment with existing program structures.
- c. **Course Changes** - Dr. Oyeniya shared updates regarding planned course scheduling changes within the program. Beginning in Summer 2026, the number of courses offered during the summer term will be reduced, with the majority of program courses offered primarily during the fall and spring semesters. This change reflects the discontinuation of

several courses previously offered during summer terms and is intended to strengthen enrollment in fall and spring offerings. In addition, Dr. Oyeniyi noted a proposed curriculum adjustment to remove Research Methods as a prerequisite for the Educational Assessment and Measurement course. This change aims to improve course sequencing flexibility while maintaining academic rigor and alignment with program learning outcomes.

- d. **NCDA Paper Assignment as a New Key Assessment** - Dr. Oyeniyi shared plans to replace **Key Assessment #6 – Counseling Skills** with **NCDA paper assignments** in the Career Counseling course, as the current counseling skills assessment does not sufficiently align with American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standards. This assessment revision is intended to ensure stronger alignment with ASCA competencies required for school counselor preparation. The NCDA paper assignments more directly reflect the essential role of career counseling within comprehensive school counseling programs and allow students to demonstrate knowledge and application of career development theory and practice. This assessment approach is particularly relevant for school counseling students across the elementary, middle, and high school levels, where career development is a critical component of students' academic, career, and social/emotional development.

II. Advisory Board Members' Thoughts

- a. **School Counseling Role Is Evolving** – The role of school counselors continues to evolve, with counselors now providing a broader range of services than traditionally associated with the profession. As schools address increasingly complex student mental health needs, many school counselors are engaging in responsibilities that extend beyond the historical scope of practice. This shift has generated strong interest among school counselors in completing the additional coursework required to pursue Licensed Associate Counselor (LAC) licensure. For example, school counselors often oversee “second chance” programs for students who have been found in possession of or using drugs or alcohol on school property. In these programs, counselors may be responsible for facilitating a series of required counseling sessions, including multiple sessions involving parents or guardians. While these responsibilities were not traditionally part of the school counselor role, counselors must now adapt to meet evolving school and district expectations.

Additionally, school counselors are increasingly delivering behavioral and mental health interventions at Tier 2 and in some cases Tier 3 within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). These responsibilities reflect a significant shift from the historical guidance counselor role, which focused primarily on academic scheduling and career planning. Today's school counselors are operating more fully within a mental health framework. Given this evolution, the addition of an LAC certificate within the University of Central Arkansas School Counseling Program is timely and highly beneficial. The LAC track equips school counselors with advanced clinical knowledge and skills that align with their expanding responsibilities, enhances professional competence, and opens additional

career and licensure opportunities. Overall, the certificate program strengthens preparation for contemporary school counseling practice and supports the changing mental health needs of students and families.

- b. **Professional Advocacy and Awareness** - Concerns regarding the replacement of licensed school counselors with non-professionals underscore the importance of continued vigilance, advocacy, and community support within the profession. This discussion emerged in response to a video circulated on social media addressing school counseling issues in Texas. Although the video dates back to May 2023 and may not reflect current policy or practice, it serves as a valuable reminder of the need to remain informed about legislative and professional developments affecting school counseling in other states. Ongoing awareness of such issues supports proactive advocacy efforts and reinforces the importance of protecting professional standards and the role of trained, qualified school counselors.