

Evaluating School Counseling Websites:

An Evaluation Tool

Glenda P. Reynolds

Auburn University Montgomery

Helen Kitchens

Troy University Montgomery

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the use of a webpage evaluation for imbedding technology in classes for teaching school counseling and counseling program development. The instructors created the Website Evaluation Form to help students recognize qualities of webpages that would enhance the school counseling program, broaden their information base about what counselors are doing over a large geographical area, and plan for their own website.

Evaluating School Counseling Websites: An Evaluation Tool

School counseling is a relatively new specialty area of counseling. It evolved from career counseling to a recognized profession that is an integral part of the process of helping all students achieve in school (Neukrug, 2003). Traditionally, school counselors have delivered their program components through consultation, classroom guidance lessons, individual planning or counseling with students and small group counseling (Schmidt, 2003).

Greater emphasis on standardized achievement measures as a result of federal and state legislation to improve achievement of all students has changed the responsibilities of school personnel. Many school counselors find that they are spending more time in testing and other services unrelated to counseling and less time in counseling. Counselors continue to seek new ways to reach all stakeholders in the counseling program and at the same time provide counseling and guidance services required by the counseling program plan. Stone and Turba (1999) suggest technology can save the counselor time by assisting them monitor student progress, provide advising to students, import test results and pair them with academic scores and teachers.

Van Horn and Myrick (2001) predicted that technology would change the way school counselors work. Daggett (2003) saw opportunities for school counselors to use technology in their roles as change agents in schools. Hohenshil (2000) stated that school counselors should be skilled in using websites to help students find funding for postsecondary education and explore career options. Gerler, Jr. (1995) suggested using

computer technology to improve classroom presentations and increase counseling experiences for students through interactive technology. One of the leading uses of computer technology by high school counselors is to provide teachers information to help them prepare course content. They also access data to help students make informed decisions concerning career, education, and other plans after high school.

Technology has been available to help counselors for many years. It has been used most in relation to school records such as information storage and retrieval. Student grades, test scores, attendance and other records are increasingly entered through computers and student schedules and graduation records are usually kept on computer files. One would expect high school counselors to be more comfortable with using computers than elementary counselors, but a study by Astramovich, Jones, and Coker (2004) found that counselors working with all grade levels are comfortable working with computers. As a result of becoming familiar with the possibilities for using computers, technology is seen as a tool to help counselors work more efficiently and enhance the program rather than supplant current methods of counseling.

Van Horn and Myrick (2001) advocated using websites to disseminate information. They suggest that a guidance website could include guidance curriculum information, group counseling opportunities, and activities for students and parents. They see the guidance website as an opportunity to inform stakeholders about the guidance department through posting calendars of activities, promoting special awareness activities - such as drug awareness programs and career fairs – newsletters and supportive links.

In 2004 the Grossmont Union High School District used an automated notification technology system to contact parents quickly when two schools experienced shooting incidents (Warren, 2004). In the aftermath parents were provided with updated information on counseling and community resources. Warren states that communication on a daily basis is just as important as crisis information. Sabella and Booker (2003) suggest using the Web to make information available to parents, community members, business and others outside the school environment. They state that online consultation and online training in the areas of communication, studying, career development, or other timely topics can provide much needed assistance to a wide audience.

Purpose

School counselor educators help counselors-to-be learn uses of technology that will make counseling programs more beneficial to students, parents, school personnel and other stakeholders. One technology with high potential is the counselor webpage. As some school systems are requiring webpages, counselors have the opportunity to make this requirement an asset to their programs.

To be able to build a webpage or to tell a technician what they need, counselors must have some knowledge of the content they want and the way they want to present it. The authors of this article developed a Website Evaluation Form for use in teaching technology for school counselors (see Appendix A). The purposes of the learning activity are to (a) gain information about school counselor programs and the activities of school counselors in elementary, middle, and high schools, (b) identify practices of school counselors that meet the *ASCA National Model: A Framework for School*

Counseling Programs (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2003) and state standards, and (c) identify qualities of attractive and useful counselor webpages.

Process

The teacher instructs students to find webpages of school counselors and evaluate them using the form provided. Students are given specific instructions about the type of webpage that may be evaluated. For example, the page must be from a specific school and not from a school system, commercial or resource site. Other instruction could include the number of in state and out of state sites and grade levels of the schools evaluated. Students use one form per webpage they visit. For example, students may be instructed to visit two elementary schools in the state and three elementary schools out of state.

Students who have more computer expertise often help the students who cannot find school counselor webpages. We think it is important for students to discuss their findings, so one class period is used to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the sites they found. Each term students seem to be surprised by the information they gained through this activity. They preface comments with, "I didn't know..." or I expected to find but...". Each student has different experiences, thus each person's insight is greatly increased by their shared findings. Website evaluations permit students to examine what counselors do in locations across the country as well as in schools in close proximity. Additionally, students gain ideas for setting up websites when they become counselors.

Conclusion

Evaluating counselor webpages from a variety of locations and discussing them is a valuable learning tool. This evaluation may be embedded in many different school counseling courses. For example, it is a helpful tool for discussing program planning and implementation, the content areas of counseling, developmentally appropriate information, and the appropriate use of technology. The counselor educator may want to compare the Web information to national and state standards for school counseling programs and codes of ethics. This is also a good introduction to the differences in programs among grade levels. Other topics that fit well with this activity include how to communicate your program and work with school administrators.

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Appendix A

Website Evaluation Form

1. URL of webpage you are evaluating: http//:
2. Name of webpage you are evaluating:
3. Does the page take a long time to load? About how long?
4. Do the pictures add to the page?
5. Is the spelling correct on the page?
6. Are there headings and subheadings on the page? If so, are they helpful?
7. Are there are hyperlinks on the page?
8. Are links clearly visible and explanatory?
9. Is there a link back to the home page from supporting pages?
10. Is there a date of last update?
11. Is the information current? If not how out-of-date is the information?
12. Is the title of the page indicative of the content?
13. If you were a student at that school would the information be useful to you?
 - a. Why or why not?
14. If you had a child in that school would the information be useful to you?
 - a. Why or why not?
15. Who is the target audience? General public? Parents? Students?
16. Discuss your overall evaluation of the attractiveness of the site.
17. Discuss your overall evaluation of the usefulness of the site.
18. If you were a counselor at this school, how would you feel about the site?
 - a. Would you be proud of it or embarrassed, consider it useful or wasteful?

Author Note

Dr. Glenda Phillips Reynolds earned her Ed. D. in Counselor Education, May 1997, from The University of Alabama. She currently is Associate Professor in the Counselor, Leadership, and Special Education Department at Auburn University Montgomery. Before joining Auburn University Montgomery, Dr. Reynolds was a school counselor at kindergarten through twelfth grades.. She is a National Certified Counselor and National Certified School Counselor. Dr. Reynolds has served on the executive councils of many professional organizations.

Dr. Helen (Len) Kitchens earned her Ed.D. in Counselor Education, May 1990, from Auburn University. She currently serves as the Associate Dean of the College of Education at Troy University Montgomery Campus. Dr. Kitchens is a Professor in the Counseling Department, and served as Chair of that department from 2001-2004. She is also a Licensed Professional Counselor. Dr. Kitchens has taught at the secondary level and was a school counselor as well as Director of the Counseling Department at St. James School, Montgomery, Alabama, from 1979-1984. Additionally, she has worked as a psychometrist and case coordinator for the Monsky Developmental Clinic, Center for Learning and Development and the Southeast Center for ADD/HD and LD.