

## Testing the Engagement Theory of Program Quality in CACREP-Accredited Counselor Education Programs

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### Abstract:

This study examined the engagement theory of program quality (Haworth & Conrad, 1997), which highlights positive student learning outcomes that result from stakeholder involvement in program evaluation within master's-level graduate programs. A total of 481 master's-level counseling students and 63 faculty members, representing 68 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited counselor education programs, participated in the study. Findings reveal that engagement theory is a potentially useful quality assessment resource for CACREP-accredited programs in their efforts at enhancing and sustaining program quality.

**Keywords:** program evaluation | student learning outcomes | counselor education | CACREP

### Article:

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2009 standards are evidence of efforts to keep pace with a quality assurance movement in U.S. higher education that emphasizes the measurement of student learning outcomes (SLOs) through outcome-based evaluation (Bogue & Aper, 2000; Schalock, 2001; Welsh & Dey, 2002). Urofsky (2008) said,

The transition to outcome-based standards is reflective of ongoing dialogue ... between representatives of the higher education and accreditation communities, the federal government, business leaders, and other higher education constituent groups during the recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. (p. 6)

Through outcome-based standards (e.g., assessment of SLOs), academic programs such as counselor education programs are required to more thoroughly assess and document what students gain from their programs. More specifically, SLOs emphasize students' cognitive and affective growth as a result of their educational experiences (Hernon & Dugan, 2004). Ideally, through continuous systematic program evaluation, accredited counselor education programs will

be able to not only demonstrate SLOs but also verify that they are providing quality learning experiences for their students.

Even before 2009, CACREP required accredited counselor education programs to include current students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders in program evaluation efforts (CACREP, 2001). In doing so, CACREP has long been in step with a second movement in U.S. higher education—the movement toward involvement of stakeholders in program evaluation. In today's academic market, “consumers, change, competition, and cost ... assessment, accountability, and action” (Schalock, 2001, p. 15) are points of concern. To demonstrate accountability and provide quality assurance, university and program leaders are “expected to collect, format, analyze, and disseminate systematically data on how students, alumni, employers, faculty, and staff perceive the quality and effectiveness of their many programs and services” (Welsh & Dey, 2002, p. 18). Although each stakeholder group is important, students' opinions in particular have become more valued in assessing the quality of their learning experiences (Welsh & Dey, 2002). Students know firsthand how their educational experiences affect them professionally and personally. Thus, administrators and educators are wise to include students in both formative and summative program evaluation efforts. With improved understanding of how educational practices affect students, administrators and educators can then make necessary adjustments to create more positive learning environments (Haworth & Conrad, 1997).

Although pursuit of quality is widespread and beneficial, no single definition of quality exists in the literature (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993). Recognizing the challenges of comprehensively defining program quality, Haworth and Conrad (1997) sought to identify the general attributes or characteristics of high-quality programs as indicated by administrators, faculty, and students across all fields of master's-level study. Haworth and Conrad focused on master's-level programs because they noted, as has Brooks (2005), that most quality assessment studies focused on baccalaureate or doctoral programs but neglected master's programs.

According to Haworth and Conrad (1997), high-quality master's programs are those that “seek and implement input from diverse stakeholders to create enriching learning experiences for students that positively affect their growth and development” (p. 15). This definition provides a wide lens through which to view and evaluate programs. It implies that high-quality programs are assertive in self-evaluation and modification, consider all stakeholders valuable, and ultimately focus on enhancing students' learning and growth as the primary purpose of higher education.

Beyond defining program quality, Haworth and Conrad's (1997) in-depth study of master's-level programs led them to propose the first integrated theory of program quality—the engagement theory of program quality (ETPQ). ETPQ consists of five program clusters (see Table 1) with 17 attributes that indicate program quality. Although the theory emphasizes students' growth and development, it also reflects the importance of all stakeholders in cultivating an optimal learning environment. In fact, a central component of the theory is the recognition that students, faculty, and administrators must be fully engaged in teaching and learning to create high-quality master's programs. When these stakeholders work together in this way, SLOs can include increased professional identity, professional competence and confidence, knowledge and understanding of

theory and professional practice, communication and problem-solving skills, and leadership capabilities. Stakeholder engagement also promotes positive outcomes for faculty, including increased administrator support, financial and resource support, opportunities to advance their own learning, and benefits of working with diverse colleagues and students (Haworth & Conrad, 1997).

**Table 1. The Five Clusters of the Engagement Theory of Program Quality**

| Cluster 1                    | Cluster 2                | Cluster 3                 | Cluster 4                                | Cluster 5                        |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Diverse and engaged faculty  | Shared program direction | Critical dialogue         | Planned breadth and depth of course work | Support for students             |
| Diverse and engaged students | Community of learners    | Interactive learning      | Professional residency                   | Support for faculty              |
| Engaged leaders              | Risk-taking environments | Mentoring                 | Tangible product                         | Support for basic infrastructure |
|                              |                          | Cooperative peer learning |  |                                  |
|                              |                          | Out-of-class activities   |  |                                  |

*Note.* Cluster 1 = Diverse and Engaged Participants; Cluster 2 = Participatory Cultures; Cluster 3 = Interactive Teaching and Learning; Cluster 4 = Connected Program Requirements; Cluster 5 = Adequate Resources. Cluster names are subscales for the Survey of Program Quality Attributes.

ETPQ emerged through a national qualitative study of 781 stakeholders affiliated with 47 master's programs across 11 fields of study. Participating stakeholders included institutional administrators, program administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and employers. Participants were interviewed related to “how interviewees experienced their master's program, including the program's ‘character,’ its ‘quality’ and value, and those attributes they felt contributed most to student and faculty learning” (Conrad et al., 1993, p. 36). Ultimately, the study resulted in a quality assessment framework through which programs might engage in “an ongoing and dynamic process of study, feedback, modification, and improvement” (Haworth & Conrad, 1997, p. 167). In this way, the 17 attributes of program quality serve as a guide for helping stakeholders know how to define and strive for program quality.

In response to quality assurance trends in U.S. higher education, CACREP-accredited counselor education programs may find that ETPQ offers a useful framework for assessing and improving program quality because the main tenets of ETPQ parallel CACREP's emphasis on professional standards. One example of this parallel is that both ETPQ and CACREP's standards emphasize engaged and supported stakeholders. In addition, both encourage ongoing program assessment and improvement and both recognize that individual programs may vary in how faculty seek to uniquely accomplish their programs' missions, goals, and objectives while maintaining high-quality results.

Despite the shared interests of ETPQ and CACREP, no previous research has explored the validity of ETPQ as a measure of program quality in counselor education programs. Because CACREP and the counseling profession hold program quality as a high value, ETPQ could prove useful as a potential means of further enhancing program quality within counselor education programs. Use of the ETPQ framework also may enable counselor education program

chairpersons and educators to gain new insight into students' perceptions and ideas for improving their learning experiences. The current study was an exploratory study to test ETPQ's utility in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. The study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How important are ETPQ's attributes of program quality as indicators of program quality?

Research Question 2: Are students and faculty similar in how they rate the attributes as important indicators of program quality?

Research Question 3: Are the attributes present within CACREP-accredited counselor education programs?

Research Question 4: Are students and faculty similar in how they rate the presence of the attributes within their programs?

Research Question 5: Are students' and faculty members' program expectations met as evidenced by the difference between their importance and presence ratings of the attributes?

Research Question 6: How satisfied are students with the quality of their program?

Research Question 7: To what extent can students' satisfaction with program quality be predicted by the differences between their importance and presence ratings of the attributes?

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

Study data were collected in two waves (late spring and early fall of 2009) in an effort to maximize the number of U.S. colleges and universities with CACREP-accredited programs represented in the study. A second wave of data collection also allowed for the addition of two exploratory research questions involving students' satisfaction with the quality of their programs. Waves 1 and 2 were conducted using the same protocol. Participants in Waves 1 and 2 of the study completed a demographic questionnaire and the Survey of Program Quality Attributes (SPQA; Kornelis, 2004; Mustan, 1998). Wave 2 participants completed these same instruments as well as an 11-item program satisfaction instrument. Instruments were completed via SurveyMonkey.

### **Participants and Procedures**

The researcher (first author) invited all eligible CACREP-accredited counselor education programs to participate in the study. Because of the relatively low percentage of CACREP-accredited programs represented in Wave 1 (22%), the researcher conducted a second wave of

data collection in fall 2009. Eighteen counselor education programs participated in Wave 2, bringing the total sample size to 68 (30%) of 228 eligible institutions.

Participants were faculty currently employed by (full-time/permanent or full-time/nonpermanent) and students enrolled in (full-time or part-time) master's-level CACREP-accredited counselor education programs in the continental United States. Although both faculty and students participated in Wave 1, only students were recruited for Wave 2 because of the addition of the two population-specific research questions. Prior to statistical analyses being performed, incomplete participant responses were culled from the data, as well as responses of students who reported completing less than 16 semester hours in their program and faculty who did not have full-time status. These last two steps were taken to ensure that students and faculty had sufficient exposure to their programs to be able to make informed decisions about program quality.

Wave 1 demographic information. Of 63 faculty members who participated in Wave 1, 55 (87%) were full-time permanent employees and eight (13%) were full-time nonpermanent employees. Most faculty members (n= 41, 65%) had worked more than 4 years at their current institution. The majority of faculty participants were White (n= 49, 78%), female (n= 40, 64%), and between the ages of 50 and 59 years (n= 27, 43%). Faculty participants were employed by public (n= 48, 76%) and private institutions (n= 15, 24%). Twenty-eight (44%) faculty members indicated that their counselor education programs enrolled students as cohort groups, and 34 faculty members (54%) reported use of a noncohort system. Finally, 37 faculty members (59%) were from master's-level counselor education programs, and the remainder (41%) were from counselor education programs with both master's- and doctoral-level programs.

Of 344 student participants, the majority identified as being enrolled in either a community counseling track (n= 105, 30%) or school counseling track (n= 133, 39%), although students from all CACREP-accredited tracks were represented. One hundred students (29%) were enrolled part-time, and 244 (71%) were full-time students. Most students (n= 255; 74%) had completed more than 31 semester hours. Regarding race/ethnicity, the majority of student participants were White (n= 271, 79%), and African American students were the second highest group of student participants (n= 40, 12%). More female students (n= 298, 87%) participated than did male students (n= 41, 12%). The majority of students (n= 203, 59%) were between the ages of 20 years and 29 years. Public institutions were represented by 245 students (71%), and 97 students (28%) were from private institutions. Ninety-seven students (28%) were from cohort-based programs, 76 (22%) were from non-cohort-based programs, and 171 students (50%) were unsure if their programs were cohort based or noncohort based. Finally, 200 students (58%) were from master's-level-only counselor education programs, whereas 144 (42%) reported being from programs that offered both master's- and doctoral-level degrees.

Wave 2 demographic information. One hundred and thirty-seven students participated in Wave 2. Of these participants, the majority were in a school counseling track (n= 73, 53%). Community counseling students (n= 23) and mental health students (n= 30) composed a combined 39% of Wave 2 participants, with students from all of CACREP's accredited tracks represented. Forty-six students (34%) were enrolled part-time, and 91 (66%) were enrolled full-time. As for semester hours completed, 38 students (28%) had completed 16 to 30 hours and the remainder (n= 99) had completed 31 or more hours. The majority of student participants were

White (n= 115, 84%). More female students (n= 118, 86%) participated than did male students (n= 19, 14%), and the majority of students (n= 83, 61%) were between the ages of 20 and 29 years. Most students (n= 111, 81%) were from public institutions, whereas 26 students (19%) were from private institutions. Students from cohort-based programs numbered 48 (35%), whereas 15 students (11%) were from non-cohort-based programs; furthermore, many students (n= 73, 53%) were unsure if their program used a cohort model. Finally, 75 students (55%) reported being from master's-level-only counselor education programs, whereas 62 (45%) reported being from programs with both master's- and doctoral-level programs.

## Instruments

SPQA. Mustan (1998) developed the SPQA to test the validity of Haworth and Conrad's (1997) 17 attributes of master's-level program quality. The survey consists of two scales. The Importance Scale consists of 27 statements to which participants respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 =not important, 2 =little importance, 3 =somewhat important, 4 =moderately important, and 5 =very important). For the current study, the researcher added clarity to response options by modifying the scale to not important, of little importance, moderately important, important, and very important, respectively.

The Importance Scale's 27 items are grouped into their respective clusters and act as instrument subscales. The Cronbach's alpha score for the Importance Scale was .92 for students, with subscale alphas ranging from .60 to .81. For faculty, the Cronbach's alpha score of the Importance Scale was .87, with subscale alphas ranging from .66 to .82 on all subscales except for Connected Program Requirements ( $\alpha$  = .25). In response to this last result, Mustan (1998) suggested increasing the number of faculty in future studies to improve that subscale's reliability.

Similar to the Importance Scale, the Presence Scale consists of 27 items. These items are the same statements that compose the Importance Scale, but with different response options (1 =strongly disagree, 2 =moderately disagree, 3 =neither agree nor disagree, 4 =moderately agree, and 5 =strongly agree). The Presence Scale's 27 items also are grouped into their respective clusters (i.e., subscales). Mustan (1998) reported Cronbach's alpha scores for the total Presence Scale of .93 for students and .85 for faculty. Although Mustan did not provide subscale reliability information in her results, her report of total scale scores for both the Importance Scale and Presence Scale (.92 and .93 for students, respectively; .87 and .85 for faculty, respectively) demonstrated that the instrument has good internal consistency.

Before conducting data analysis of the current study's hypotheses, the researcher examined the reliability of the SPQA using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha scores for faculty and students are listed in Table 2. Total scale reliability was good for the Importance Scale and Presence Scale but ranged from low to moderate for many of the subscales.

**Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Scores for the Importance Scale and Presence Scale of the Survey of Program Quality Attributes**

| Scale and Subscale                | Wave 1  |          | Wave 2   |
|-----------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
|                                   | Faculty | Students | Students |
| Importance Scale                  | .73     | .75      | .67      |
| Diverse and Engaged Participants  | .72     | .71      | .53      |
| Participatory Cultures            | .70     | .62      | .66      |
| Interactive Teaching and Learning | .24     | .56      | .87      |
| Connected Program Requirements    | .90     | .44      | .34      |
| Adequate Resources                | .88     | .81      | .81      |
| Total Presence Scale              | .83     | .79      | .76      |
| Diverse and Engaged Participants  | .88     | .79      | .84      |
| Participatory Cultures            | .81     | .86      | .81      |
| Interactive Teaching and Learning | .18     | .57      | .93      |
| Connected Program Requirements    | .93     | .57      | .62      |
| Adequate Resources                | .94     | .41      | .63      |
| Total                             |         |          |          |

Program Evaluation Survey (PES). To assess students' satisfaction with the quality of their programs, the current study used the PES (Wise, Hengstler, & Braskamp, 1981). This instrument was designed by administrators at the University of Illinois to assess enrolled undergraduate students' perceptions of and satisfaction with various aspects of their respective departments, including instructional, curricular, advising, and operational aspects. The original 24-item instrument contained 11 items pertaining to satisfaction with a range of response options from 1 (high) to 5 (low). In their quantitative study of satisfaction ratings by University of Illinois alumni and enrolled students from 20 departments, Wise et al. (1981) reported Horst reliabilities ranging from .85 to .94 for the 11 satisfaction items of the PES. The current study used this 11-item subscale as a measure of students' program satisfaction. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used with a range of response options from 1 (highly satisfied) to 5 (not satisfied). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha score for the PES was .93, indicating good reliability. Use of a multiple-item satisfaction measure is one of the unique contributions of the current study to the existing ETPQ literature.

## Results

### Wave 1

Research Question 1 explored students' and faculty members' perceptions of the importance of ETPQ's attributes of program quality. The Importance Scale's 27 items were grouped in their respective clusters prior to the calculation of summary statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations) for students and faculty. Observed responses by students and faculty ranged from 1 to 5. Students and faculty perceived all of the attributes as important, as evidenced by mean scores above 4 for all faculty and students. Table 3 provides all means and standard deviations for participants' Importance Scale and Presence Scale ratings.

**Table 3. SPQA Importance Scale and Presence Scale Ratings for Wave 1 and Wave 2**

| Scale and Subscale                | Wave 1   |           |          |           | Wave 2   |           |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|                                   | Faculty  |           | Students |           | Students |           |
|                                   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Importance Scale                  | 4.52     | 4.56      | 4.34     | 4.41      | 4.25     | 4.33      |
| Diverse and Engaged Participants  | .40      | .45       | .44      | .44       | 4.25     | 4.33      |
| Participatory Cultures            | 4.28     | 4.43      | 4.21     | 4.23      | 4.17     | 4.16      |
| Interactive Teaching and Learning | .46      | .37       | .45      | .46       | 4.17     | 4.16      |
| Connected Program Requirements    | 4.20     | 4.17      | 4.35     | 3.98      | 4.32     | 3.90      |
| Adequate Resources                | .49      | .66       | .48      | .67       | 4.32     | 3.90      |
| Presence Scale                    | 4.24     | 4.11      | 4.04     | 3.86      | 3.91     | 3.74      |
| Diverse and Engaged Participants  | .72      | .62       | .74      | .76       | 3.91     | 3.74      |
| Participatory Cultures            | 4.39     | 3.69      | 4.20     | 3.61      | 4.13     | 3.60      |
| Interactive Teaching and Learning | .46      | .73       | .59      | .75       | 4.13     | 3.60      |
| Connected Program Requirements    |          |           |          |           | .59      | .78       |
| Adequate Resources                |          |           |          |           |          | .78       |

Note. SPQA = Survey of Program Quality Attributes.

Research Question 2 examined differences in perceptions held by students and faculty regarding the importance of the attributes of program quality. Independent t tests (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ) were conducted to compare students' and faculty's composite means for each of the five clusters within the Importance Scale. Independent t tests resulted in statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between students' and faculty's perceptions of the importance of the attributes on four of the five subscales. Faculty members tended to rate the importance of attributes in the Diverse and Engaged Participants, Participatory Cultures, and Connected Program Requirements subscales higher than did students. Students tended to rate the importance of the attributes within the Adequate Resources subscale higher than did faculty. Students and faculty did not differ significantly on the Interactive Teaching and Learning subscale.

Research Question 3 explored students' and faculty members' perceptions of the presence of ETPQ's attributes of program quality within their own CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. The Presence Scale's 27 items were grouped in their respective clusters before the calculation of summary statistics for students and faculty. Observed responses for both students and faculty ranged from 1 to 5 with mixed results. Students' mean scores revealed that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the presence of attributes from three subscales: Diverse and Engaged Participants, Interactive Teaching and Learning, and Adequate Resources. Students, however, perceived the attributes of the subscales Participatory Cultures and Connected Program Requirements as present within their programs. Faculty perceived the attributes of four of the subscales as present within their programs: Diverse and Engaged Participants, Participatory Cultures, Interactive Teaching and Learning, and Connected Program Requirements. Faculty, however, neither agreed nor disagreed with the presence of Adequate Resources within their program.

Research Question 4 examined differences in perceptions held by students and faculty regarding attributes of program quality in their counselor education programs. Independent t tests (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ) were conducted to compare students' and faculty's composite means for each of the five clusters within the Presence Scale. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) existed between students' and faculty members' perceptions of the presence of three of the five clusters of attributes: Diverse and Engaged Participants, Interactive Teaching and Learning, and Connected Program Requirements. In each of these clusters of attributes, faculty members' mean presence scores were higher than students' mean presence scores.

Research Question 5 assessed whether students' and faculty members' program expectations were met as evidenced by differences between their respective ratings of the importance and presence of ETPQ's attributes of program quality. Exploring participants' program expectations was another unique contribution of the current study to the existing literature related to ETPQ. Research Question 5 required a two-part analysis. First, two sets of paired t tests were conducted (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ )—one for students and one for faculty. For students, all but one subscale (Connected Program Requirements) produced statistically significant results ( $p = .000$ ). For faculty, the subscales Diverse and Engaged Participants, Participatory Cultures, and Adequate Resources produced statistically significant results ( $p < .002$ ).

The second step in answering Research Question 5 of Wave 1 required examining students' and faculty members' actual mean scores for each subscale. Where statistically significant

differences existed, differences in mean scores among the five clusters were examined to determine if participants' program expectations were either being exceeded or not being met. If students' and faculty members' program expectations were exceeded, then their respective mean presence scores would be higher than their mean importance scores, thereby producing a negative mean score ( $M < 0$ ) when mean Presence scores were subtracted from mean Importance scores. If students' and faculty members' program expectations were not being met, then their respective mean Presence scores would be lower than their mean Importance scores.

Examining differences in mean scores for Importance and Presence revealed that each of the five clusters' mean Importance scores were higher than mean Presence scores for both students and faculty. For students, mean scores for Importance and Presence in the Connected Program Requirements cluster were nearly equal and did not produce statistically significant results in paired t tests, suggesting that students' expectations of their programs may have been met. Paired t tests in the other four clusters produced significant results ( $p < .001$ ), with mean Importance scores always higher than mean Presence scores. This outcome suggests that students' expectations of their programs were not being met in these areas of program quality.

For faculty, the subscales of Interactive Teaching and Learning and Connected Program Requirements did not produce statistically significant results, suggesting that faculty members' expectations of their programs were being met in these two areas of program quality. The other three clusters of attributes produced statistically significant results ( $p < .002$ ) in paired t tests, but as with students, mean Importance scores for faculty were higher than mean Presence scores. This suggests that faculty members' expectations of their programs were not being met in these areas of program quality.

## Wave 2

For Wave 2, Research Question 1 explored students' perceptions of the importance of ETPQ's attributes of program quality. Once again, the Importance Scale's 27 items were grouped in their respective clusters before the calculation of summary statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations). Observed responses ranged from 1 to 5. As hypothesized, students perceived the attributes as important, as evidenced by mean scores higher than 4. Table 3 provides all means and standard deviations for participants' Importance and Presence scores.

The second research question pertaining to Wave 2 (Research Question 3) explored students' perceptions of the presence of ETPQ's attributes of program quality within their own CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. The Presence Scale's 27 items were grouped in their respective clusters prior to the calculation of summary statistics. Observed responses ranged from 1 to 5. Students in Wave 2 primarily indicated that they "neither agreed nor disagreed" that the attributes were present. Only for the Connected Program Requirements cluster did mean scores indicate that students agreed the attributes were present within their programs.

The third research question for Wave 2 (Research Question 5) required a two-part analysis to assess whether students' program expectations were met, as evidenced by the difference between their ratings of the importance and presence of ETPQ's attributes of program quality. First, paired t tests were conducted (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ). All subscales except that of Connected

Program Requirements produced statistically significant results ( $p < .001$ ). The second step required examining students' actual mean scores for each of the subscales. If students' expectations were not being met, then statistically significant differences would exist, with mean Importance scores being higher than mean Presence scores. If students' expectations were being exceeded, statistically significant differences would exist, with mean Presence scores being higher than mean Importance scores, and produce a negative score ( $M < 0$ ) when mean Presence scores were subtracted from mean Importance scores.

For the four clusters in which paired t tests revealed statistically significant results, Presence scores were lower than Importance scores, indicating that students' expectations were not being met. The lack of statistical significance for the subscale of Connected Program Requirements suggests students' expectations were being met in regard to this subscale, or cluster attributes, of program quality. Students' program expectations were not exceeded in any of the clusters.

The next research question pertaining to Wave 2 (Research Question 6) explored students' overall satisfaction with their programs. Students' responses to the 11 items of the PES were averaged together for a combined mean score. Observed responses ranged from 1 (highly satisfied) to 5 (not satisfied). As hypothesized, students expressed satisfaction (i.e., satisfied to highly satisfied) with the overall quality of their programs, as evidenced by an overall mean score of less than 3 ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .81$ ).

The final question of Wave 2 (Research Question 7) examined to what extent students' satisfaction ratings could be predicted by the mean differences between their Importance and Presence ratings of ETPQ's attributes of program quality (i.e., the extent to which their expectations were being met through their programs). Mean differences between Importance and Presence ratings for each of the five clusters of attributes served as independent variables, with students' total satisfaction mean score serving as the dependent variable. A linear regression analysis was run to test the hypothesis that differences between Importance and Presence ratings of the attributes would predict students' satisfaction with program quality. The regression was run using the Enter method. Regression analyses indicated that the model significantly predicted students' combined mean satisfaction score,  $F(5, 131) = 26.27$ ,  $p = .000$ .  $R^2$  for the model was .50, and adjusted  $R^2$  was .48. Diverse and Engaged Participants ( $t = 2.80$ ,  $p = .006$ ) and Participatory Cultures ( $t = 3.16$ ,  $p = .002$ ) were significant predictors of students' program satisfaction. Interactive Teaching and Learning, Connected Program Requirements, and Adequate Resources were not significant predictors. Together, these five variables contribute to 50% of the variance explained by the model.

## **Discussion**

Students' and faculty members' Importance ratings of ETPQ's attributes of program quality support that the theory does hold potential for use within the field of counselor education. CACREP requires that accredited counselor education programs identify, produce, and assess SLOs and encourages accredited counselor education programs to include stakeholders in continuous systematic program evaluation. Through ETPQ, it is suggested that numerous affective and cognitive SLOs result from programs that involve stakeholders and prioritize the personal and professional growth of its students. Thus, CACREP-accredited programs may

benefit in at least two ways by defining and seeking program quality as outlined by ETPQ. First, the ETPQ provides a framework through which to create, sustain, and evaluate program quality. Second, the program's efforts to increase SLOs can be helped by implementing ETPQ's principles.

Programs that define and seek program quality based on ETPQ will need to regularly dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that attributes of the program quality are, in fact, present as perceived by those stakeholders. The current study revealed that students and faculty somewhat disagreed in their perceptions of the presence of program quality and that there is often room for improving attributes of program quality to meet expectations of students and faculty members. Although a goal of complete satisfaction by all stakeholders at all times may not be realistic, programs that use ETPQ can likely increase their chances of obtaining favorable quality ratings when involving stakeholders in formative and summative evaluation, informing stakeholders of impending changes, developing and implementing change, and continuing to evaluate their respective programs for other necessary changes.

In this study, students' (Waves 1 and 2) and faculty members' program expectations were met in the area of connected program requirements. This means that students and faculty viewed their programs as offering both broad-based and specialized knowledge, opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in a professional residency, and required tangible products that demonstrate SLOs (Haworth & Conrad, 1997). Faculty members' program expectations also were met in the area of interactive teaching and learning. This cluster of program quality attributes consists of activities such as critical dialogue, integrative learning, mentoring, cooperative peer learning, and out-of-class learning opportunities (Haworth & Conrad, 1997). These results suggest that faculty members perceive themselves as doing a good job in creating interactive learning opportunities for students. The fact that students' program expectations are not met in this same area suggests a discrepancy between faculty members' and students' perceptions that may need increased attention. As with connected program requirements, administrators and faculty leaders should seek balance, or agreement, between these two key stakeholder groups so that both perceive their programs as providing interactive teaching and learning opportunities.

Satisfaction ratings are one source of data that may be useful to programs in their program evaluation efforts. The PES was used in this study to determine students' (Wave 2) satisfaction with overall program quality in their respective programs. On the basis of their overall mean satisfaction ratings, students in Wave 2 of this study were satisfied with the quality of their programs. Although this same group of students indicated that their program expectations were not met, it is important to note that satisfaction and satisfied program expectations are interrelated but distinct concepts. Therefore, it is better to view students' PES results as supplemental to their SPQA results and for the purpose of more clearly delineating students' program perceptions. Just as the PES was created by the University of Illinois for internal evaluation (Wise et al., 1981), faculty leaders in CACREP-accredited programs may also develop their own satisfaction measures. Using ETPQ encourages this type of customized approach to program evaluation according to the unique needs of a given program (Haworth & Conrad, 1997).

In assessing student satisfaction, faculty leaders should remember that ETPQ was designed less as a satisfaction measure and more as a framework for program evaluation. Although Mustan (1998) designed the SPQA as a means of quantitatively testing ETPQ, the current study revealed that ETPQ and satisfaction, although possibly overlapping in some ways, are different concepts. This was supported by the result that mean differences in students' (Wave 2) Importance and Presence ratings accounted for some but not all of the variance in their satisfaction ratings. Here again, faculty leaders need to be aware of their unique program evaluation goals and choose appropriate assessment tools that best capture the information they seek (Haworth & Conrad, 1997; Maki, 2004; Miller, 2007).

### **Recommendations for future research**

Future studies could examine a greater number of CACREP-accredited programs to better understand how they rate the importance and existence of quality attributes as outlined by ETPQ. Additionally, future studies should test ETPQ in nonaccredited counselor education programs, because these programs were not included in this study. Because quality assurance is a concern in all of higher education, it is clearly an important subject for both accredited and nonaccredited programs. Future studies of both types of programs might aid the evaluation efforts of counselor educators and positively affect the training of professional counselors.

Future studies may also examine participants' ratings of ETPQ's attributes of program quality based on the demographic characteristics of the participants. The current study did not use collected demographic information to explore differences among participants. For example, certain demographic characteristics may correlate with ratings of the attributes to some degree. This information could provide more specific information to CACREP-accredited counselor education programs related to how different stakeholder groups view program quality as outlined by ETPQ. Certainly, individual programs may want to collect demographic data in their own independent studies of program quality. Obviously, when doing so, they should be careful to protect the confidentiality of participants so that honest responses are more likely.

Finally, future studies may gather longitudinal data to better understand if and how stakeholders' perceptions of program quality change over time. The current study captured data at only one point in time for each participant. However, a longitudinal study may indicate changes of perception over time and in relation to program changes or broader societal changes that might affect institutions and programs.

### **Limitations**

The current study was exploratory and sought to better understand ETPQ as perceived by faculty and master's-level students in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. One possible limitation is that the theory, and therefore the SPQA, may not reflect unique aspects of counselor education. A second limitation is the use of the SPQA in this study. Although this instrument is the best existing quantitative measure of ETPQ, it may need continued revision to better measure the attributes of program quality. Among potential revisions may be the addition of items to the Connected Program Requirements and Adequate Resources subscales to increase their reliability. These subscales include only four items each and produced relatively low reliability alphas in the

current study. A third consideration is that participants' overall high ratings of the importance of ETPQ's attributes of program quality may be positively skewed or inflated due to positive wording of the items. Finally, the number of programs ( $n= 68$ , 30%) represented in this study is relatively small compared with the total number of institutions with CACREP-accredited counselor education programs ( $N= 228$  at the time of this study). Despite limitations, however, the findings of this study are encouraging for the usefulness of the ETPQ framework as a valuable tool for ongoing evaluation and improvement of counselor education programs.

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