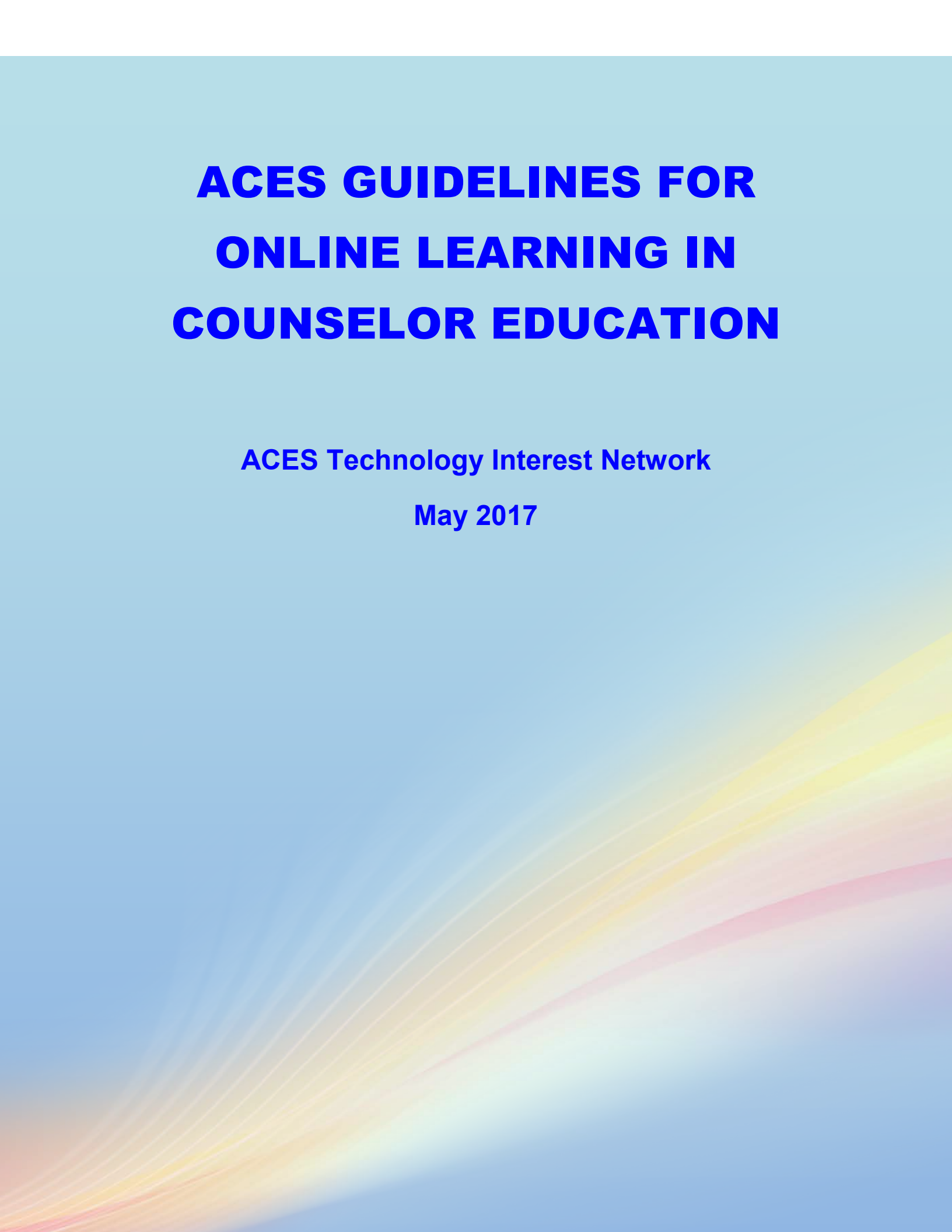# ACES GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE LEARNING IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

ACES Technology Interest Network

May 2017

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Introduction

There is a growing demand for online learning in all professions including Counselor Education and Supervision (CES). Of greatest importance in online learning is the need for equity with traditional face-to-face courses. Online learning should parallel the learning that occurs in the face-to-face classroom. Therefore, the course objectives, learning outcomes, content, and learning activities, should mirror those offered in face-to-face courses. The goal of the **ACES Online Learning Guidelines** is to help create technology-mediated environments in the field of CES that facilitate student learning in a proactive manner. The Online Learning Guidelines are organized in the following broad categories: A. Institutional Support; B. Course Quality; C. Instructional Support; D. Faculty Qualifications; E. Instructor and Course Evaluation; F. Grievance Procedures; G. Research; H. Ethics

Institutional Support

This section on institutional support discusses what institutions need to do to provide an inclusive online learning environment for all their students. It is concerned with promoting access, opportunity, and affordability so that all online learners can achieve their learning goals. To ensure that the online learning environment is respectful and does not marginalize learners, institutions need to do the following:

1. Institutions must ensure that issues of equity and diversity are addressed and fostered during the online learning process.

Discussion: The communication styles, learning needs, and behavioral patterns of students are influenced by a number of variables. In order to meet the learning needs of all students, the institution, program, and instructors have a responsibility to monitor student behavior, learning, and communication to ensure that the needs of all students are met, that individual differences are acknowledged as strengths, and are nurtured. To make online learning accessible, institutions must have an IT accessibility policy and provide on-campus support/resources to consult and problem-solve concerns related to online accessibility and usability.

2. Students must have access to all required resources and/or equivalent educational supports including library resources, tutorial assistance, technical support, and access to the course instructor.

Discussion: The university experience extends beyond the walls of the individual classroom and textbooks. Therefore, a variety of support materials, ancillary contacts, and personal relationships are successfully combined in a well-balanced academic environment. Institutions must move beyond simply providing class lectures or reading material online to incorporating the entirety of the academic experience that students would have access to in a face-to-face

classroom setting into the online learning process. Information about accessing these resources should be provided to students in the syllabus, classroom, and the new student orientation.

3. Financial resources must be available to support online learning.

Discussion: Institutions should be aware of the financial commitment required for offering programs/courses online. In all cases, institutions must make the necessary financial investment to ensure that student educational needs are met even while keeping the online learning affordable.

4. Students must be provided with training in the technology that will be used for online instruction prior to using it. Thereafter, they must be provided with ongoing technological support throughout their educational experience.

Discussion: As technology continues to evolve quickly, and instructors and students may not always be current with newer aspects of technology. Therefore, clear expectations about the level of technological expertise and equipment required to participate in the program/course should be shared with students prior to enrollment. Programs should have students identify their level of technological expertise prior to beginning the program. The *ACES Technology Standards* can be used by programs to develop a list of required skills. If, during the period of time that students are receiving instruction the interface, technological demands, or other aspects of technology change, the institution must take reasonable steps to ensure that they are trained/retrained to adequately handle these changes. Institutions must provide adequate support services that are readily accessible to resolve student difficulties that result from a lack of knowledge or skills, changes in software or equipment, software or equipment malfunction, or other circumstances over which the institution has control or responsibility. Course shells/websites can provide a link to institutional training resources and to technical support.

5. Institutions should provide all students with an orientation to the institution so that students are aware of the resources and how to access them.

Discussion: Institutions need to provide students with an introduction to the campus to ensure that they have access to institutional resources to succeed academically. This can be achieved providing information through online orientations and through student handbooks.

6. As counseling courses often involve the exchange of sensitive information about clients and students, institutions need to implement and enforce the appropriate cyber security measures to ensure appropriate protection of sensitive information about clients and students.

Discussion: Institutions need to ensure that client and student confidentiality will be maintained. This can be achieved through methods such as, but not limited to, data encryption, pseudonym use, and password protection, on various access levels to the Internet and other communication programs, and a method of security for the verification of postal delivery of sensitive information.

7. Institutions must provide instructors with training to teach online, and with instructional design including designing for accessibility and usability, and technological support necessary to deliver appropriate online instruction.

Discussion: Institutions have an ethical responsibility to provide instructors who teach online with ongoing, up-to-date technology training so that they can teach effectively and to ensure that the learning platform and all materials are accessible by developing an IT accessibility policy. Therefore, institutions are also responsible for providing instructional design support and other technological support so that all students enrolled in online courses/programs have a quality experience that aligns with the expectations of the CES profession.

Course Quality

This section on course quality discusses the elements that the curriculum and courses need to embody to ensure that online programs and online courses facilitate the education of all learners. To ensure that the online learning experience is inclusive and takes into account the learning and communication styles of all groups, programs and courses need to do the following:

1. Online courses should be designed so that the delivery and content does not disadvantage or marginalize any group of learners.

Discussion: Instructors need to be aware of how their delivery of curricular content and course content is influenced by their privilege, power, social group status, values and beliefs, and its impact on the experience of the learners.

2. Courses must offer, at a minimum, equivalent educational opportunities to those provided in face-to-face courses. This should include equality in the domains of course objectives, course goals, content, assignments, skill competency, professional standards, supervision, and course evaluation.

Discussion: Online learning offerings should maintain the equivalent standards of quality with face-to-face courses. Learning objectives that achieved in the online environment, and/or which cannot be reasonably modified or replaced with equivalent objectives, should be delivered in a face-to-face format. Course objectives should clearly match course goals, class assignments, and assessments. Additionally, assignments should clearly state how they connect to course outlines and objectives.

3. Specific content must be amenable to effective online delivery to maintain the quality of the course.

Discussion: Some courses may readily lend themselves to many online learning formats. Other courses may lend themselves to only a limited range of formats, while some may not be appropriate for online delivery. When designing online courses, instructors and program administration need to use pedagogical techniques that are effective in meeting the specific course's objectives.

4. There should be no differences between the objectives for online and face-to-face classes to ensure that all students receive the same preparation to become effective counselors.

Discussion: Programs should ensure that students who receive online instruction receive educational opportunities equivalent to students who receive face-to-face instruction. In some cases, certain objectives may not be appropriately addressed through some online modalities. In those cases, equivalent opportunities may be provided through alternative formats to ensure student success. For example, videos, additional readings, and lectures from instructors should be available in the online class.

5. Online courses must provide an opportunity for the students to actively engage in the learning process beyond simply reviewing text-based material, particularly if the face-to-face course provides opportunities.

Discussion: Current learning theory suggests that the appropriate learning involves opportunities to process information, formulate solutions to real world problems, and apply theoretical models to specific situations. Face-to-face classrooms also provide opportunities for student interaction and social construction of knowledge through human contact and this cannot be replicated merely by reviewing text materials. Therefore, online offerings need to identity strategies that replicate these experiences so that they provide a broad range of learning opportunities through various technological modalities. Some examples may include, but are not limited to real time video discussions, blogs, and video/voice recordings of course materials.

6. Online courses should not be a re-creation of face-to-face courses but should be specifically designed to take advantage of educational opportunities provided by the online medium used to deliver the course.

Discussion: To provide the most effective educational opportunities available, instructors must maximize the potential of the technology available to them. As technologies evolve they offer instructors the opportunity to develop new and innovative learning approaches that transcend what has been done in the past.

7. The differential impact on student learning which is likely to occur when students are taught in the online environment compared to students who are taught in face-to-face settings must be considered and any potential problems must be guarded against and efforts should be made to address them.

Discussion: All forms of online instruction offer different ways of learning and are different from face-to-face instructional settings. To ensure appropriate educational standards, a range of potential outcomes should be assessed including skills, knowledge, attitudes, personal development, and professional orientation. Online courses should meet the needs of students in each domain or steps must be taken to ensure that students' needs in those domains not met through asynchronous course components are met in an alternative format. Example of alternative formats may include real time online video or chat.

8. Given recent advancements in technology, online courses should as far as possible, provide meeting opportunities for students. The meeting environment should be inclusive, supportive, and conducive to the educational/learning process.

Discussion: Not all online environments meet the needs for educational meetings. If groups of students are meeting in a face-to-face setting, the virtual space provided for online students must be adequately designed and equipped to meet their specific needs.

9. The course enrollment for online classes should be dictated by what is pedagogically appropriate and based on current research.

Discussion: The size of a course should be determined by the nature and the content of the course. Attention to how the course size will influence student learning should be the primary consideration when considering course enrollment.

10. Online courses need to reflect sound pedagogy, and where appropriate, opportunities for student interaction and collaboration on specific course materials must be provided.

Discussion: Online courses need to ensure that students are provided with opportunities to interact and collaborate on the course content.

11. Online courses should be designed to meet the different learning needs of students and the learning objective of the course. Therefore, information should be offered in different formats (writing, text to voice, recordings, etc.) in order to ensure student success.

Discussion: Online education opportunities should be judiciously and wisely chosen to meet the needs of the students based on the content of the course. A good practice is to use the technologies that best meet the learning needs of the students and the learning objectives of the course. By addressing these needs and objectives, institutions can ensure that online offerings are inclusive, accessible, and facilitate student learning.

12. Institutions and programs should make reasonable efforts to ensure that students are responsible for completing their own assignments.

Discussion: Institutions need to ensure that the registered student completes the required assignments on their own. One option is to use proctored exams that are administered at distance sites or through online proctoring sites. It is best practice to verify the identity of the students early in the course. This can occur through a direct meeting via videoconferencing.

13. Appropriate procedures for evaluation of student learning must be implemented.

Discussion: The evaluation process of student learning should be clearly delineated for students enrolled in the course. Procedures should be clearly stated in the course syllabi so that students know how they will be graded.

Instructional Support

This section on instructional support discusses how instructors can promote the success of all online learners and in their online courses. It is critical that instructors are mindful that learners will bring a diversity of knowledge, skills, and worldviews to the learning process based on their experiences in both historical and current societal context. To facilitate the learning experience of all online learners, instructors need to do the following:

1. Instructors must receive the necessary training in technology to teach online, along with instructional design including designing for accessibility and usability, and technological support so that they can deliver online instruction appropriately.

Discussion: The reason that the issue of training is referred to in more than one section of this document is because it is critical that students have access to, and have the ability to use the technology provided. In order for students to have an online learning experience that ensures that the learning outcomes of the course and program are met, it is essential that instructors who teach online receive appropriate and ongoing training from their institutions so that they can teach effectively. In addition, institutions have an ethical responsibility to ensure that instructors are provided with technological support so that the learning platform and all materials are accessible by developing an IT accessibility policy.

2. Students must be provided with adequate access to instructors in a timely manner.

Discussion: Institutions must provide students who are enrolled in online programs and courses with appropriate instructor support. This occurs when instructors are available to students while they are enrolled in the program and in courses. Instructors should be available for student consultation through the use of specific electronic media in which the students are provided the

opportunity for appropriate training. Instructors should indicate appropriate contact information, including the expected amount of response time in course syllabus, as well as in the classroom (including office hours, contact information, etc.).

3. The specific purpose and outcomes of the online delivery method must be explained prior to the beginning of the course and included in the syllabus.

Discussion: For some students, online learning may be a new experience. Prior to deciding to participate in this environment, students must have adequate information about the course, procedures, and expectations so that they can make an informed decision about the appropriateness of this modality in meeting their learning goals. Information can be provided in student handbooks.

4. Appropriate policies must be developed and disseminated about expectations for student attendance, time commitments, and other expectations for performance. These expectations should be clearly listed in course syllabi and in appropriate locations within the course platform.

Discussion: It is important that students receive the necessary information that allows them to actively participate in the online learning process. To facilitate this process, instructors can provide students with information about such course aspects as student attendance, time commitments, assignment, and online interaction with peers upfront.

5. Resources that support the learning process such as books, videos, and computer software, must be made available to students in a manner that is makes them easily accessible for students enrolled in online programs.

Discussion: Institutions and departments must take reasonable steps to provide students enrolled in online programs/courses with access to necessary support materials. If, for any reason, this is not possible, then students must be fully informed in advance that they will not have access to such resources and that there will be portions of the learning opportunity in which they will not be able to participate. For instance, online students should have electronic access to resources available in the on-campus library through e-books and full-text journal databases.

6. Technological problems will occur and institutions must provide the instructors with the resources to have an appropriate back up plan to respond to such emergencies.

Discussion: In the event that problems with technology, including a natural disaster, interfere with the online learning process, there should be an institutional plan to address these issue/s promptly. These backup plans may include technologies that maintain the integrity of the course and provide minimum disruption to student learning. If student learning is disrupted or students cannot complete a course due to technological issues that are the responsibility of the educational institution, then the institution is responsible for providing the students with alternative means to meet their needs in relation to the original learning contract.

Faculty Qualifications

This section on faculty qualifications discusses the skills and training necessary to promote the learning of all students. It is critical that instructors are aware of their own assumptions, attitudes, and worldviews with regard to both learners and technology. As we live in a constantly changing world, instructors need to engage in continual professional development so that they possess the pedagogical and technological skills to promote the learning of all learners--that no learner is privileged or marginalized during the online experience. To facilitate the learning experience of all online learners, instructors need to conduct themselves in the following manner:

1. Instructors who teach either in online counseling programs or online courses must have equivalent credentials and experience, and be eligible for academic rank similar to that of colleagues who are employed in face-to-face program/departments.

Discussion: Instructors who teach online need to be involved in all aspects of the academic program just as they would be if they were involved in face-to-face offerings. While some distinctions in qualifications may be appropriate in terms of knowledge of technology or other specialty areas, the breadth and degree of training and experience should be similar to those of instructors in face-to-face programs.

2. Instructors who teach online must be fully trained in all aspects of the technology that is used to deliver the program or courses and must receive continuous ongoing training and support by the educational institution.

Discussion: The instructors who deliver online instruction need to have the counseling and technology skills necessary to successfully implement the effective delivery of the material online. Therefore, institutions must be prepared to provide the support necessary to ensure that these tools are used appropriately. This must include support in the design, delivery, student access, and updating of online or computer based materials.

3. In cases where qualified mentors or discussion leaders are required, the same standards must exist to determine quality and ability of these support personnel similar to those used in face-to-face settings.

Discussion: The quality of personnel should be the same for both face-to-face and online programs to ensure that all students receive the same instructional support.

4. Institutions need to acknowledge the extent of instructor involvement in the online teaching process so that there are adequate time and resources for instructors training, course preparation, and technology adaptation.

Discussion: There is a substantial increase in the responsibilities of instructors who teach online and many institutions do not understand or are willing to acknowledge the demands that can be placed on instructors who teach online. Institutions and programs are responsible for monitoring

instructors' behavior and involvement, and to adequately compensate instructors for the additional time necessary to succeed in this new arena.

5. The faculty workload for instructors who teach online classes should align with standards of accreditation organizations (e.g. CACREP).

Discussion: There can be a perception that teaching online is easier than teaching face-to-face because of greater flexibility in delivery. However, this is not borne out by existing research. Therefore, the workload of faculty who teach online and faculty who teach face-to-face should align with workload recommendations of accreditation organizations.

Instructor and Course Evaluation

This section on instructor and course evaluation discusses what needs to be considered in the evaluation of instructors and courses. To ensure that the learning experience addresses the needs of all learners and does not marginalize anyone, it is critical that students have the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about the instructor and the course. Institution and instructors need to provide support for such expression in the following manner:

1. Students enrolled in online courses must have the opportunity to evaluate both the course and the instructor in a manner that allows them to express their opinions without fear of negative consequences.

Discussion: It is important that students have the opportunity to provide feedback about the course/instructor and not fear retaliation. Students participating in online classes must be given the opportunity to provide course/instructor evaluations anonymously (e.g., by returning evaluations via the U.S. Postal Service).

2. The evaluation process needs to be consistent with the evaluation process used for other courses at the institution.

Discussion: The evaluation process that is used in face-to-face and online course needs to be similar. Students should have the opportunity to provide an evaluation of online courses and of instructors who teach online, in a manner that provide the instructor with insights to improve the quality and experience of the course/s.

Grievance Procedures

This grievance procedures section discusses the elements necessary to provide students with the opportunity to seek redress when they have concerns about the program, course, and/or instructor. To ensure that the learning experience is inclusive and accessible for all students, programs and courses need to do the following manner:

1. Procedures to address the grievances of the students must be implemented.

Discussion: Students engaging in online education programs are held to the same standards and expectations, and should participate in equivalent grievance procedures. The course level grievance procedure must be consistent with the grievance procedure used for other courses and programs at the institution. Students enrolled in online counseling programs and/or courses must be provided with clear directions about the institution's procedure for filing a grievance. These directions should be provided to students when they enroll in the program and/or course/s. This information should be provided on the website of the department/institution and in the course syllabi. Students should also be made aware that information about grievance procedures are available in their program/department/college handbook or catalog.

2. Procedures to address academic misconduct must be provided to students in a timely manner.

Discussion: Students must receive information about the procedures that will be used to address student academic misconduct such as plagiarism, receiving unauthorized assistance with examinations or academic assignments, and/or acting as a substitute for another student at the time of enrollment. These procedures should be clearly outlined at the beginning of the course in the syllabus and in the program handbook.

Research

This research section discusses what the field of Counselor Education and Supervision (CES), institutions, faculty, and students need to do to ensure the effective and appropriate delivery of online programs and online courses. Research into online learning in CES will provide ongoing support for improving the accessibility and affordability of online learning for students.

1. The Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) should encourage research into the effectiveness of online learning of counselor education and supervision.

Discussion: Technology is evolving very rapidly bringing new and different ways to engage in online learning in the field of counseling preparation and supervision. Therefore, it is ethically incumbent on the CES profession to engage in research to identify which technologies are pedagogically appropriate for counselor education and supervision. This can be achieved by establishing a research award that is committed to the investigation of online learning in CES.

Ethics

This section on ethics discusses the ethical issues that the field of Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) needs to consider as it engages in online learning. To ensure that the learning experience is conducted in an ethical manner, institutions, instructors, and students need to do the following:

1. In accordance with the American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical standards, the ACES best practices in CES, and the CACREP standards, there are several ethical considerations in the realm of technology and CES that need to be considered during the online learning process.

Discussion: Technology standards and competencies require ethical standards of practice that include but are not limited to: taking steps when using technology to ensure appropriate levels of encryption, following FERPA and HIPPA guidelines, appropriate ethical use of technology and communication, appropriate boundaries, roles and responsibilities, and consistent use of an ethical decision making model. When considering the use of technology and the culture in higher education and in CES, attention to autonomy, beneficence, and nonmaleficence must continue to be of highest importance.

2. As there is often an exchange of sensitive information about clients and students, institutions have an ethical responsibility to provide appropriate cybersecurity to ensure the protection of sensitive information of students and clients.

Discussion: Institutions have an ethical responsibility to ensure that appropriate cybersecurity measures are in place so that sensitive information about clients and students is not compromised.

3. Technology evolves rapidly so if institutions are to provide an effective online learning experience for students, the ACES Guidelines for Online Learning need to be revised regularly so that they can provide some direction for institutions.

Discussion: As institutions strive to provide an effective online learning experience for students, it would help them to have clear and up-to-date online learning guidelines to provide them with some direction. Therefore, it is important for the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) to revise the *Guidelines for Online Learning* regularly. At the very least, the guidelines need to be reviewed annually by the Technology Interest Network.

Glossary of Terms

Asynchronous
This refers to communication that occurs over a period of time and does not all happen in the same time or place (Bach, Haynes, & Smith, 2007).

Asynchronous distributed course
Internet technologies are used to have a non-synchronous or time shifted experience with students located at differing locations. This is done completely in an online format generally without synchronous online meeting times (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).

Blended learning
This concept refers to traditional face-to-face learning concurrent with the use of online learning. Blended learning may also be referred to as hybrid learning (Bach et al. 2007).

Blended (hybrid) course
This refers to a course that blends online and face-to-face delivery and a substantial proportion of the content is delivered online. This course will utilize online discussions and typically will have a reduced number of face-to-face meetings. 30% to 79% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Different time-different place
This concept refers to asynchronous technologies such as email, voicemail, text messages, web forums, computer conferencing, shared databased, blogs, wikis, dispersed personal, and mobile learning sites (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).

Different time-same place
This concept refers to technologies such as workstations, bulletin boards, voice mail and team workrooms (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).

Face-to-Face instruction
This refers to the traditional classroom environment where the instructor and the students meet synchronously in the same room. Face-to-face instruction may also be called "in-person" or "on-campus" instruction ("Online Education Glossary of Terms", 2017).

Online course
This refers to a course where most or all of the content is delivered online. This type of course typically does not have face-to-face meetings and 80+% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Online environment	This refers to courses and discussions that occur in an electronic format via the Internet. It may also refer to the technology platform on which the instruction occurs ("Online Education Glossary of Terms", 2017).
Online instruction	This refers to the teaching that is provided in a virtual environment and includes the pedagogical methods that the instructor uses to provide the online instruction. The instruction can be synchronous or asynchronous (Bach et al. 2007).
Online learning	This refers to the idea that instruction is delivered by the instructor through Web-based or Internet-based technologies ("Online Education Glossary of Terms", 2017).
Same time-different place	This refers to synchronous technologies such as voice communication, video conferencing, chat rooms, web cams, and dispersed classrooms (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).
Same time-same place	This refers to technologies such as blackboard, flip charts, video, PowerPoint, computer projections, or traditional classrooms (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).
Sense of presence	This concept refers to telepresence, videoconferencing, compresence, social presence, teaching presence. According to the U.S Congress for Technology Assessment, distance education refers to the linking of a teacher and students in several geographic locations via technology that allows for interaction (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).
Social presence	This refers to a subjective quality of the communication medium that reflects its capacity to transmit cues about facial expression, direction of looking, posture, dress, and other nonverbal cues that are key to effective communication (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).
Synchronous	This refers to communication that occurs at the same time, is a real-time interaction, and occurs independent of location (Bach et al. 2007).
Synchronous distributed course	Internet technologies are used to have simultaneous meeting experience with students located at differing locations. This can be done in while others in the class maintain a face-to-face meeting or it can be done completely in an online format (Sener, 2015).

Traditional course   This refers to a course where there is no online technology used, but rather the content is delivered in writing or orally by the instructor. 0% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Web facilitated course   This refers to a course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. The course may use a learning management system (LMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments and 1% to 29% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

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Appendix I

History of the Development of the Online Learning Guidelines

ACES Guidelines for Online Instruction in Counselor Education were first developed on behalf of ACES in 1999 by the ACES Technology Interest Network (TIN) as online instruction was just beginning as an instructional phenomenon. The 1999 Guidelines drew heavily from the effort of Harry Daniels, Scott Christie, and Michael Tyler. The 1999 Guidelines addressed areas of course quality, course content/objectives, instructional support, faculty qualifications, instructor and course evaluation, technology standards, and grievance procedures. Many of the original guidelines are still relevant for online instruction twenty years later.

The ACES Technology Interest Network (TIN) initiated an examination of the ACES Guidelines for Online Instruction in Counselor Education (1999) in October 2015 at the ACES conference in Philadelphia. At the meeting, a subcommittee was appointed to work on the guidelines. In August 2016, a draft on the guidelines was discussed at an online meeting with the all TIN members and subsequently at a TIN meeting at the North Central Association in Counselor Education and Supervision conference in Bloomington, MN. Recognizing that the concept of online instruction was evolving, the TIN members decided to change the name of the guidelines to the **ACES Guidelines for Online Learning in Counselor Education and Supervision**. Additionally, the members also wanted to ensure that the guidelines enshrined the principles of equity and social justice. In May 2017, on behalf of TIN, Dr. Jacqueline Lewis (Co-Chair, ACES Technology Interest Network) presented guidelines to the ACES President Dr. Heather Trepal for consideration by the ACES Executive committee.

Appendix II

ACES Technology Interest Network Members
(2015-17)

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