To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kristi Turner Walker entitled "Current and Best Practices for Recruiting Qualified Rehabilitation Counselors." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Ralph Brockett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

CURRENT AND BEST PRACTICES FOR RECRUITING QUALIFIED REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

A Dissertation

Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kristi Turner Walker

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who shares my love of education. I thank my husband Brad for enduring many years of having a "part time" wife as I pursued my education. I thank my parents, John and Linda, for instilling a strong value for education at an early age, and for giving me my life motto: "you can do anything you set your mind to." And I thank my dear son Kevin, whose birth during the writing of this inspired me to be the best that I can be for him. I love you all dearly.

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I would also like to thank all of the members of RSA's Region IV Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Steering Committee. The input from committee members was very valuable in designing this study.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current status of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) in Rehabilitation Services Administration's Region IV, along with their current recruitment practices. Written surveys and follow up phone interviews were used to gather data from the 19 Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs and the 12 Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation programs in Region IV. Additionally, suggestions were obtained from key stakeholders regarding future recruitment activities.

Currently there are 891 positions not filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. In addition, a majority of graduates from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs are not seeking employment from the Federal/State VR programs (51%). The anticipated retirement and turnover rate for VR Counselors in the next three years is projected to be three times larger than the number of students graduating from RCE programs. Consequently there is a need for an aggressive recruitment campaign.

RCE Coordinators and VR Directors agreed that some needed recruitment strategies included: recruitment and development of recruitment videos and development of a regional spokesperson, and development of a web based marketing program, paid internships for VR agencies, and marketing strategies for high schools and universities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of the Problem	3
	Purpose of the Study	4
	Research Questions	4
	Rationale for the Study	5
	Significance of the Study	6
	Limitations	7
	Definitions/ Acronyms	7
	Organization of the Dissertation	9
II.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	10
	Specialization of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	10
	Research Leading to Current Legislation	12
	Comprehensive System of Personnel Development	13
	Recruitment	16
	Retention	21
	Continuing Education	22
	Ongoing Program Evaluation	28
	Conclusion	35

III. METHOD 37

Population 38

Instrumentation 38

Procedure 39

Research Questions and Data Analysis 40

Summary 44

IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA 45

Demographic Characteristics 45

Specific Research Questions 48

Responses to Research Questions 49

Summary 68

V. CONCLUSIONS 69

Procedures 69

Summary of Research Findings 70

Discussion 79

Recommendations 81

Suggestions for Future Research 82

Summary 83

LIST OF REFERENCES 85

APPENDICES 90

VITAE 100

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
4.1	Applicant rates to RCE programs over a three year period	50
4.2	Yearly admission rates for RCE programs	51
4.3	Region IV RCE graduation rates for a three year period	53
4.4	Employment of Region IV RCE graduates by agency type	54
4.5	Average salary for RCE graduates	56
4.6	Number of VRC positions in Region IV	58
4.7	Number of vacant VR Counselor positions	59
4.8	Expected VRC retirements/promotions in the next three years	60
4.9	Reasons VRCs leaving agency	61
4.10	Number of QRCs needed in Region IV	62
4.11	Current recruitment practices used in Region IV	63
4.12	Comparison of RCE and VR on Likert scale items	65
4.13	Suggested new recruitment initiatives for Region IV	67

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

2.1 Model that illustrates the four components of CSPD 16

4.1 Admission rates for RCE programs 52

4.2 RCE graduation rates for a three year period 53

4.3 Comparison of starting salaries for RCE graduates in different agencies 57

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1998 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs have been mandated to place qualified personnel into Rehabilitation Counselor positions. This mandate came as a result of numerous studies indicating more successful outcomes for clients who were served by qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (Szymanski & Parker, 1989; Szymanski, 1991, Szymanski & Danek, 1992; Cohen, Conley, Pelavin & McInerney, 1993; Cook & Bolton, 1992). As part of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) states are required to determine what a qualified counselor is. Most states have adopted a definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor as being an individual with a Master's degree who is eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor examination.

This mandate to upgrade the minimum requirements for a Rehabilitation Counselor has posed numerous concerns for Vocational Rehabilitation Human Resource departments. Federal/ State Vocational Rehabilitation programs were initiated in 1921 with the Smith Fess Act. In the early 1970's, when increased Federal funding became available, the careers of many current VR

administrators had just begun. By the time the 1998 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act were enacted, many long-term counselors were getting close to retirement age (Bishop & Crystal, 2002). It is anticipated that a large number of counselor positions will become vacant. In addition to the higher demand for VR Counselors, the pool of available applicants shrank drastically in size due to the new educational requirements. To date, this problem has come to fruition, and Federal/State VR programs are looking for new ways to recruit qualified Rehabilitation Counselors.

According to Breaugh (1992) recruitment "involves those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or the types of applicants who apply for a position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted". Breaugh also believes that the ultimate goal of the recruitment process should not be to attract a large pool of applicants, but rather to attract high-quality applicants.

For the purpose of this study, a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor will be identified as a person with a Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field. The natural recruitment flow for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (RCs) would be graduates from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE) programs entering into the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation programs. Ideally, current RC's who are not considered qualified would pursue this degree, however that is not happening. This study is designed to determine current issues in recruitment of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors, and to identify recruitment areas that could be improved.

Statement of the Problem

With new pressures for VR agencies to recruit more counselors, it becomes necessary to determine where changes need to occur. In order to do this, one must first have a solid understanding of current practices, so that more innovative practices can be built on top of the current foundation (Andrew, Fabion, & Palmer, 2002). With an understanding of current recruitment practices, it is also necessary to collect ideas from key recruiters in an effort to develop the new practices.

In Region IV, which consists of eight states and twelve agencies, the turnover rate of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions is greater than the recruitment rate (IRI, 1999). The high turnover rate is coupled with a projected increase in the retirement rate among VRCs in the public VR programs. According to the 1998 amendments of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies are required to fill all their Rehabilitation Counselor positions with "qualified Rehabilitation Counselors". In a recent national study, Dew and Peters (2002) reported that out of the 1,230 graduates of RCE programs in 1997-1998, only 26 worked in state VR agencies. These statistics indicate that there will not be enough qualified graduates to fill the existing and expected need. Knowing the current recruitment strategies and goals could assist in formulating strategies to increase the number of qualified counselors entering the field.

Purpose of the Study

A series of research studies conducted in the 1980's led to a requirement that all Rehabilitation Counselors in the Federal/ State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies were to be more qualified for their jobs. This requirement was made in the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. While each state was given the responsibility to determine their own definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor, most states adopted the definition as being an individual with a Masters degree who is eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) examination.

The purpose of this research project is to identify how Vocational Rehabilitation agencies currently recruit qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. Data will also be collected to determine the extent to which academic educators and VR administrators agree on what the best recruitment practices are. This information will be obtained through surveys administered to coordinators of the 19 Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs in Region IV, as well as the 12 State Directors of the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation programs in the same region. This study was conducted at the request of the Region IV CSPD steering committee. The committee wanted to obtain information that would assist them in developing a recruitment initiative plan.

Research Questions

The study was conducted in an effort to answer thirteen research questions. The questions follow:

1. What are the applicant rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
2. What are the admission rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
3. What are the graduation rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
4. Where are graduates from RCE programs in Region IV employed upon graduation?
5. How are agencies recruiting graduates from RCE programs in Region IV?
6. How may VR Counselor positions exist in Region IV?
7. How many VR Counselor positions in Region IV are currently vacant?
8. How many VR Counselor retirements and/or promotions are expected in the next 3 years?
9. Why are counselors leaving the VR agencies in Region IV?
10. To what extent do Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors express a need for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors?
11. What are the current recruitment practices used in Region IV?
12. To what extent do Educators and State Directors share the same recruitment concerns?
13. What are suggested best practices for a new recruitment initiative in Region IV?

Rationale for the Study

Turnover among counselors in the Federal/ State VR program has been attributed to counselors leaving for jobs in the private sector, being promoted or transferred within the agency, leaving for family-related or personal reasons,

being fired, or retiring (Cohen, Conley, Pelavin, & McInerney,1993; Crimando, Hansen, & Riggar 1986; Bishop & Crystal, 2002). It is suspected that the current turnover rate is greater than the recruitment rate. To add to the problem, new positions must be filled with individuals who have a higher level of formal education than previously required. As a result, the recruitment of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors is a major problem for Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. This study will identify the expected number of Rehabilitation Counselor positions that need to be filled with qualified personnel and compare it with the number of students graduating from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs. Additionally, it will identify current recruitment practices in Region IV.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will contribute to the current Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor education knowledge base in several ways:

1. VR programs in Region IV can use the information to develop a new recruitment initiative that may address the current demand for Rehabilitation Counselors.
2. Current practices in Region IV may be revised to reflect future concerns.
3. As two of the major gatekeepers in the natural recruitment flow, it is important for VR administrators and RC Educators to work

together. The opinions of both these groups will be compared for similarities and differences.

4. This study may serve as a template for other Regions to conduct similar studies.
5. This study will add another dimension to studies conducted by Edna Szymanski (Szymanski & Parker, 1989; Patterson & Szymanski, 1991; Szymanski & Danek, 1992; Leahy & Szymanski,1995). Szymanski (1991) concluded that Rehabilitation Counselors who have Masters Degrees assist clients with better employment outcomes. Szymanski's study provides data allowing evaluation of the practicality of Vocational Rehabilitation programs hiring Masters level counselors with budget concerns.

Limitations

This study will be limited to the issues identified by the Region IV recruitment steering committee. It may be difficult to generalize this study to RSA regions outside of Region IV, as a random sample is not being used.

Definitions/ Acronyms

Throughout the study, the following acronyms will be used:

Comprehensive System for Personnel Development (CSPD) - A term used in the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and refers to both pre-

service and in-service training systems that all federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs must develop to ensure that all counselors are qualified to provide services to individuals with disabilities.

Qualified Rehabilitation Counselor (QRC)- A Rehabilitation Counselor who meets the state definition of being "qualified". In Region IV, most states have adopted the definition of a QRC being someone who is eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor examination. This means that the counselor has a Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field, and/or practicum experience.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) – A law passed in 1973 whose primary goal is to foster economic independence for people with disabilities by providing funding and enabling greater access to government information and services for people with disabilities. This legislative initiative enacted congressional insight for provision of consumer involvement in Rehabilitation initiatives. A primary goal was to foster economic independence and to enable people with disabilities to have greater access and input into rehabilitation services.

Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE) - Programs offered by colleges and universities that are accredited to educate current and future Rehabilitation Counselors.

Regional Rehabilitation Counselor Education Programs (RRCEP) – Programs housing educators who work directly with Vocational Rehabilitation staff in each region to train new and experienced Rehabilitation personnel.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) – The Federal/State rehabilitation program that was developed as a result of the Smith Fess Act of 1920. It allows individuals with disabilities to acquire skills necessary to obtain employment, potentially getting off public assistance programs, and adding to the tax revenues

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) – A qualified individual who has responsibility to ensure that the basic services of the Vocational Rehabilitation program are provided to eligible individuals with disabilities.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduced the problem being studied, detailed the purpose of the study, proposed the research questions, stated the significance and the limitations of the study, and defined key operational terms. Chapter II provides a literature review of the following topics: 1) a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, 2) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor recruitment, 3) retention in Vocational Rehabilitation, 4) continuing education, and 5) ongoing program evaluation. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology, including a description of the population, procedure, and data analysis. Chapter IV contains the results of the study and Chapter V summarizes the research findings, provides conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for future research. An appendix containing the survey instrument follows Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature and research that support this study. Literature was reviewed on topics regarding the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation system including: 1) a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, 2) Vocational Rehabilitation recruitment, 3) retention in Vocational Rehabilitation, 4) continuing education, and 5) ongoing program evaluation.

Specialization of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

In the United States, it is reported that 54 million (one out of five) people have a disability. With the changes in medical advancements and work technologies, more and more individuals who have disabilities are capable of being productive members of the workforce. According to the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI, 1999), empowerment, informed choice, and assistance from a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor can assist these individuals in obtaining employment and independence.

As a catalyst for a person's independence, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor's (VRC) role is very important. A VRC can help a person to develop a

good understanding of their knowledge, skills and abilities. A VRC also assists people with disabilities in identifying potential barriers to employment, and ways to accommodate these barriers. Additionally, Rehabilitation Counselors are equipped with a great understanding of the current job force, and have knowledge of employee expectations. They are experts in career development, assistive technology, training options, and community resources that are available for clients in accessibility, transportation, and independent living. The VRC works with the client to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). A successful plan may mean that a person can stop living on subsidy programs, earn a greater wage, and have their own medical insurance, transportation, and housing.

Among the helping professions, the Rehabilitation Counseling profession is very specialized. While the employment setting and client population may vary, most Rehabilitation Counselors "(a) assess needs, (b) establish a working alliance with the individual to develop goals and individualized plans to meet identified needs, and (c) provide or arrange for therapeutic services and interventions (e.g., psychological, medical, social, behavioral), including job placement and follow-up services" (Leahy, 2004, p. 143). A person in the Rehabilitation profession must have specialized knowledge in disabilities, services, and employment. In addition, a person must have knowledge and skills required for counseling. These skills beyond counseling differentiate the Rehabilitation Counseling profession from other counselors such as those in mental health, career, and school counseling. It is also distinct from other

rehabilitation professions such as job placement specialists and vocational evaluators (Jenkins, Patterson & Szymanski, 1992; Leahy & Szymanski, 1995).

Research Leading to Current Legislation

With such a comprehensive and varied job description, it becomes apparent that a Rehabilitation Counselor is a specialized professional, who needs specialized training. Researchers have evaluated the impact of having a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. These studies have concluded that a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor with a Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling is able to obtain a higher number of employment outcomes at a lower cost to the state VR agency when compared to a VR Counselor without a Masters degree (Cook & Bolton, 1992; Dunn, 1990; Szymanski, 1991). Szymanski and Parker (1989) found that people with severe disabilities achieved significantly better outcomes when they worked with a VR Counselor who had a master's degree as opposed to VR Counselors who held bachelor's degrees. This research recommended that states need to eradicate the practice of hiring persons with only bachelors degrees as VR Counselors. There is also a large body of research concluding that Rehabilitation Counselors who have a Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field achieve better service delivery outcomes among clients with *severe* disabilities (Leahy & Szymanski, 1995). In addition, these same Rehabilitation Counselors perceive themselves to be more competent in critical knowledge and skill areas

of Rehabilitation Counseling than counselors who did not possess a Masters degree.

Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

The research described above led to concentrated advocacy efforts to mandate that Rehabilitation Counselors be qualified. In 1992, when the Rehabilitation Act was reauthorized, it introduced the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) that required state agencies to establish standards for rehabilitation personnel. It was at this time during Dr. Martha Walker's presidency of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE) that the organization advocated placing the word "qualified" before the word "personnel" in sections 304 (a) and 304 (c) of the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Leahy, 2004). In the 1998 amendments, a requirement was made for Rehabilitation Counselors to be qualified. While the law did not specify a definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor, each state had the task of determining a definition. In most states, the definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor is an individual who is eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) examination. To sit for the CRC examination, one must have a Masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field. It is important to note that the CRC credential is not usually required by states for a counselor to be considered qualified. Instead of being required to actually attain the CRC credential to be considered qualified, a counselor only has to be eligible to take the examination. Critics such as Rothman (1987) and

Leahy (2004) believe that without requiring the CRC credential there are some limitations to a qualified counselor. To be certified implies that a person has successfully passed a proficiency examination, is accountable to the professional code of ethics, and has a continuing education requirement. The regulation of practice is made more difficult if all qualified Rehabilitation Counselors are not required to hold a CRC credential (Leahy, 2004). This affects the level of personnel development.

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is defined by the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (1999) as "foremost a human resource development tool for management to increase staff capabilities, improve performance, and respond to changing demands brought to bear from external and internal environments" (p. 25). It is based on a philosophy that in order to provide the best employment outcomes for people with disabilities, the individuals who serve them must have the best education, skills, and abilities that are possible.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (1998), states that new personnel hired by the State VR programs are expected to meet the requirements to be a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor. If it is not possible for the state to comply, then acceptable justification must be presented, and a plan developed to move toward this standard. The Rehabilitation Act also requires existing personnel to be retrained to meet established requirements. Staff members who do not meet the standard should have a plan in place to achieve it.

Each state must also have a plan for the recruitment and retention of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors.

A Comprehensive System of Personnel Development is necessary in order to ensure that Rehabilitation Counselors are qualified. A national study conducted by the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) indicates that approximately 42% of currently employed Rehabilitation Counselors do not presently meet the CSPD requirements (Froehlic & Linkowski, 2002). Another national study indicated that only 25% of counselors holding a Master's degree reported having the CRC credential (Andrew, et al, 2002). This seems to be a major concern considering the fact that seven years ago amendments to the Rehabilitation Act mandated VR agencies to fill the counselor positions with qualified personnel.

A strong Comprehensive System of Personnel Development depends upon several factors to make it work. Figure 2.1 contains a model used as an organizing framework for the discussion of literature. One may view CSPD as a structure supported by three pillars. In the model, CSPD is illustrated as a dome supported by the pillars of recruitment, retention, and continuing education which are all sitting on a foundation of program evaluations. The model illustrates that all pillars are equally important to ensure that CSPD is maintained. In order to assess if each of the pillars are able to support the weight of CSPD, it is necessary to conduct continuous program evaluations. Each pillar and the foundation will be addressed in the following sections.

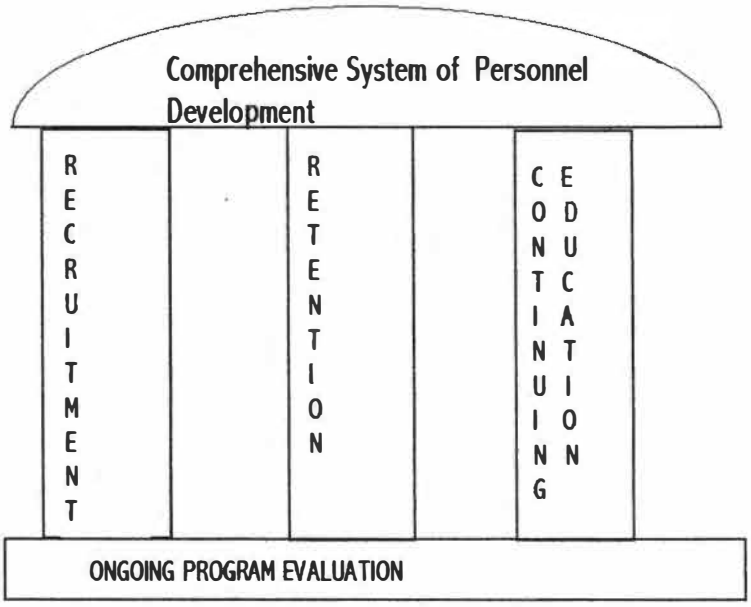

Figure 2.1: Model that illustrates the four components of CSPD

Recruitment

The first pillar in the CSPD model represents recruitment. While large demands are placed on VR agencies to fill positions with qualified personnel, recruitment is particularly important due to the fact that agencies are also faced with high turnover levels. The turnover crisis continues to increase due to counselor retirement (Dew & Peters, 2002; Roberts, Oliveri, & Delmonico, 1989).

According to Dew & Peters (2002) the number of employees leaving VR for any given five-year period is approximately 25%. With approximately 8000 counselors employed by VR agencies, this means that approximately 2000 counselors will be needed every five years just to meet the current need. To

meet CSPD requirements these counselors should be qualified Rehabilitation Counselors.

The number of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors needed is increased when one considers that the Federal/State VR agencies experienced a tremendous growth period after the 1973 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. Many counselors joined the workforce at this time, and are currently at the retirement age. The expected retirement of many long time employees of the VR programs increases the number of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors needed nationally (by 500-750) to be between 2,500 and 2,750.

State agencies may recruit qualified Rehabilitation Counselors from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE) programs. The RCE programs are the most widely available provider of pre-service education for Rehabilitation Counselors. In 1954 federal grants were made available to the RCE programs to assist in their growth. In 1972, in an effort to standardize and accredit these programs, the Council of Rehabilitation Education (CORE) was established. There are currently over 85 CORE accredited RCE programs. These RCE programs graduate approximately 1,250 trained Rehabilitation Counselors annually (IRI, 1999). However, according to Dew and Peters (2002), out of the 1,230 graduates of CORE-accredited Rehabilitation Counseling training programs in 1997-1998, only 26 went to work in public VR agencies. With such a low percentage (2.1%) of RCE graduates going to work in state agencies, the importance of Federal/State agencies and RCE programs working together to design recruitment programs is evident.

There are incentives for RCE programs to become involved in the CSPD initiative. Educators have the potential to attract a new cohort of students into the program who are experienced as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. Collaborations between RCE program Coordinators and VR Directors may also open up more opportunities for graduates of the RCE programs such as paid internships.

Educators face two major problems in contributing to a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development: (1) training enough counselors to meet the demand, and (2) preparing counselors to meet the demands of state VR agencies (Dew & Peters, 2003). Both problems are very difficult to overcome. Educators are not able to train enough counselors to meet the demand because the numbers of students entering RCE programs are less than the demand from Federal/State VR agencies. Additionally, RCE programs do have students who are more interested in a career in the private sector of Rehabilitation Counseling. Among the reasons students express an interest in private sector positions are higher salaries, better benefits, and perceived higher potential for growth. It is difficult for Educators to prepare counselors to meet the needs of the Federal/State agencies as they must provide a well rounded education to all students. This can make it difficult to focus on preparing the student to meet all the demands of the public VR agencies.

Dew and Peters (2002) surveyed 81 members of the National Council of Rehabilitation Educators (NCRE) from Regions I through X to explore how the programs were involved with the recruitment and retention of the state VR

Counselors. Graduate programs reported several methods used to increase the number of graduates seeking employment with public rehabilitation programs. The most effective strategy reported was offering paid internships in state VR agencies. Educators reported that the low pay was the most common reason that RCE graduates did not seek state agency employment. To increase the number of RCE program graduates seeking state VR agency employment, the following suggestions were made:

- Increase the RSA funding for student tuition
- Provide additional scholarships
- Increase stipends for students
- Hire additional RCE faculty for training and research

Educators reported that the most frequent strategy used to increase the number of RCE graduates is aggressive recruiting. The following recruitment efforts were reported:

- Development of Web pages
- Alumni networking
- Addition of an advanced senior program for undergraduates
- Development of recruitment videos
- Faculty presentations and publications.

Again, lack of funding for students and the program was the most frequently cited barrier to recruitment.

Dew and Peters (2002) concluded the study by making six recommendations to the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies:

> 1. State VR agencies should work with institutions to offer paid internships to students. 2. Policies to increase the low pay of state VR Counselors should be explored. 3. Policies to increase RSA funding should be considered. In addition, RSA may want to provide technical assistance to institutions so that they can access RSA funding that is already available. 4. Institutions that do not already make use of training through RRCEPs and distance education may want to investigate these options, which have proven effective. 5. RRCEPs may want to address the issue of VR Counselors' resistance to training by conducting organizational development workshops. 6. RRCEPs and other groups may want to offer technical assistance related to recruiting students for master's degree programs. (p. 64-65)

Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs also face barriers when trying to produce qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. Funding and staffing become critical issues when trying to expand services in response to the increased need. RSA currently funds only about half of the Master's degree Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs. Programs that do receive RSA grants are offered minimal funding for capacity building and expansion of staff. Another problem that RCE programs may face is the inability to serve all existing Rehabilitation Counselors who require additional education in order to become qualified. Most university programs have criteria for enrollment in graduate

studies such as undergraduate grade point average, Graduate Record Examination Scores, and writing achievement that some agency employees may not meet.

Some agencies have already become creative to overcome these barriers. Students in the RCE programs are required to spend 600 hours in an internship working with people with disabilities. To address recruitment of qualified staff, agencies such as the Missouri General agency and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission provide paid internships to students from CORE accredited programs (IRI, 1999). Once clients are recruited into the VR agencies, it is important to be able to retain them. The next pillar on the CSPD model addresses this issue.

Retention

The second pillar on the CSPD model is retention. VR is experiencing a turnover rate higher than ever before (Bishop, 2002). Numerous rehabilitation researchers have suggested that there is a relationship between turnover and job satisfaction (Crimando, Hansen, & Riggar, 1986; Crimando, Riggar & Hansen, 1986, Riggar, Godley, & Hafer, 1984). Bishop (2002) suggests that job satisfaction is further connected to the motivation of current counselors. He conducted a study to identify reasons why people want to become Rehabilitation Counselors. Knowing the reasons may give some insight into recruiting motivated counselors who are likely to be satisfied in their work, and successful with their clients. His research findings suggest that three types of reasons

explain why current VR Counselors choose their profession. These are: (1) counseling and helping others, (2) personal growth/opportunities for learning, and (3) aspects of working in the state/federal system such as job security, accessibility, and variety. Bishop stresses the importance of hiring individuals who are aware of the work that is required of VR Counselors, and whose interests are matched.

CSPD is no only about hiring qualified counselors, but it is also about maintaining a qualified staff. Continuing education is necessary for counselors to keep up with the changing profession.

Continuing Education

Continuing education serves as the third pillar in the CSPD model. The job of a Rehabilitation Counselor is not one that can be learned once, and then performed for life without additional education. Continuous changes in laws, technology, medical treatments, and information require that counselors continuously learn new skills and knowledge.

It is important to note that when investigating continuing educational material for Rehabilitation Counselors their status as adult learners needs to be considered. Malcolm Knowles, a prominent figure in the art of adult learning, was among the first to differentiate between andragogy and pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined as the activity of teaching, or the art of teaching. Androgogy is defined as an intentional activity that is designed to change an adult learner (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998). While pedagogy can be viewed as a

teaching activity designed for any person, androgogy is teaching specific to adults. Qualified rehabilitation practitioners do bring a great deal of maturity to learning situations and require an androgogical approach to learning.

Retention of current counselors also involves providing them with continuing education opportunities to ensure that they meet the CSPD requirements. RCE Educators made some suggestions as to how current employees might be provided with training to upgrade their skills: "Offer additional training through the RRCEPs, offer continuing education credits, and to provide distance education (including CSPD, online courses, and interactive TV), which was named as the most effective" (IRI, 1999, p.69). Educators indicated that resistance from counselors was a great barrier to these efforts. Again, money (more grants, larger grant amounts, and additional CSPD faculty) was listed as things that could improve the training of VR Counselors.

Ronald Cervero (2000) identifies four trends in continuing education. The first trend states that "the amount of continuing education offered at the workplace dwarfs that offered by any other type of provider, and surpasses that of all other providers combined" (p. 5). In fact, some of the larger corporations such as Motorola, General Electric, AT&T and IBM have continuing education budgets that exceed revenues of large universities. The second trend identified by Cervero is that "universities and professional associations are active and important providers, with an increasing number of programs being offered in distance education formats" (p. 6). So, both of these important providers identified in trend two are working together. In many professions, employers look

to universities to obtain adult educators. Cervero also found a third trend: "there are an increasing number of collaborative arrangements among providers, especially between universities and workplaces" (p.6). Universities are beginning to play a large role in the financial development of their regions, while the business world is beginning to utilize the professionals from the universities. Cervero indicates that about 90% of the education provided by employers are developed using outside resources, including colleges and universities. The fourth trend identified by Cervero is that "continuing education is being used more frequently to regulate professionals' practice" (p.7). Good examples of this are the continuing education demands that are placed on certificates and licenses. For example, a certified Rehabilitation Counselor is required to obtain 100 hours of continuing education every five years (CCRC, 2000).

Alan B. Knox (2000) indicates that there are several benefits to seeing continuing education from a "broad and integrative perspective" (p. 14). By recognizing the professional characteristics of an occupation, one can influence the characteristics to serve as goals of lifelong education. Additionally, following the transition from pre-professional education into professional education can ensure continuity. This is likely to occur when university faculty and continuing education providers work together with professionals in the early stages of their careers. If university faculty is made more aware of the learning continuum required of a profession, they may design the pre-service education in a way that encourages lifelong professional education.

Knox (2000) developed four basic guidelines that can be used in developing a continuum of professional education. The first guideline deals with the coordination of the professionals (both the pre-professional educators and the educators of professionals). If each group coordinates the education they provide, they can build upon one another. A second guideline is the responsiveness to learners. Pre-professional educators may address responsiveness in the way of student achievement, whereas continuing education providers may need to reach out to professionals to encourage them to enroll. The third guideline is to encourage application. It is important for learners to apply their knowledge, which can benefit individuals and organizations. The final guideline is to obtain stakeholder support. Stakeholders range from learners, administrators, policy makers, sponsors, and many other individuals who influence the quality of the education. Leaders of professional education are challenged to obtain support from all stakeholders. In summary, Knox states:

> "The continuum of professional education can be strengthened by attention to relations among providers, as well as by research and evaluation. Such efforts can be enhanced by appreciation of a comprehensive and integrated perspective on this continuum, use of insights from relevant literature, recognition of potential benefits, and application of guidelines regarding coordination, responsiveness, application, and stakeholder support". (p.20)

The discussion above came from the Adult Education literature. Amick & Wesley (1999) write on continuing education specific to Rehabilitation

Counselors. According to Amick & Wesley (1999), there are generally four obstacles faced when attempting to implement continuing educational programs to rehabilitation professionals. The first obstacle is the notion that learning needs will be met by maintaining the status quo with regard to the relationship between the RCE programs and the VR agencies. Both institutions have the opportunity to be strengthened by the CSPD requirements. However, there are some barriers that can have an impact on the situation. The VR agency training budgets either remain constant or they shrink, they are not increasing, while the university tuitions are rising due to the ever increasing cost of providing education. At the same time university resources continue to shrink (NCRE, 1998).

The second obstacle identified by Amick & Wesley is that adult learners cannot be equated with the traditional university student. Educators need to have a basic understanding of adult education principles when facilitating the learning process with this unique population. According to Knowles et al (1998) "lifelong learners need to know how they need to learn something." (p.64) Rehabilitation practitioners balance many roles in their lives. They have work demands, family demands, and when they become a student they add the school demands. Knowles et al. (1998) suggest that "lifelong learners bring lots of knowledge and experience to the class" (p. 65). This must be utilized by the professor in such a way that the learner is not biased and closed minded as a result of his previous experience.

The third obstacle is when professors fail to adopt new roles. The ability to utilize a variety of teaching methods increases the interest and the motivation

to learn in the learners. Professors must go from being a "teacher" (pedagogical approach) to being a "learning facilitator" (androgogical approach). The professor should integrate more active learning concepts including group discussions and simulations.

A fourth obstacle is the failure to keep up with and use available technology. Technology that can be used in the classroom include audio conferencing, video-based teleconferencing, DVD recordings, web based training, Internet training, computer conferencing, and satellite transmissions.

In order to enhance the quality of continuing education programs that are made available to VR Counselors who are attempting to meet the CSPD requirements, it is necessary for Rehabilitation Educators to have a through understanding of the unique needs of adult learners. An androgogical approach to education recognizes the knowledge and experiences of the adult learner, and attempts to weave them into the learning situation. It involves using a wide variety of facilitation techniques that enhance the active participation of learners. It also requires a relationship between the student and the facilitator that is less formal than the traditional student/ professor relationship. In an effort to develop a continuum of professional education (transitioning from pre-professional education to professional education) it is suggested that Rehabilitation Educators design programs in a way that encourages lifelong professional education and collaborate with continuing education providers. The CSPD integration can be made smoother by following some of these basic adult education principles.

While continuing education, along with the other two pillars in the CSPD model (recruitment and retention) are important, the last element ties them all together. Ongoing program evaluation is necessary as it allows administrators to monitor their progress.

Ongoing Program Evaluation

As the base of the CSPD structure, ongoing program evaluation is needed to assess the progress within each pillar. The purpose of any program evaluation is to address the question: What has the program achieved? (Stufflebeam et al, 1985).

The success of an evaluation effort is focused on the usability of the final product. In reviewing the literature on evaluation it has become apparent that *utilization focused evaluation*, which is defined in the next subsection, is a relatively new concept, and Michael Quinn Patton is the pioneer (Henry, 2000; Kirkheart, 2000; Patton, 1997; Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997; Berk & Rossi, 1990; Caracelli, 2000, Cook, 1997). According to the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI, 1999), "evaluation is a vital part of program improvement. It is part of the accountability that now permeates federal programs and is at the very core of the quality management movement" (p. 99).

Unfortunately, in the Federal/State VR programs, no measurements have been applied to test the quality of CSPD. Well designed evaluation of a program preserves the integrity of the program by making stakeholders aware of the continuous quality improvements needed (Patton, 1997). The IRI (1999)

indicates that with regard to the CSPD, program evaluation should answer these three basic questions: "1.) What is the context in which the program is functioning and how is this context changing? 2.) How well is the program progressing towards its goals, and how can it be improved? and 3.) How well did the program achieve its goals?" (p. 99).

Utilization Focused Evaluations

In his 1997 text, Patton introduces the concept of a utilization-focused evaluation. Patton had concerns that too many evaluations were being conducted, and then not being used by the intended stakeholders for many different reasons. He stated that it was important for evaluations to be useful, and as a result he developed the utilization focused evaluation. The objective of this type of evaluation is to get results that are meaningful and used appropriately. Patton indicates that the only way to achieve this useful evaluation is to develop and implement it with attention to how it will be used. Stufflebeam (1985) agrees: "the most important purpose of evaluation is not to prove but to improve... we cannot be sure that our goals are worthy unless we can match them to the needs of the people they are intended to serve" (p.151).

When conducting a utilization focused evaluation, it is important to focus on the intended use by the intended users. One must first write a clear statement of who the actual users are, and what their specific uses for the evaluation will be. The evaluator must then develop working relationships with the users to help them determine what kind of evaluation they need. A

utilization focused evaluation can be defined as an "evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific intended users" (Patton, 1997, p. 23).

The primary users of the evaluation, referred to as stakeholders, assist the evaluator in coming up with the primary questions. It is the evaluator's relationship with the stakeholders that ensures the value of the final product (Patton, 1997). The evaluator's role then becomes one of a partner or "co-producer of knowledge" (Rossman & Rollis, 2000). Rossman and Rollis compare the evaluator to that of a truly effective teacher, offering a "zone of proximal development that reveals alternative perspectives and possibilities" (p.9).

Patton believes that when designing an evaluation, the intended users should be involved in the methods decisions. His belief is not without controversy. There have been concerns that by increasing utilization of evaluations, the evaluator's independence can be impaired, and questions may arise about the credibility or accuracy of evaluation findings (Bezruki et al, 1999, Berk & Rossi, 1990). Edwards and Guttentag (1975) hold a classic position: "The decision makers' values determine on what variable data should be gathered. The researcher then decides how to collect the data" (p. 37). There is a tradeoff when intended users are part of the method decision making. Researchers may give up the technical, methods and measurements in lieu of allowing the decision makers to understand the strength and weaknesses of the data. However, Patton believes that this will enhance the utilization of the evaluation results, putting it to greater use.

Utilization focused evaluations are being considered more and more by legislative program evaluators (Jonas, 1999). The current trend is for legislatively mandated evaluations to be more "user friendly". Jonas concludes that "the extent to which the audit bureau's work is meaningful... depends on whether the information it develops provides any value to the legislature" (p. 5). Bezurki et al. (1999) reiterate this sentiment by stating that "an evaluation design that fails to anticipate use ... will undermine the utilization of the evaluation results" (p. 21).

In the text book Utilization Focused Evaluation, Patton (1997) provides a flowchart that describes the process, which was followed in this study. This process consists of the following six steps:

1. Conduct a stakeholder analysis.
2. Negotiate a process to involve the primary users of the evaluation in making decisions.
3. Negotiate a process to involve the primary users of the evaluation in making evaluation decisions.
4. The evaluator and intended users commit to the intended uses of the evaluation and determine the focus of the evaluation.
5. The evaluator makes design method and measurement decisions, and collects data.
6. Once collected, the data is organized and presented to users.

In an effort to collect data from a large number of agencies, Patton recommends using survey designs.

Survey Development

In developing a survey, it is important to ask appropriate questions. A field survey is used to evaluate specific attitudes or behaviors. The most typical survey methodology involves designing and administering a questionnaire. The three major areas of survey design include designing the questionnaire, writing effective questions, and contacting the sample/population (Bordens & Abbott, 1996). It is also necessary to develop questions that are relevant to the research.

There are several different types of items, ranging on a scale from an open-ended item, to a closed ended item, with a partially open ended item in the middle. Some limitations are associated with an open ended question. For example the participants may not understand what the researcher is asking, and provide an answer that does not contain the needed information (Bordens & Abbott, 1996).

With a closed ended question, the researcher has control over the responses that a participant can provide, making it easier to summarize and analyze. However, the information is not as rich as information from an open ended item. Additionally, it is not possible to provide an alternate answer that adequately describes the person's opinion, and participants may be forced to choose an answer that does not fit (Bordens & Abbott, 1996).

Considering the recruitment of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors, it may be necessary to obtain opinions from both RCE and VR personnel. A Likert

rating scale is often utilized in this type of situation. A Likert scale provides a series of statements to which participants can indicate degree of agreement or disagreement (Edwards & Guttentag, 1975).

In developing questions, it is important to avoid biased wording. The wording of the items needs to be simple. The questions should also be precise. Rating scales provide the participant opportunities to indicate personal opinion. While there is no set number of points that a rating scale must have, it is suggested that scales use between four and 10 points (Abbott, 1996).

There are also several ways to label a scale. One can label every point, only the two end points, or the endpoints plus the neutral. With only the end points labeled, the participant must interpret the meaning of the rest of the points. If all points are labeled, the participant knows exactly what each point means, and may provide more accurate information. For the survey used in this study, all points were labeled to provide the most accurate information (Bordens & Abbott, 1996).

This study uses a survey design that includes the elements discussed above. The survey is used as part of a utilization focused evaluation. Limitations of the utilization focused evaluation are discussed in the next section.

Limitations of Utilization Focused Evaluations

While traditional evaluation methods are limited by threats to validity, a utilization focused evaluation is concerned with "threats to utility" (Patton, 1997). There are several threats that can affect the usability of the results. These

include a failure to focus on the intended use of the evaluation by the intended users; failure to involve the primary users in making methods decisions; poor stakeholder understanding of the evaluation; unbalanced data collection and reporting; failure to keep stakeholders adequately informed and involved along the way as design alterations are necessary. Additionally, there are some limitations associated with using a non-traditional method to develop evaluations. For example, some may believe that involving stakeholders distracts from the scientific nature of evaluation, contaminating it with "lay" people's ideas (Berk & Rossi, 1990). It is at the discretion of the evaluator to determine the philosophical framework that will be used.

> According to Berk & Rossi (1990), a successful evaluation is
>
> *One that provides the best information possible on the key policy questions within the given set of real-world constraints. This implies that all evaluations are flawed if measured against the yardstick of abstract perfection or if judged without taking time, budget, ethical, and political restrictions into account. In other words, there is really no such thing as a truly perfect evaluation.* (p. 85)

However, a successful evaluation provides the best information possible under the given circumstances. It provides better information than would otherwise be available. As the base for the CSPD model, ongoing program evaluation is necessary to monitor the CSPD process.

Conclusion

The CSPD model provides a visual overview of the necessary supports for an effective CSPD program. The model illustrates how the foundation of ongoing program evaluation, along with the supports of recruitment, retention, and continuing education work together to uphold an effective Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. The recruitment pillar represents the importance for VR agencies to obtain new qualified counselors. Along with a high turnover rate, there are large numbers of anticipated retirements in the next three years. A recruitment initiative will be necessary to fill the vacant positions. The retention pillar addresses the high turnover rate. In order to maintain a qualified staff, VR agencies need to look at ways to retain current staff. Research indicates that job satisfaction is correlated to turnover (Crimando, Hanse, & Riggar, 1986). To retain counselors, it is necessary to ensure job satisfaction. The third pillar of continuing education indicates that in order to keep current counselors qualified; they must have updated information on such things as medical technologies, and rehabilitation technologies. Ongoing program evaluation serves as the foundation of this model. In order to evaluate and obtain feedback on the progress of CSPD initiatives, it is necessary to obtain and compare data. Ongoing program evaluation allows VR agencies to monitor their CSPD efforts.

Consumers of the VR programs advocated for a CSPD. They realized the importance of having qualified personnel provide them with rehabilitative services. Research states that qualified Rehabilitation Counselors provide better

services and employment outcomes to people with disabilities (Cook & Bolton, 1992; Dunn, 1990; IRI, 1999; Jenkins, Patterson, & Szymanski, 1991; Leahy & Szymanski, 1995; Szymanski & Parker, 1989; Szymanski, 1991; Szymanski & Danek, 1992).

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the method and procedures used in this research study. The goal of this study was twofold: (1) to develop and administer an instrument to determine the current practices of recruiting qualified Rehabilitation Counselors in Region IV, and (2) to determine how each major agency (the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agency and the Rehabilitation Counselor Education program) rate current recruitment practices. In an effort to answer the posed research questions, a quantitative survey research design was developed.

This research was initiated to help the RSA Region IV CSPD Steering Committee develop a recruitment/retention plan. Composed of representatives from the VR programs (typically administrators and human resource directors), the steering committee is in charge of developing state CSPD plans. I collaborated with the steering committee throughout this process.

Chapter III includes a description of the procedures to conduct the study as well as questions guiding the study, and an overview of how the instruments were developed. Descriptions of the participating agencies and method of data analysis are also included.

Population

The population for this study consisted of the 12 state Vocational Rehabilitation/ Blind Services Directors and the 19 Rehabilitation Counselor Education coordinators in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) Region IV. Comprised of the states Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, Region IV covers the southeastern United States. This population was chosen based on input from the RSA Region IV Steering Committee and convenience. Participation in this study was voluntary.

Instrumentation

Information was collected via a survey I developed in conjunction with the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Region IV CSPD steering committee (appendices B-D). By attending several committee meetings, I was able to obtain input from representatives from state agencies and Counselor Education programs throughout the region. The objective of the committee is to improve the recruitment efforts made in Region IV. Committee members made recommendations regarding information they believed relevant to collect from the population. I developed the instrument based on committee recommendations. Once developed, the instrument was reviewed and approved by the committee members.

A survey design was chosen for data collection, as it allows one to obtain numeric descriptions of answers provided by a population (Creswell, 1994;

Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985; Eisner, 1994). Three surveys were designed for this study. The survey developed for the Rehabilitation Counselor Education Coordinators (appendix C) requested specific information about their students and degree program. A second survey developed for the VR Directors (appendix B) requested information specific to the Federal/State agencies. Both surveys asked general questions about the demographics of the agency and requested recommendations for recruitment activities. The surveys consisted of both open ended and multiple choice questions. A third survey, the Likert scale (appendix D), was given to all participants. It was used to obtain opinions regarding recruitment efforts. Prior to being distributed, the surveys and the scale were reviewed and approved by the Region IV CSPD Steering Committee and the University of Tennessee Internal Review Board.

Procedure

A survey and a Likert scale questionnaire, accompanied by a cover letter were sent to each Director in the 12 Federal/State VR agencies in RSA Region IV. A different survey and the same Likert scale were sent to each Counselor Education Coordinator in the same region. One week later, follow up telephone calls were conducted to review the questionnaire and collect answers. Telephone calls were repeated until responses were received. All 12 Federal/ State agency Directors responded to the survey. From a total of 19 Counselor Education Program Coordinators, 14 responded, resulting in an 84% overall response rate.

Research Questions and Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 11.0 for Windows (student version). Each research question, followed by the specific type of analysis used, is described below. All data analysis results are presented in Chapter IV.

Research Question 1: What are the applicant rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

This question was answered by reviewing item number 6 on the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators (appendix C). This open ended question item asks "How many students have applied to your program in the last three years?" The answers to this item were added together. To obtain a yearly rate, the answers were divided by 3. Data was be presented in a table.

Research Question 2: What are the admission rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

Research Question 2 was answered by reviewing item number 3 on the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators: 'How many students are admitted into your program each year?" Seven choices were offered for this item ranging from "5-10" to "35+". In the development of this instrument, it was determined that asking for ranges would lend to higher participation rates than if a specific number were requested. In order to calculate a number to answer question 2, the midpoint of the range specified by each participant was used.

Research Question 3: What are the graduation rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs typically take two to three years for students to complete. To accommodate for part-time students, item 4 on the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators asks "how many students have graduated over the last three years?" To answer Research Question 3, the midpoint of the range that each participant answered was summed.

Research Question 4: Where are graduates from RCE programs in Region IV employed upon graduation?

To answer Research Question 4, the researcher reviewed item 7 from the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators. The question asks: "how many students in the last three years were employed by: i) Insurance companies ii) hospitals iii) private rehabilitation iv) public vocational rehabilitation programs v) other (please list)". The numbers for each category were tallied, and presented in a table.

Research Question 5: How are agencies recruiting graduates from RCE programs in Region IV?

To answer this question, items 13, 14, and 15 from the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators were used. Item 13 asks participants to indicate the salary ranges that are offered by competitors. Items 14 and 15 are both open-ended questions asking how competitors recruit from RCE programs and what

makes them attractive to students. Answers to these questions were categorized and reported in a table format.

Research Question 6: How many VR Counselor positions exist in Region IV?

The answer for this question was be obtained by reviewing answers to item 3 on the questionnaire for Federal/State VR Directors. The answers to the question "How many Rehabilitation Counselor positions does your state have?" were added together.

Research Question 7: How many VR Counselor positions in Region IV are currently vacant?

This question was answered using the questionnaire for Federal/State VR Directors. Specifically, item number 7 asks how many Rehabilitation Counselor positions are currently open. The participants' answers were summed to answer Research Question 7.

Research Question 8: How many VR Counselor retirements and/or promotions are expected in the next 3 years?

Items 8 and 9 on the Questionnaire for Federal/State VR Directors were used to answer Research Question 8. The numbers provided by participants were summed.

Research Question 9: Why are Counselors leaving the VR agencies in Region IV?

This research question were answered by reviewing the answers for the Questionnaire for Federal/State VR Directors' item 10 "how many VRCs have quit in the last 3 years?" and item11, which asks participants to indicate the reason for the VRC's quitting. The answers for item 10 were added together, and presented in tabular format with the answers from item 11.

Research Question 10: To what extent do Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors express a need for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors?

Research Question 10 was answered by subtracting the number of Rehabilitation Counselor positions filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (item 4) from the total number of Rehabilitation Counselor positions (item 3).

Research Question 11: What are the current recruitment practices used in Region IV?

With open-ended questions, both Rehabilitation Educators and VR state Directors were asked to list their current recruitment practices. These answers were categorized by major category and listed in tabular format.

Research Question 12: To what extent do Educators and State Directors share the same recruitment concerns?

A Likert scale questionnaire (appendix D) was developed to obtain the opinions of participants on recruitment efforts. For each item on the questionnaire, the means of each group were compared using a *t* test.

Research Question 13: What are suggested best practices for a new recruitment initiative in Region IV?

Rehabilitation Educators and state Directors were asked to make suggestions for best recruitment practices. The answers were categorized and listed in tabular form.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the current recruitment and retention practices in RSA's Region IV, and to obtain suggestions for future recruitment initiatives. The method and procedures utilized in this study provided data to determine the current opinions and practices that exist from VR agencies and Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs. The data also provided information necessary for enhancing and improving the effectiveness of recruitment and retention in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Region IV. Chapter IV will offer a presentation of the data analysis and results.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis of data collected from a survey instrument developed by the researcher. This survey instrument was administered to Coordinators of the Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs and Directors of the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) Region IV. The purpose of the survey instrument was to obtain information related to perceptions about the recruitment and retention issues in this seven state area. This instrument was developed with input from the RSA Region IV CSPD Steering Committee. This chapter includes demographic information on the population, specific research questions, and the responses to those questions. Chapter V will go into depth on conclusions that can be drawn from the responses.

Demographic Characteristics

RSA's Region IV is composed of eight states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. In this region, there are 12 Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies with four

agencies specializing in services for the blind and eight agencies working with all other disabilities. These agencies include:

- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Florida Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Florida Division of Blind Services
- Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Kentucky Office for the Blind
- Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
- North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind
- South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department
- South Carolina Commission to the Blind
- Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services

Representatives of all 12 Rehabilitation agencies responded to the survey.

There were a total of 19 Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs in RSA's Region IV. All of the RCE programs are housed in public universities and are accredited by the Council of Rehabilitation Education (CORE). Nine of the programs receive partial funding through RSA to provide scholarships to students. RCE programs in Region IV vary in the number of tenured tracked faculty. Faculty size ranges from 1-5 with a mean of 2.4 and a median of 3. The programs are housed in the following colleges and universities:

- Alabama A&M University
- Auburn University
- East Carolina University
- Florida State University
- Fort Valley State University
- Georgia State University
- Jackson State University
- Mississippi State University
- South Carolina State University
- University of Alabama
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- University of Florida
- University of Kentucky
- University of Memphis
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of North Florida
- University of South Carolina
- University of South Florida
- University of Tennessee

A total of 14 RCE programs responded. The total response rate was 84%. In an effort to preserve the confidentiality of all participants, each agency was

randomly assigned a number. This assigned number will be used in all data sections.

Specific Research Questions

The specific research questions to be addressed were as follows:

1. What are the applicant rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
2. What are the admission rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
3. What are the graduation rates for RCE programs in Region IV?
4. Where are graduates from RCE programs in Region IV employed upon graduation?
5. How are agencies recruiting graduates from RCE programs in Region IV?
6. How may VR Counselor positions exist in Region IV?
7. How many VR Counselor positions in Region IV are currently vacant?
8. How many VR Counselor retirements and/or promotions are expected in the next 3 years?
9. Why are counselors leaving the VR agencies in Region IV?
10. To what extent do Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors express a need for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors?
11. What are the current recruitment practices used in Region IV?
12. Do Educators and State Directors share the same recruitment concerns?

13. What are suggested best practices for a new recruitment initiative in Region IV?

There are additional items on the survey instrument that are not directly related to the research questions. These items were included, as they were requested by the Region IV CSPD Steering Committee to provide additional information for future research. For example, in the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators, respondents were asked to report the number of graduates who become CRC certified (item 5). The steering committee requested this information in order to determine how many students are becoming professionalized in the field.

State VR Directors were also asked to provide additional information. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, allows each state to determine its definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor. In order to determine state CSPD requirements, each state Director was asked to provide the state's definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor (item 1), as well as the minimum requirements for a Rehabilitation Counselor in their agency (item 2).

Responses to Research Questions

This section contains the data analysis used for each research question.

Research Question 1: What are the applicant rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

The responses from the Rehabilitation Counselor Education Program Coordinators survey were calculated to determine the number of applicants who applied to the programs.

Item 9 on the survey asks "How many students have applied to your program in the last three years?" Table 4.1 lists the applicant rates for each program. It indicates that a total of 1069 people have applied to RCE programs in Region IV in the last three years, with an average of 356 applicants applying each year. The number of applicants that apply to the programs each year range in number 1 to 70.

Table 4.1: Applicant rates to RCE programs over a three year period

Program	Applicants/ year	Applicants/ 3 years
1	20.00	60.00
2	15.67	47.00
3	33.33	100.00
4	40.00	120.00
5	1.00	3.00
6	22.00	66.00
7	23.33	70.00
8	23.33	70.00
9	13.33	40.00
10	36.00	108.00
11	18.33	55.00
12	30.00	90.00
13	70.00	210.00
14	10.00	30.00
Total	356.33	1069.00

Research Question 2: What are the admission rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

To answer Research Question 2, the Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators was used. Survey item 3 asks "How many students are admitted into your program each year?" After discussing the format of this question with the CSPD steering committee, it was determined that using a multiple choice format with ranges would result in participants more likely to respond. Table 4.2 indicates the range chosen by each school. The midpoint of each range was used to answer Research Question 2. There are an estimated 228.5 applicants to the RCE programs in a given year. Figure 4.1 is a graphical representation of the number of participants who gave an answer in each range. It shows that the number of participants who answered in the

Table 4.2: Yearly admission rates for RCE programs

School	Range	Midpoint
1	5-10	7.50
2	11-15	13.50
3	21-25	23.50
4	11-15	13.50
5	11-15	13.50
6	21-25	23.50
7	11-15	13.50
8	11-15	13.50
9	11-15	13.50
10	16-20	18.50
11	16-20	18.50
12	11-15	13.50
13	35+	35.00
14	5-10	7.50
Total		228.50

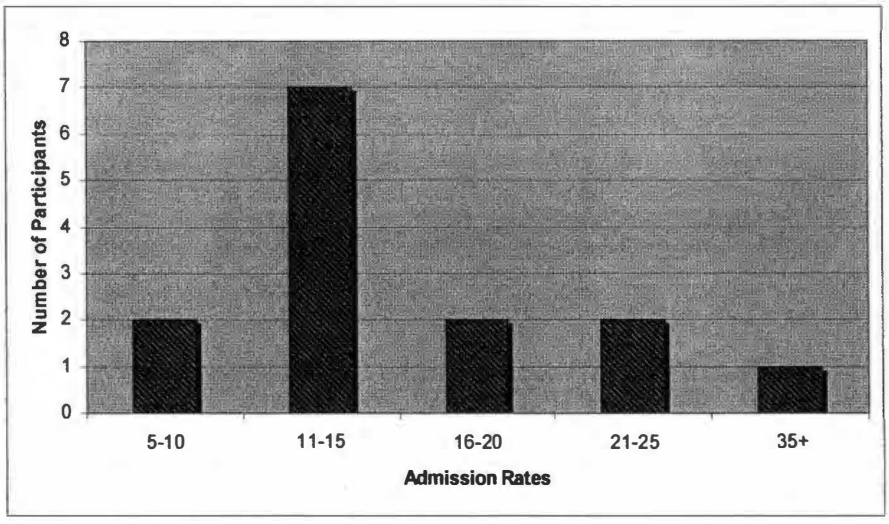

Figure 4.1: Admission rates for RCE Programs

"11-15" range (n=7) is over twice the number of participants who answered in any other range.

Research Question 3: What are the graduation rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

The questionnaire for Rehabilitation Counselor Educators asked "How many students have graduated over the last 3 years?" It takes the equivalent of three full time semesters for students to graduate from most programs. In order to include part-time students in calculations, participants were requested to estimate graduation rates for a three year period. Table 4.3 indicates that there were an estimated 406.5 students graduating in a 3 year period. Figure 4.2 indicates that there

Table 4.3: Region IV RCE graduation rates for a three year period

School	Graduation Rate	Midpoint	Rate per year
1	31-35	33.50	11.17
2	26-30	28.50	9.50
3	35+	35.00	11.67
4	26-30	28.50	9.50
5	16-20	18.50	6.17
6	26-30	18.50	6.17
7	35+	35.00	11.67
8	35+	35.00	11.67
9	16-20	18.50	6.17
10	26-30	18.50	6.17
11	31-35	33.50	11.17
12	31-35	33.50	11.17
13	35+	35.00	11.67
14	35+	35.00	11.67
Total		406.50	135.50

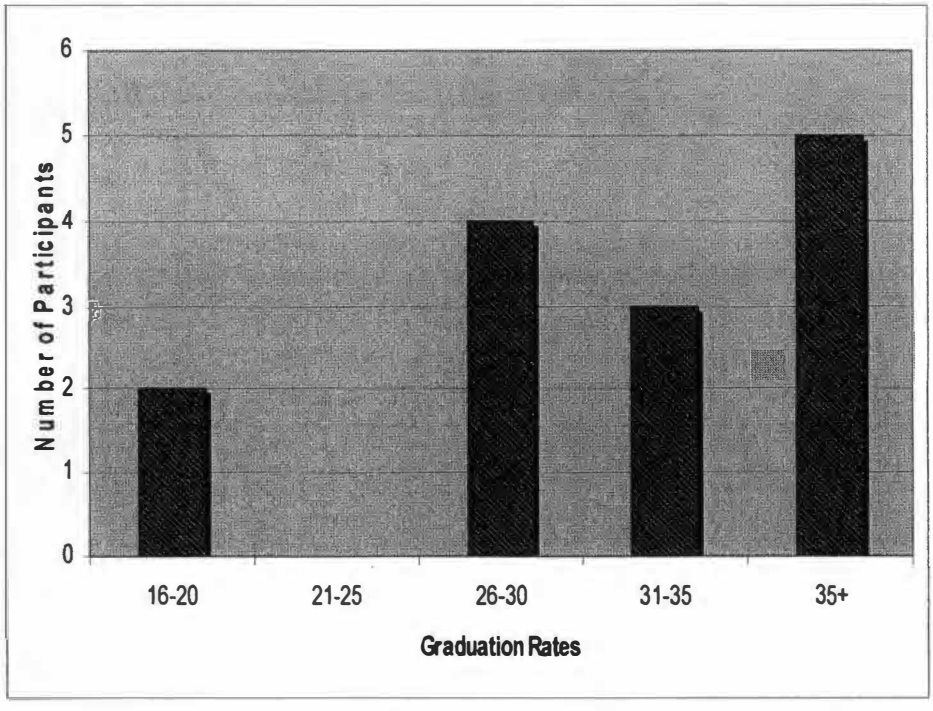

Figure 4.2: RCE Graduation rates for a three year period

were no answers given for the "21-25" range, and the majority of programs graduated more than 35 students in a three year period.

Research Question 4: Where are graduates from RCE programs in Region IV employed upon graduation?

Rehabilitation Counselor Educators were asked about the types of agencies where their graduates were employed. As indicated in Table 4.4, 49% of graduates become employed by Federal/State VR agencies.

Research Question 5: How are agencies recruiting graduates from RCE programs in Region IV?

RCE Coordinators were asked, "How do competitors recruit from RCE

Table 4.4: Employment of Region IV RCE graduates by agency type

Type of Agency	# of Graduates Employed	% of Graduates
Insurance companies	8	2.00
Hospitals	20	5.00
Private Rehabilitation	73	18.00
Public Vocational Rehabilitation	199	49.00
Other	8	2.00
Mental Health Counseling	33	8.00
Developmental Disabilities	8	2.00
Community Based Rehabilitation	41	10.00
Veterans Administration	12	3.00
Educational Institutions	4	1.00
Social Security Administration	1	0.00
Total	407	100.00

programs?" The following verbatim responses were obtained from this open-ended question:

- Send materials, job listings, marketing materials (brochures), flyers, along with position announcements;
- One has asked to come on campus to speak to students;
- Bulletin board list positions with flyers ;
- Come to class to speak;
- Cultivate internships/ practicum sites;
- Internships and practicum sites lead to employment;
- They offer paid internships and send flyers to the program and keep the program appraised of job openings;
- Our advisory committee meets with our students once a year. The advisory committee is about 1/3 state VR and 2/3 other (community based, private, university disability services program);
- Guest speakers;
- They come to classes to speak;
- Advertise and guarantee higher salaries, vacation and fringe benefits;
- Job postings;
- Internships- best recruiting tools; and
- Send letters/ flyers.

Item 13 asks RCE Coordinators to estimate the salary for new graduates who enter agencies other than VR. Table 4.5 indicates the average salary for RCE graduates in insurance companies, hospitals, private rehabilitation agencies, mental health agencies, and the Veterans Administration. Figure 4.3 illustrates that the Veterans Administration and private rehabilitation agencies offer the highest salary to RCE graduates.

Survey item 15 asks participants to describe what makes competitors attractive to students. The following verbatim responses were provided to this open ended question:

- High status, higher income and more professional goals;
- Salary;
- Salary, professionalism (specialized training required to fill positions), availability of positions;

Table 4.5: Average salary for RCE graduates

Insurance Companies	Hospitals	Private Rehabilitation	Other:
$22,000	$25,000	$28,000-$32,000	Mental Health
$25,000	$25,000	$30,000-$32,000	$25,000
$30,000-$40,000	$25,000-$30,000	$30,000-$40,000	$28,000
$35,000	$30,000-$35,000	$32,000	Mean= $26,500
$35,000	$32,000	$34,000-$38,000	VA
$35,000	$35,000	$35,000	$35,000
$36,000-$38,000	$40,000	$35,000-$50,000	$42,000
$40,000	$44,000	$35,000-$50,000	Mean= $38,500
$45,000	$45,000	$40,000	
		$40,000	
		$50,000-$60,000	
Mean= $34,300	Mean= $34,000	Mean= 38.09	

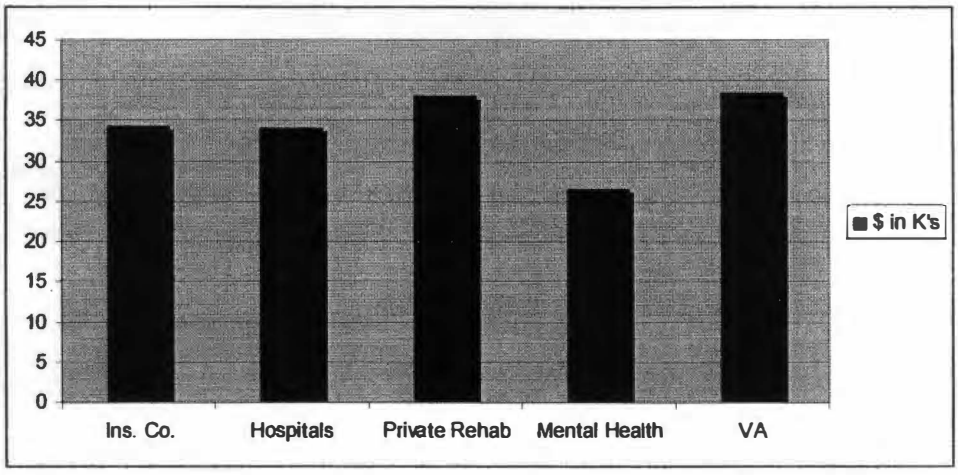

Figure 4.3: Comparison of starting salaries for RCE graduates in different agencies

- Job availability;
- More money for salaries;
- The fact that they are able to offer higher salaries is the key incentive. Most students do not worry so much about upward mobility within an organization. Upon graduation, they are looking for competitive salaries;
- Primarily salary;
- Variety in terms of the nature of work and the income earning potential;
- They have a smaller caseload than VR;
- Availability- my state has a hiring freeze and students must look to agencies other than VR for jobs;
- Salary;
- Licensure;

These findings will be discussed in Chapter V.

Research Question 6: How many VR Counselor positions exist in Region IV?

Directors with the Federal/State VR agencies were asked how many counselor positions exist. Table 4.6 indicates that there were a total of 1777 VRC positions in Region IV. The mean number of positions for each agency is 148 with a standard deviation of 114.5 (n=12). The number of positions ranged from 11-396.It should be noted that there are two different types of agencies serving clients in Region IV: those that serve only blind/low vision caseloads and those that serve a general caseload. Agencies serving blind/low vision caseloads have a much smaller staff than the general caseload agencies. This is likely to be the reason for the unusually large standard deviation.

Table 4.6: Number of VRC positions in Region IV

Agency	# of VRC positions
20	175
21	154
22	192
23	50
24	11
25	165
26	121
27	396
28	29
29	185
30	282
31	17
Total	1777
Mean = 148 S.D. = 114.5	

Research Question 7: How many VR Counselor positions in Region IV are currently vacant?

In order to get an estimate of the need for counselors, VR Directors were asked to calculate how many positions are currently vacant. Table 4.7 indicates that there are currently 142 VR Counselor positions vacant in Region IV. To establish a turnover rate for the VR Counselor positions, Directors also provided information regarding the number of positions that have been vacant over the last three years. There have been a total of 471 positions vacant in the last three years.

Table 4.7: Number of vacant VR Counselor positions

Agency	# of VRC positions currently vacant	# VRC positions vacant (last 3 years)
20	1	15
21	71	106
22	9	140
23	3	15
24	0	5
25	10	20
26	5	15
27	10	32
28	4	36
29	2	18
30	27	50
31	0	19
Total	142	471

Research Question 8: How many VR Counselor retirements and/or promotions are expected in the next 3 years?

In order to understand what type of VRC shortage can be anticipated, VR Directors in Region IV were asked to indicate the number of retirements and promotions that are expected in the next three years. Table 4.8 shows that Directors in Region IV are expecting 315 VRC retirements and 241 VRC promotions for a total loss of 556 counselors due to retirements and promotions over the next three years.

Table 4.8: Expected VRC retirements/ promotions in the next three years

Agency #	# VRC expected retirements	#VRC expected promotions	Total expected loss
20	32	15	47
21	12	0	12
22	63	8	71
23	10	7	17
24	2	1	3
25	11	9	20
26	9	46	55
27	27	4	31
28	5	1	6
29	28	20	48
30	114	128	242
31	2	2	4
Total	315	241	556

Research Question 9: Why are Counselors leaving the VR agencies in Region IV?

According to the survey information, a total of 471 VRC's have quit over the last 3 years. The number to quit ranged for each agency from 0 to 154 with a mean of 39.25 and a standard deviation of 47.85 (n=12). As indicated in Table 4.9, over the last three years 49% (n=229) left for a higher salary, 20% (n=96) left due to retirement, 5% (n=22) were terminated, 11% (n=50) left to tend to family needs, and 16% (n=74) left for unknown reasons.

Table 4.9: Reasons VRC's leaving agency

Reasons for Leaving VR Agency	Number	%
Higher Salary	229	48.62
Retirement	96	20.38
Termination	22	4.67
Family Needs	50	10.62
Unknown	74	15.71
Total	471	100.00

Research Question 10: To what extent do Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors express a need for Qualified Rehabilitation Counselors?

To determine the current need for positions to be filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (QRCs), it is necessary to determine how many positions are filled with QRCs. Table 4.10 demonstrates that there are currently 1777 Rehabilitation Counselor positions, but only 886 are filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. This leaves a net need for 891 positions to be filled with QRCs.

Table 4.10: Number of QRCs needed in Region IV

Agency #	# VRC positions	# VRC positions filled with QRCs	% QRCs	# QRC's needed
20	175	98	56.00	77
21	154	145	94.16	9
22	192	78	40.63	114
23	50	30	60.00	20
24	11	4	36.36	7
25	165	47	28.48	118
26	121	79	65.29	42
27	396	218	55.05	178
28	29	20	68.97	9
29	185	63	34.05	122
30	282	90	31.91	192
31	17	14	82.35	3
Total	1777	886	100.00	891

Research Question 11: What are the current recruitment practices used in Region IV?

Answers to an open-ended question from both RCE Coordinators and VR Directors were categorized to identify the current recruitment practices. Table 4.11 indicates the number of times each category was given as an answer. The two most popular recruitment practices are word of mouth, and presentations to undergraduate classes.

Table 4.11 Current recruitment practices used in Region IV

Category	Type of Agency		Total
	VR	RCE	
Word of mouth	1	8	9
Presentations to undergraduate classes	1	6	7
Recruit other schools		6	6
Paid internships	5	0	5
Outreach to RCE programs	4	0	4
Attend career fairs	2	2	4
Network with community agencies	3	1	4
Recruitment position	3	0	3
Maintain website	0	3	3
National clearinghouse website	1	1	2
Mass letter mailings		2	2
Other		2	2
Internet job postings	1		1
Brochures		1	1
Total	21	32	53

Research Question 12: Do Educators and State Directors share the same recruitment concerns?

To determine whether Educators and Directors share the same recruitment concerns, each question on the Likert scale questionnaire was analyzed using a *t* test for correlated samples. A standard significance level of .05 was used. For each question on the Likert scale, the *t* test compared the ranking means of the RCE coordinators and the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors. The results indicated that a significant difference in the answers did occur for several questions. Table 4.12 lists the means of each ranking on the Likert scale for both RCE Coordinators and VR Directors. This table also displays the results of a *t* test for each item comparing RCE and VR answers. The *t* test indicates that there are four items where a significant difference in the RCE coordinator answers and the VR Directors answers exist. The four items follow (in order of their statistical significance):

- *The complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment* (p=.001). VR Directors rated this statement with a mean of 1.92, while the RCE Coordinators rated this statement with a mean of 3.3. This indicates that RCE Coordinators are significantly more likely to think that the job complexity is a recruitment barrier, when compared to VR Directors.
- *The recruitment practices of my agency are very good* (p=.008). RCE Coordinators rated this statement with a mean of 2.33 and VR Directors rated with a mean of 3.5. This indicates that VR Directors are

Table 4.12: Comparison of RCE and VR on Likert scale items

Question	Mean		Mean Difference	S.D	t
	RCE	VR			
Agency participates in recruitment activities	2.83	3.70	0.87	0.62	-1.67
One barrier to recruitment is low salaries	3.25	3.67	0.42	0.30	-0.96
One barrier to recruitment is lack of marketing	3.17	2.80	0.37	0.26	0.71
One barrier to recruitment is poor continuing education	2.42	1.70	0.72	0.51	1.50
Recruitment videos would be helpful in the recruitment effort	2.83	2.90	0.07	0.05	-0.13
A spokesperson would be helpful in the recruitment efforts	3.42	3.30	0.22	0.08	0.46
Communication is good between VR and RCEs	3.08	3.70	0.62	0.44	-1.56
Recruitment practices of my agency is good	2.33	3.50	1.17	0.83	-2.94*
Complexity of RC job is barrier to recruitment	1.92	3.30	1.38	0.98	-3.72**
Web based marketing program would be beneficial	2.83	3.20	0.37	0.26	-0.76
New marketing strategies for high schools beneficial	2.50	3.20	0.70	0.49	-1.42
New marketing to universities beneficial	3.42	4.00	0.58	0.41	-2.24*
Barrier to recruitment is other industries more attractive	3.67	3.40	0.27	0.19	0.88
Lack of rehabilitation programs negatively affects recruitment	2.08	3.30	1.22	0.86	-2.54*
Better communication is needed between VR and RCE	2.92	2.10	0.82	0.58	1.62
Paid internships needed for better recruitment	3.75	4.00	0.25	0.18	-1.39
RSA scholarships would lead to increased recruitment	3.75	3.60	0.15	0.11	0.48
It is easy to fill new RC positions	2.42	2.10	0.32	0.23	0.63
Currently able to hire new educators/ counselors	2.42	3.20	0.78	0.55	-1.30

$p < .05$

***$p < .0026$ (Bonferroni correction)*

significantly more likely to rate their practices as "very good" when compared to RCE Coordinators.

- *The lack of rehabilitation training programs negatively affects recruitment* (p=.019). The mean rate for this statement was 2.08 for RCE Coordinators and 3.3 for VR Directors. RCE Coordinators are significantly more likely to think that the limited number of rehabilitation training programs affects recruitment in a negative way than VR Directors.
- *New marketing strategies to universities would be beneficial to recruitment efforts* (p=.046). For this statement the mean rate was 3.42 for RCE Coordinators and 4.0 for VR Directors. This indicates that VR Directors are significantly more likely to rate marketing to universities higher than RCE Coordinators.

A Bonferroni correction is a statistical adjustment for multiple comparisons. In this study, a total of 19 items were compared. To compensate for the possibility that chance alone may contribute to items on the Likert scale showing a statistical significant difference, a Bonferroni correction was applied. When a Bonferroni correction is applied, the significance level becomes .0026. At this level, the only question with statistical significance becomes "The complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment". This suggests that RCE Coordinators and VR Directors usually agree on recruitment issues.

Research Question 13: What are suggested best practices for a new recruitment initiative in Region IV?

RCE Survey item 8 and VR Survey item 18 are open ended questions that ask participants to list what agencies can do to attract more counselors. Answers were placed into eight categories by the researcher. There was variation in the answers provided, but all were considered short answer. The specific answer that comprised each category is listed in Table 4.13. Quantitative answers were used to categorize suggestions that RCE Coordinators and VR Directors have regarding a new recruitment initiative. As indicated, the most frequently identified recruitment initiative was making stipends and grants available to students.

Table 4.13: Suggested new recruitment initiatives for Region IV

Category	Total
Increased marketing efforts	1
Website/ Internet improvement	2
Brochures/ packets	1
Help with presentations/ videos	4
Stipends/ grants for students	11
VR support/ presence in RCE programs	4
VR salaries increased	2
Other	3

Summary

The purpose of this study was to obtain information to assist in the recruitment efforts of RSA's Region IV. Overall results suggest that there is a large shortage of qualified VR Counselors, and not enough potential RCE graduates to fill the void. Suggestions were obtained by key stakeholders regarding recruitment activities. These research findings will be discussed in greater detail along with the conclusions and recommendations for future research in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to obtain information on the status of Region IVs recruitment activities in their efforts to obtain a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). As a visual reference to the elements needed to compose a CSPD, the CSPD model was developed. According to the model, CSPD is composed of recruitment, retention, continuing education, and ongoing program evaluation. This study specifically looked at the recruitment and retention elements of the model.

Procedures

The participants in this study were the Coordinators of the Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE) programs and the Directors of the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) Region IV. The total population consisted of the 12 Federal/State VR Directors and the 19 Rehabilitation Counselor Education programs in Region IV. There were a total of 26 respondents.

I developed an instrument to be administered via electronic mail and telephone. The instrument was developed to obtain information that would give

an understanding of the need for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors, and recruitment information. Additionally, a section of the survey was designed to determine the opinions of participants regarding recruitment practices.

The survey, along with a cover letter, was sent to participants via electronic mail. I followed up with a telephone call within one week of mailing the survey and cover letter. The participants' responses were recorded in a SPSS database, and analyzed in order to answer the research questions.

Summary of Research Findings

Surveys were sent to the Directors of all 12 VR agencies in Region IV, and to the Coordinators of all 19 RCE programs in Region IV. One hundred percent of the VR agencies responded, and 14 of the RCE programs responded for an overall response rate of 84%. The following results are summarized according to each research question.

Research Question 1: What are the applicant rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

Each year potential students apply to RCE programs in Region IV. The quality of the applicant pool can set the standard for the quality of the students that are admitted into the program. A survey for Rehabilitation Educators asked "how many students have applied to your program in the last three years?" The total number of applicants over the last 3 years for the 14 participants was 1069, for a mean of 356 applicants per year in Region IV.

Research Question 2: What are the admission rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

According to Table 4.2, there are approximately 229 students admitted into Region IV RCE programs each year. This means that approximately 64% of the students who apply to Region IV RCE programs are admitted, and approximately 127 or 36% of applicants are denied admission.

Research Question 3: What are the graduation rates for RCE programs in Region IV?

According to Table 4.3, there were about 406 students graduating in a three year period, leaving an estimated 135 students to graduate per year. So, in a given year, there are about 356 students who apply, 229 who are admitted, and 135 (59% of those admitted) who graduate.

Research Question 4: Where are graduates from RCE programs in Region IV employed upon graduation?

Table 4.4 indicates that the largest percentage (49%) of RCE graduates in Region IV is employed by public vocational rehabilitation programs upon graduation. This is not consistent with the findings by Dew & Peters (2002), which stated that out of all Council of Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited RCE programs, only 2% of the graduates were employed by public VR agencies. This study found that 18% of graduates in Region IV were employed by private rehabilitation agencies, 10% were employed by community

based rehabilitation agencies, 8% by mental health counseling agencies, 5% by hospitals, 3% by veterans administrations, 2% by insurance companies, and 1% by educational institutions.

Research Question 5: How are agencies recruiting graduates from RCE programs in Region IV?

RCE Coordinators provided responses to this open-ended question. The responses indicate that many agencies recruit RCE students by sending them company fliers and brochures. Agencies also send job announcements, and go to the classrooms to speak. RCE Coordinators also indicated that agencies recruit by becoming internship and practicum sites for students. One participant indicated that the program advisory board is composed of 2/3 agencies other than Federal/State VR agencies. They meet with the students once a year. Another participant indicated that agencies can advertise high salaries and benefits in their recruiting methods.

As indicated earlier, starting salaries are also effective recruiting tools. According to Table 4.5, insurance companies, hospitals, private rehabilitation agencies, and veterans administrations provide a salary on average about $30,000 for graduates of RCE programs. Figure 4.3 provides a bar graph indicating that veterans' administrations and private rehabilitation agencies offer close to $40,000 as starting salaries.

Research Question 6: How many VR Counselor positions exist in Region IV?

To determine the turnover rate for VR Counselors, it was necessary to determine the number of positions that are available. Table 4.6 shows that there are a total of 1777 VR Counselor positions in Region IV. Additionally, it indicates that 50.9% of these positions are filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. This means that in order to meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, 891 positions need to have qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. With approximately 135 students graduating from RCE programs each year, it would take over six years for them to fill these positions.

Research Question 7: How many VR Counselor positions in Region IV are currently vacant?

In order to have an idea of the extent to which VR agencies need VR Counselors, it is necessary to determine how many positions are vacant. According to Table 4.7 there are currently 142 vacant VRC positions in Region IV. Each of these positions needs to be filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. With 135 students graduating from RCE programs annually, it would take over a year for the programs to fill the positions.

Research Question 8: How many VR Counselor retirements and/or promotions are expected in the next 3 years?

The Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies are experiencing the highest turnover rates they have ever had (IRI, 1999). This may be attributed to

the fact that most VR professionals began their careers in the mid 1970's when states received increased monies from the federal government. These professionals are currently approaching retirement age. In an effort to determine how these retirements will affect Region IV, VR Directors were asked to indicate the number of retirements and promotions expected in the next three years that will leave open counselor positions. There are 315 expected retirements, and 241 promotions expected in the next three years. This will result in a total loss of 556 counselors. When added to the 142 vacant positions, this means that there is a need for 698 counselors in the next three years. When one considers that 406 students graduate from RCE programs in a three year period, it appears that there is currently a shortage of 292 students to fill the need for VR agencies in Region IV.

Research Question 9: Why are Counselors leaving the VR agencies in Region IV?

In order to outline a good retention and recruitment program, it is necessary to determine the reasons that VRC's quit. In Region IV, it was determined that 471 counselors have left over the last three years. The majority of counselors (48%) have left for a higher salary. Twenty percent retired, and 11% left due to family reasons. The remaining 16% left for unknown reasons. Having a majority of counselors leave due to obtaining a higher salary indicates that VR agencies in Region IV need to take another look at their budget to determine if they can compete with other agencies.

Research Question 10: To what extent do Vocational Rehabilitation agency Directors express a need for qualified Rehabilitation Counselors?

Table 4.10 shows that out of 1777 Rehabilitation Counselor positions open, only 886 are filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors. This leaves a current need for 891 positions to be filled with QRCs.

Research Question 11: What are the current recruitment practices used in Region IV?

Table 4.11 reviews the current recruitment practices of VR and RCE agencies. It indicates that the most popular recruitment practice is word of mouth, with recruitment to undergraduate classes second. Offering paid internships was the most popular recruitment tool used by VR agencies, with outreach to RCE programs coming in second. Three VR agencies also mentioned that they have developed a position solely responsible for recruitment concerns.

Research Question 12: Do Educators and State Directors share the same recruitment concerns?

To compare the recruitment concerns of Educators and State Directors, a Likert scale was developed. The scale had a 4-point response (1= disagree, 2= slightly disagree, 3= slightly agree, 4= agree). According to Table 4.12, there are four questions where a significant difference exists between the RCE coordinator

answers and the VR Director answers. The four questions (in order of their statistical significance) are:

- The complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment. (p=.001)
- The recruitment practices of my agency are very good. (p=.008)
- The lack of rehabilitation training programs negatively affects recruitment. (p=.019)
- New marketing strategies to universities would be beneficial to recruitment efforts. (p=.046)

However, as stated in chapter IV, when a Bonferroni correction was applied, the alpha level decreased to .0025. This left only one sentence with a statistically significant difference: "the complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment". This suggests that VR Directors and RCE Coordinators generally agree on recruitment issues.

The following is a list of statements that both agencies agreed on:

- My agency participates in recruitment activities;
- One barrier to recruitment is low salaries;
- One barrier to recruitment is lack of marketing;
- Recruitment videos would be helpful in the recruitment efforts of my agency;
- A spokesperson would be helpful in the recruitment efforts of my agency;

- The communication between my state agency and the local rehabilitation counselor education programs is good;
- A web based marketing program would be beneficial in recruitment;
- Paid internships are needed for better recruitment;
- New marketing strategies for high schools would be beneficial in recruitment;
- New marketing strategies to universities would be beneficial to recruitment efforts;
- One barrier to recruitment is that other industries are more attractive;
- RSA scholarships would lead to increased recruitment.

The CSPD Steering Committee may want to investigate these sentences where there was an overall consensus between RCE Coordinators and VR Directors further. Based on the consensus, they may be good suggestions to implement in Region IV. The barriers (low salaries and lack of marketing) should be reviewed for how they hinder the recruitment process. The marketing strategies that were believed to be beneficial should be considered for implementation.

The following is a statement that both agencies disagree with:

- It is easy to fill new Rehabilitation Counselor positions

This indicates that both RCE Coordinators and VR Directors recognize and agree that it is not easy to recruit Rehabilitation Counselors. The next four statements are ones in which the VR agencies agreed with, and the RCE programs disagreed with:

- The recruitment practices of my agency are very good
- The complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment
- The lack of rehabilitation training programs negatively affects recruitment
- I am currently able to hire new counselors/educators

It is interesting to note that none of the statements that were disagreed upon were related to marketing and recruitment strategies, which is the focus of this study. Finally, this last statement is one that the RCE Coordinators agreed with, and the VR agency Directors disagree with:

- Better communication is needed between VR agencies and RCE programs

This could be interpreted to mean that RCE Coordinators would like to have better communication with VR agencies.

Research Question 13: What are suggested best practices for a new recruitment initiative in Region IV?

The most popular suggested recruitment practice for Region IV is to obtain more stipend/grants for RCE students. This indicates that both types of agencies are concerned with the amount of students coming from the RCE programs. Agencies also believed that obtaining assistance with presentations and videos would be beneficial. More VR agency presence in the RCE classrooms was also a popular suggestion for recruitment practices.

Discussion

As the Federal/State VR system attempts to meet the mandated CSPD, it is important to have an understanding of the current compliance status. A major assumption of this study is that the best providers of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (QRCs) come from RCE programs. Graduates of these programs have Masters Degrees and are eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) examination – which would make them qualified Rehabilitation Counselors per the definition adopted by all the states in Region IV.

It is important to know if the number of students graduating from RCE programs matches the number of counselor slots needed. According to this study, 49% of the students graduating from Region IV are employed by the Federal/State VR agencies. This number is surprisingly large when compared to the nationwide study conducted by Dew and Peters (2002) that indicated only 2.1% of RCE graduates went to work in the Federal/State VR agencies. Perhaps the discrepancy in numbers is due to the relationship shared between RCE Coordinators and VR Directors in Region IV. According to this study, they do agree on most recruitment concerns. Similar studies nationwide may determine differences in each of the regions.

While 49% of RCE graduates going into the Federal/State agency is a large number of students when compared to national studies, it is still not enough graduates to meet the need in Region IV. Therefore the programs would ideally need to graduate 51% more students than the number needed by VR agencies. This study indicates that there are 135 graduates from RCE programs each year.

In order to determine the extent to which these counselors meet the VR agency needs, the VR Counselor positions needed to be assessed according to the CSPD mandates.

Research findings indicate that there are a total of 1777 VR Counselor positions in Region IV. To meet CSPD requirements each position needs to be filled with QRCs. There are currently 891 positions not filled with QRCs. It was also necessary to determine the extent of the high turnover that is expected for VR agencies in the next three years. This study found that there are 315 VRC retirements expected in the next 3 years, and 241 promotions out of VRC positions. Added to the 142 positions that are currently vacant, this leaves a total of 698 counselor positions that will need to be filled with QRCs.

The RCE graduate rate of 135 students per year clearly will not meet the demand, especially when it is considered that less than half of the graduates become employed by VR agencies. In order to meet the federally mandated CSPD requirements, aggressive recruitment campaigns will be necessary for both RCE programs and VR agencies. This study examined suggestions that each participant had regarding recruitment tools. RCE Coordinators and VR Directors agreed that some of the barriers to recruitment were the low salaries that agencies could offer VRCs, the lack of marketing that the agencies do, and the fact that other industries are more attractive. Each group also agreed on some tools that would be helpful for recruitment including recruitment videos, a celebrity spokesperson, web based marketing programs, paid internships from VR agencies, and new marketing strategies for high schools and universities.

Perhaps it is the positive relationship between the VR Directors and the RCE Coordinators in Region IV that contribute to their overall agreement on the issues. The positive relationship may also account for the large number of RCE graduates seeking employment from public VR agencies when compared to national studies such as Dew & Peters (2002).

To retain current counselors, information was gathered regarding the reason that counselors were leaving the program. A large majority of the counselors leaving the VR agencies left for a higher salary with a different agency.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed as a result of analyzing the data collected for this study:

1. Continue to update the program evaluations for CSPD in the VR agencies. In order to track progress, it is necessary to have ongoing data recording recruitment practices that work and those that do not (Patton, 1997). This study can serve as a source for baseline data.
2. Recognize that recruitment into the RCE programs is imperative to meeting the CSPD requirements. Based on information gathered in this study from RCE Coordinators and VR Directors, suggested recruitment incentives for RCE programs include marketing strategies for high school and undergraduate university classes.

Additionally, if more RSA scholarships were available for students, recruitment would be maximized.

3. To retain current counselors, it would be beneficial to increase salaries. According to this study, 48.62% (Table 4.9) of Rehabilitation Counselors who leave the VR agencies are leaving for a higher salary. Some VR agency Directors reported that they are abiding by salary scales developed for all state employees; perhaps a nationwide advocacy campaign would help agencies to get the needed funding.
4. Based on the responses to the Likert scale, RCE Coordinators and VR Directors agree that it may be beneficial to develop certain marketing tools to be used by all Federal/State VR agencies. Included in these tools are brochures, videos, and web based marketing advertisements. RCE Coordinators and VR Directors also agreed that a celebrity spokesperson could also assist in increasing the awareness of the program and the profession.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following suggestions for future research have been developed as a result of this study:

1. One of the limitations of this study is that only RCE programs in Region IV were considered as the source for QRCs. There are in fact several additional sources for QRCs including online RCE

programs, and RCE programs outside of Region IV. Future studies should consider these other QRC sources

2. It is also important to note that this study is being replicated in Region III using the same instrumentation. The principal researchers intend to collaborate in an effort to draw conclusions for the extended Region III & IV areas. Future studies may result in obtaining data nationwide, expanding these studies further.
3. Suggestions for further research include surveying current RCE students to determine what they are looking for in an employer, and to survey RCE graduates who took jobs with agencies other the Federal/State VR agency to find out why they chose other employment.
4. Due to the differences in findings (regarding RCE student employment upon graduate) between this study and the study by Dew and Peters (2002), further research should determine the differences between Region IV and other regions across the nation.

Summary

This study was able to take elements of several broad disciplines and bring them together in one project. It served as a continuation of Szymanski's research on the importance of Rehabilitation Counselors being trained at the Masters Degree level. Because CSPD is a mandate for continuing education, it addresses Cevero's literature on effective practices for providing continuing

education to adult learners. This study was also an example of Patton's utilization-focused evaluation.

Using a utilization-focused evaluation of RSA's Region IV, this study has provided baseline data regarding how well the region has complied with a CSPD, and ratings on recruitment strategies. Four elements (recruitment, retention, continuing education, and ongoing program evaluation) were identified as being needed in order to maintain an effective CSPD. Current recruitment and retention strategies were collected, and categorized. Suggestions for future recruitment and retention practices were rated. It will be important for Region IV to use this information in the development of a recruitment plan. CSPD involves educating personnel to be more effective in their jobs. The continuing education component of the model should be explored further by developing programs based on the adult education principles of continuing education. CSPD ongoing program evaluation is necessary for Region IV to continue to monitor progress. The baseline data obtained can be utilized to compare with a future Region IV personnel analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Cover letter sent with instruments

<First name, last name>
<Street Address>
<City, State>

Dear *<name>:*

The Region IV CSPD steering committee is in the process of developing a region wide plan to increase the number of qualified rehabilitation counselors working in state VR offices. To assist them in their planning efforts, I am in the process of gathering information from each VR agency and RCE program in Region IV. The information gathered will be presented at the planning conference scheduled for April, 2003. Additionally, I will be using the information for my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Enclosed, you will find a questionnaire and a rating scale. Please answer the questions, and return to me via fax or mail. I appreciate your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B: Questionnaire for State VR Directors

Questions for State VR Directors:

Rehabilitation Counselors:

1. What is your state's definition of a qualified Rehabilitation Counselor?
2. What are the minimum requirements for a Rehabilitation Counselor in your agency?
3. How many Rehabilitation Counselor positions does your state have?
4. How many Rehabilitation Counselor positions are filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors as defined by your state?
5. How many Rehabilitation Counselor positions have you had open in the last three years?
6. How many of the above positions have been filled?
7. How many remain open?
8. How many Rehabilitation Counselors do you expect to retire in the next 2 years?
9. How many promotions do you expect will occur in the next 2 years (from Rehabilitation Counselor to Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor)?
10. How many VRCs have quit in the last 3 years?
11. How many VRC quit based on:
    i. A higher salary _____
    ii. Retirement _____
    iii. Termination _____

iv. Family needs _____

v. Unknown _____

vi. Other: (please list)

12. What is the current salary (or range) you are able to offer new qualified VR counselors?

Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisors

13. How many Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor positions does your state have?
14. What are the minimum requirements for a Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisory position in your agency?
15. How many Rehabilitation Counselor Supervisor positions are filled with qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (as defined by your state)?
16. How many Rehabilitation Supervisor positions have you had open in the last three years?
17. How many of the above positions have been filled?
18. How many remain open?
19. How many open positions have been filled by qualified Rehabilitation Counselors (as defined by your state)?

Questionnaire for Rehabilitation Educators

Your Institution:

1. My program is Core accredited. T/F
2. What kind of funding does your program receive?
    a. RSA
    b. Other (please list):

Student:

3. How many students are admitted into your program each year?
    a. 5-10
    b. 11-15
    c. 16-20
    d. 21-25
    e. 26-30
    f. 31-35
    g. 35+
4. How many students have graduated over the last 3 years?
    a. 11-15
    b. 16-20
    c. 21-25
    d. 26-30
    e. 31-35

f. 35+

5. How many graduates have become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors?

   a. 5-10

   b. 11-15

   c. 16-20

   d. 21-25

   e. 26-30

   f. 31-35

   g. 35+

6. What is your annual capacity for students?

   a. 5-10

   b. 11-15

   c. 16-20

   d. 21-25

   e. 26-30

   f. 31-35

   g. 35+

Student Employment Upon Graduation:

7. How many students in the last three years were employed by:

   i. Insurance companies: _____

   ii. Hospitals: _____

   iii. Private Rehabilitation: _____

   iv. Public Vocational Rehabilitation Programs: _____

v. Other (please list):

Recruitment of Graduates by Public Vocational Rehabilitation Programs:

8. What could state agencies do to attract students?

Recruitment into RCE programs

9. How many students have applied to your program in the last three years?
10. What are some examples of your most successful recruitment activities?
11. What do you think would help you recruit more students? (stipends, videos, presence from VR agency, etc.)
12. What are some examples of your most successful recruitment efforts?

Competitor information

13. For students entering other industries, what is the beginning salary range?
    i. Insurance companies: _____
    ii. Hospitals: _____
    iii. Private Rehabilitation: _____
    iv. Other (please list):

14. How do competitors recruit from RCE programs?
15. What makes them attractive to students?

Rehabilitation Counselor Educators

16. How many tenured tracked Rehabilitation Counseling Educator positions does your institution have?
17. How many non-tenured Rehabilitation Counseling Educator positions does your institution have?
18. How many educators are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors?
19. In the last three years, what is the turnover rate for tenured-track Rehabilitation Educators in your institution?
20. In the last three years, what is the turnover rate for non-tenured tracked Rehabilitation Educators in your institution?
21. What is the current salary range for new rehabilitation educators?
22. How many educator retirements do you anticipate in the next 3 years?
23. What are the minimum qualifications for Rehabilitation educators?

Appendix D: Recruitment efforts Likert scale

Recruitment Efforts

This questionnaire ranks your opinions about the recruitment of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors into state Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies.

Please rank the following statements as follows:

1= Disagree 2= Somewhat disagree 3= Somewhat agree 4= Agree

20. My agency participates in recruitment activities. _____

21. One barrier to recruitment is low salaries _____

22. One barrier to recruitment is lack of marketing _____

23. One barrier to recruitment is poor continuing education _____

24. Recruitment videos would be helpful in the recruitment efforts of my agency

_____

25. A spokesperson would be helpful in the recruitment efforts of my agency.

_____

26. The communication between my state agency and the local rehabilitation counselor education programs is good. _____

27. The recruitment practices of my agency are very good. _____

28. The complexity of a Rehabilitation Counselor job is a barrier to recruitment.

_____

29. A web based marketing program would be beneficial in recruitment _____

30. New marketing strategies for high schools would be beneficial in recruitment

_____

31. New marketing strategies to universities would be beneficial to recruitment efforts _____

32. One barrier to recruitment is that other industries are more attractive ____

33. The lack of rehabilitation training programs negatively affects recruitment _____

34. Better communication is needed between VR agencies and RCE programs _____

35. Paid internships are needed for better recruitment _____

36. RSA scholarships would lead to increased recruitment. _____

37. It is easy to fill new Rehabilitation Counselor positions. _____

38. I am currently able to hire new counselors/ educators. _____

Vitae

Kristi Turner Walker was born in Powell, TN on January 20, 1973. She went to Powell Elementary and Middle schools, and graduated from Powell High School in 1991. From there, she went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where she graduated with a BS in Organismal and Systems Biology and a BA in Psychology in 1995. She graduated with a MS in Rehabilitation Counseling in 1998.

Kristi is pursing her Doctorate in Educational Psychology with a specialization in Adult Education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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