Assignment Modifications to Encourage Professional Advocacy on Counseling Legislative Day

One of our goals as counselor educators is to graduate counselors who have a clear identity and sense of pride as professional counselors that motivates them to advocate for the profession. Every year the American Counseling Association holds a National Legislative Day where representatives from universities and the counseling profession meet with legislature to advocate for the counseling profession. In order to strengthen Liberty University’s representation at the ACA Legislative Day this year, we are proposing modifying the existing assignments in core curriculum to help students identify and advocate for pertinent current legislation.

Goal: To insure that all counselor education students graduate with a clear identity and sense of pride as professional counselors that motivates them to advocate for the profession on personal, systemic, and legislative levels.

Objective 1: Our education program will incorporate the teaching of legislative advocacy for clients and the profession into their curriculum.

Objective 2: Students will become engage in interpersonal and self-reflective practices that encourage them to become professional and social justice advocates.

Objective 3: Students will be educated on the practical steps of implementing advocacy skills on a personal, systemic, and legislative level.

CHMC 500 - Orientation to Counselor Professional Identity and Function Assignment Modification of the Advocacy Project:

For this assignment, students will identify four legislative actions that directly relate to the counseling profession. They will utilize ACA and state counseling association websites to become aware of the various legislative actions (i.e. being considered, proposed in the House of Representatives, with/without matching Senate bills, under committee review, and recently dismissed). The focus will be on legislative actions that provide reimbursement for counselors’ services (i.e. reimbursement through federally funded programs), and promote counselors’ rights to practice within the limits of their training (e.g., counselors’ rights to use assessment instruments) so that they can better meet the needs of a diverse population of clients. Students will also need to investigate the respective appropriations that are required for the execution of their chosen legislative action and the legislature representative who is sponsoring the legislation. Students will use their four legislative actions to create a single page handout, which is easy to reference and read, to utilize during legislative day. Additionally, the class will identify common definitions of professional counseling from local, state, national, and international professional organizations. They will formulate a unified professional counseling identity which will appear on the legislative action handout, and be able to articulate this identity. Students will review how to interact with government officials, testify at hearings, litigation, letter writing, and initiate other forms of constituent contact through class discussion and role play. Students will
submit a reflective paper that evaluates the potential future impact of their chosen legislative actions on personal and client wellness. In this paper they will also identify other professional organizations with whom they could form beneficial coalitions and suggest a brief plan of how they would approach and encourage their participation.

**CMHC 502 Human Development Modification of Class Participation:**
Professor will present one legislative action that relates to a developmental disability (i.e. Intellectual Disability, Autism, etc…). The class will read this and discuss action would impact healthy human development.

**CMHC 504 Multicultural Modification of Cultural Immersion Experience and Group Project:**
Students will find one legislative action that addresses one area of oppression in the group that they chose to immerse themselves within. Students will be required to write a letter to their legislator either in support of or against that legislation.

**CMHC 505 Techniques Modification of Class Participation:**
Student will discuss how the basic counselling skills provide the foundation of counselor identity. They will break into small groups and write a brief script that could be presented to a legislator who is questioning proposed legislation to expand scope of practice for professional clinical mental health counselors.

**CMHC 510 Theories Modification of Class Participation:**
Students will discuss the difference between evidenced based practices and best practices for counselors. Students will break into groups and write a brief outline focusing on how to explain to a legislator the difference between the these two concepts, the value of best practices, and potential legislative actions that would increase billing for these practices.

**CMHC 512 Group Process Modification of Group Proposal Project:**
Students will be required to choose a marginalized group for this project. They will have need to consider if there is any current legislation that impacts this group..

**CMHC 515 Research Modification of Class Participation and Homework Paper/Activities:**
Professor will present a topic that is currently being considered in the legislature. Students will in class brief literature search focused on finding 2 peer reviewed articles that could either support or not support the passing of that legislative action. They will then discuss in class how to incorporate research to advocate on Legislative Day.
CMHC 521 - Assessment Modification of Participate in Class Discussions and Group Activities:
Students will discuss in class the current limitations of counselors using assessments. Students will propose ideas of how to promote equality in LPC billing assessment based on the counselor’s scope of practice through legislative actions.

CMHC 522 Career Modification of Class Participation:
Students will research the average pay difference for psychologist, LCSW, and LPC. They will then discuss how these difference impact career opportunities and how current legislation may mitigate these differences. They will then be encouraged to write letters to their own state legislators to address these disparities.

CSI Themes of Advocacy that are addressed by this assignment:
- Theme A: Counselor Education
- Theme B: Intra-professional Relations
- Theme C: Marketplace Recognition
- Theme D: Inter-professional Issues
- Theme E: Research
- Theme F: Prevention/Wellness

People needed for implementation:
Faculty, counseling students, CSI members.

Timeline for developing and implementing:
Fall semester: modification and implementation of class assignments, discussions, and group interactions. Spring semester: Legislative Day attendance.

Legislative Day Attendance:
In conjunction with Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) faculty and students will be given the opportunity to participate in Legislative Day. CSI will provide primary logistical planning. Students will sign up and participate in planning logistical activities sponsored by CSI. In addition, each student will be responsible for contacting their respective legislators to schedule meetings where they can present chosen legislative action individually and/or in groups.

Resources helpful for assignment:
- Contact information for local and state representatives
  - Text your zip code to 520-200-2223 to get a list of your representatives.
- Access to the ACA website on public policy and legislative issues
  - [https://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/public-policy](https://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/public-policy)
- Access to the Virginia Counselors Association Website
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