

## The Professional, the Quest for Licensure and the Value of Certification

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The purpose of this document is to provide a brief history of counseling as a concept, discuss the licensure process and shed light on certification in relationship to both.

Counseling has probably existed since the dawn of civilization. Undoubtedly, ancient leaders and humans in general have always sought direction to help deal with every day problems, decision making, crises or the general demands of life. We would think those most likely called upon were the most sensitive, empathic, prudent and wisest people in the community. We can easily suggest that there have been excellent counselors long before formal programs and accreditation processes ever developed in our modern times. The process of counseling is clearly very old. Indeed, it has been argued that counseling is interwoven within the role of religious leader, doctor, confessor, lawyer, ambassador, spouse, parent, nurse, monk, consultant, political advisor, and arguably, also that of valet, maid, chauffeur, barber, waitress, and bartender.

Jonathan Plucker (2003) offers a history of Psychology. William Wundt, the German Philosopher & Psychologist, is often referred to as the "Father of Modern Psychology." During 1870, he founded an experimental psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, "utilizing experimental method and structuralism." William James wrote the "Principles of Psychology" during 1890 and G. Stanley Hall founded the American Psychology Association during 1892. Psychology was born. When Hugo Munsterberg published "On The Witness Stand" during 1908, "Psychology and The Teacher " during 1909, and "Psychology and Industrial Efficiency" during 1913 , psychology was extended into law, education and business.

During 1943, the American Psychological Association Division 17 came into existence, originally named the Division of Counseling and Guidance. The founding was impacted by Carl Rogers and it focused on vocational guidance, exploring experiences and the use of tests. During 1951, C. Gilbert Wrenn coined the term, "Counseling Psychology," separating it from other psychology fields in an effort to help define its purview. APA Division 17 changed its name to Counseling Psychology and, for all intents and purposes, made a claim on "counseling" as a psychological field, needing a PhD degree.

John J. Schweska in the Ancient root of counseling (1999) tells us another story about counseling, "At the turn of the century, the counselor emerged out of the educational system: new school and competence testing, youth activity/career programs, health care/ hygiene and advisement regarding everyday problems and goals."

Indeed, during 1913 the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) was founded, to advocate for professional standards in the field that would eventually lead to guidance counseling and today be called school counseling.

During 1951, while APA was claiming counseling, NVGA joined together with the National Association of Guidance and Counselor Trainers (NAGCT), the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education (SPATE), and the American College Personnel Association to form the American Personnel and Guidance Association. That name was changed to the American Association of Counseling and Development during 1983 and on July 1, 1992, the association became the American Counseling Association (ACA). Today ACA claims it is “The world's largest association exclusively representing professional counselors in various practice settings.” ACA recognizes professional counseling at the master’s degree level, but will accept regular members with less education and does support paraprofessional certification.

We can of course include Social Work in the historical perspective (Murry, 1996-97). Back in 1889, Jane Addams, who is credited with starting the field of social work, opened Hull House to Chicago immigrants crowded into a residential and industrial neighborhood, providing services such as kindergarten and daycare facilities for children of working mothers, an employment bureau, an art gallery, libraries, and music and art classes. During 1920, the Association of Training Schools of Professional Social Work was founded. During 1952 it became the Council on Social Work Education, which today is recognized as the accrediting body for Social Work education. During 1955, the National Association for Social Workers (NASW) was established. NASW recognizes professional Social Work at the Master’s Degree level, however does certify those that have completed some bachelor of social work programs.

The term “profession” is defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary (Merriam Webster On Line) as “an act of openly declaring or publicly claiming a belief, faith, or opinion or a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation.” From the short history above, we can see that psychology, social work and counseling were seeking identity, the acknowledgement of their names, just before and at the turn of the century. With the establishment of professional associations and certainly the activities of the 1950s, I see a clear shift towards establishing “Professional Identity.” Professional associations are advocates for their members, offer opportunity for continuing education, eventually establish standards of practice, publish ethics and competencies, offer certifications and lobby for licensure. However, it would be worthwhile looking at licensure before we continue the discussion of professional associations and certifications.

The Licensure movement can be traced back to 1945 when the state of Connecticut passed licensure legislation for psychologists, becoming the first state to recognize psychology as a protected practice oriented profession (History of Psychology). California was the first state to “register” social workers when, in 1945, the Board of Social Work Examiners was formed (State of California, 2004). In 1963, the Board was given the responsibility for administering the Marriage, Family, and Child Counselor Act. The act was renamed the Social Worker and Marriage Counselor Act and the Board was accordingly renamed the Social Worker and Marriage Counselors Qualifications Board.

In 1967, the Licensed Clinical Social Worker Program was established. In 1970, a licensing program for Educational Psychologists was added and the Board then became known as the Board of Behavioral Science Examiners. During 1976, Virginia became the first state to establish a Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) designation (Pope, 1997).

From national perspective, psychology was the first of these three professions to attain widespread licensure, and supposedly not without arguments against their qualifications to practice from Psychiatrists and the American Medical Association. Psychologists, following the same pattern, supposedly argued against the licensure of social workers and counselors, again questioning their qualifications to practice. It is fair to say that those who call themselves psychologists and social workers, as professionals, have had a longer history of name identification within the general public than individuals who call themselves counselors. It is quit common to say, "I am a licensed professional counselor" and hear, "you mean a psychologist" or "school counselor" or perhaps even, "lawyer?" Despite supposed arguments for or against, progressively, during the past couple of decades, social worker and counselor advocates have won their battles as more and more states pass licensure laws.

Rather than digress into a formal discussion of why and how governments came into existence, I will simply suggest that human who chose to live in communities eventually accepted a leader and some type of system to set down rules and regulations that would allow all members of the community to interact with reasonable harmony. For psychologists, social workers and counselors, the license clarifies scope of practice and excludes individuals who do not meet fairly well defined parameters and of course, also exists to protect the public. Licensing requirements are established by state legislatures in the United States. Psychology On Line provides links to all state psychology licensing boards. The Association for Social Work Boards lists licenses and certifications for social work. The National Board for Certified Counselors does the same for counseling licensure.

In its quest to identify counseling as more than one of the things done by psychologists and social workers, the American Counseling Association (ACA On Line) defines The Practice of Professional Counseling as, "The application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systemic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology." John J. Schweska (1999) also states that The Journal of Counseling and Development describes the counselor as "a hybrid born from a relationship between psychology and education with ties to core health care disciplines." Capella University's Doctoral Program in Human Services and Counseling (Minneapolis) adds, "...thus counselors emphasize the developmental, preventive, educational as well as the remedial aspects of mental health care.

They assist clients to help themselves by identifying and mobilizing strengths, and developing skills that carry them beyond the resolution of the immediate issue. Professional counselors truly practice health care rather than solely the treatment of disorders, abnormalities, or diseases alone."

Returning to the role of professional associations, we might say they first come into existence to organize a profession, to provide a forum for discussion for all who wish to participate. Associations go through a process of defining who they represent and set about making rules and regulations to define their scope of practice. Eventually they get to the concept of certification which is nothing more than a piece of paper that announces that the recipient has achieved a prescribed set of "goals" that in essence define the piece of paper. This is an important concept for this discussion. Certifications are not regulated by law. Any association, any organization or any person has the right to provide certifications

that they in essence define. From a professional organization perspective, interested in eventual licensure law, those certifications may indeed be quite rigorous. One could argue that the American Psychological Association defined professional counseling at the PhD level to support their parity with the American Medical Association in the eyes of the legislature. From personal experience, being involved with the licensure efforts of the New Jersey Counseling Association, we instituted a Registry of Professional Counselors back in 1982, and did discuss setting standards that we felt necessary to achieve parity with psychologists and social workers in the eyes of the legislature. However, we are not here to argue politics or what might or might not have happened on the journey towards license. What is clear is that licensure is a goal of strong organizations because the legislature makes laws that are defended in our courts.

Other than those who were grandfathered into licensure based on experience and years of practice, who may or may not have been otherwise eligible under the law, the existing requirements are substantial for social workers and counselors. Furthermore we see the emergence of the clinical social worker and clinical mental health counselor, designations which clearly are meant to suggest parity with PhD psychologists involving diagnosis in an effort to achieve insurance coverage. Our purpose here however is not to discuss the politics or evolving licensure for these three professions, but rather to use the process described thus far to help us understand the myriad of certifications that seem to be appearing on a fairly regular basis.

America's Career Infonet (ACINET) is the federal government's public information network designed to develop the nation's workforce. Using the Career One Stop Certification finder, there are 109 certifications just under the category of "community and social services" alone. ACINET makes no claim about the legitimacy of credentials, since no law exists, and will list any sent to its attention. It is up to the public, the career development professional or any other interested party to determine the value of the certification based on the provided information. The range of certification providers include professional associations, religious groups and private businesses.

Fortunately ACINET lists the criteria it feels important in determining the value of a credential. Below, italicized, is an example using the Pastoral Counseling Certification.

*Certification Requirements*

*Training and Experience*

*Exam Required?*

*No*

*Certifying Organization*

*American Association of Pastoral Counselors*

*Certifying Organization Address*

9504-A Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA 22031-2303

*Certifying Organization Webpage*

<http://www.aapc.org>

*Certifying Organization Phone*

7033856967

*Certifying Organization Fax*

7033527725

*Certifying Organization Email*

[marilyn@aapc.org](mailto:marilyn@aapc.org)

*For More Information, Visit*

<http://www.aapc.org/membership.htm#diplomate>

*View all certifications offered by this organization.*

Utilizing this system, we can quickly determine how difficult the certification is to acquire and have direct links to analyze the certification organization and do more in depth research on any issues of concern.

In conclusion, professionals are people who profess to have specialized knowledge not possessed by the general public. Becoming licensed to practice a profession is fairly well defined by law and is most certainly desired by those who hold the qualifications. Between declaring that a profession exists and becoming licensed, falls the certification process. It may be quite extensive and on par with the eventual licensure law or as uncomplicated as declaring your competence and accepting a mail order certificate for a fee. With a lot of variations in between, the ACINET Certification Finder proves to be a very useful tool.

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