

# RAM

RHO ALPHA MU

# REPORT

The New Normal

Fall 2022 Issue



How the Pandemic Has  
Changed the Landscape  
of Counseling

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# Meet the Editorial Staff



## Sarah Roundtree

*Editor - in - Chief*

**Sarah Michelle Roundtree** is a Clinical Rehabilitation Counselor and second-year doctoral student in the Counselor Education program here at Penn State. She has been an active member of CSI since 2018 and served as Assistant Editor for the RAM Newsletter during the 2021-2022 school year.

Her research centers around the experiences of educators and students with disabilities, as well as adaptation to disability.



## Saiber Shaikh

*Associate Editor*

**Saiber Shaikh** is a first year doctoral student and a Herr Clinic Supervisor at the Penn State's Counselor Education program. She loves all things art and dabbles in writing, painting, cooking, photography from time to time. When she is not busy with the doctoral program, she loves connecting with people, staring at flowers, and watching dog videos on the internet.



## Mansi Kankan

*Assistant Editor*

**Mansi Kankan** is a first-year master's student in the Counselor Education: CMHCSC emphasis at Penn State. She is currently Co-Chair of Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy for the RAM CSI chapter. Her interests lie in the mind-body connection, wellness, and multiculturalism.

# Meet the New Faculty: Dr. Casado Pérez

INTERVIEW BY MANSI KANKAN

## What made you want to join as faculty here?

Penn State has been part of my family for a long time. While we did not have the fortune of attending as undergraduate students, our family regularly engaged with the university through sports – especially volleyball. I had the opportunity to return to Penn State for my doctoral work, where I learned first-hand the caliber and excellence of the work done at the university. I chose to join the faculty at Penn State not only because of this tradition of excellence and change-making, but, truthfully, because the institution is also close to my family. I have been lucky to live in multiple states across the US, but I wanted to transition closer to home.

I am most excited to dive into the scholarship and partnerships here at the institution. The counselors-in-training and doctoral students at Penn State are bright and motivated: they are the reason I get excited about my work. Exploring the edge of what we know as counselor educators when navigating systemic inequities and structural oppression in clinical and educational spaces is what I can't wait to jump into.

## What are your research interests?

My research interests focus on professional and educational equity, mental health justice, instructional best practices, and racial trauma. Most recently, I have worked with faculty subject to sociocultural minoritization within the academy, ascertaining their strategies for surviving and resisting institutional forms of oppression, as well as the meaning-making processes that result from these experiences. I believe that counselor education and, consequently, counselors' clinical practices, benefit by way of creating increasingly equitable workplaces for the educators and doctoral students who prepare counselors-in-training.



## How do you envision the CNED program at Penn State evolving in the next few years?

The brilliant faculty here already reflect the trends and directions of the field. As we contend more and more with the importance of antiracism and anti-oppressive practices in counselor education, rehabilitation, and human services, I believe the CNED program will rise to the challenge of transforming counselor preparation in ways that emphasize sociocultural competence and social justice.

## Any fun aspect you'd like to share about your likes/hobbies?

I am, for the most part, a pretty boring person. I love to read, write creatively, game, and amateur painting. The most exciting parts of my days are when our four-legged family member, Earthling, nudges me to get out the door and take him for a long walk or the dog park.

# Applying Wellness and Self-Care in Our Lives: A Message to Counselors-in-Training

MIHEE WOO

The field of counseling has placed a strong emphasis on wellness and self-care. Maintaining our wellness is essential because counselors are the tools in the counseling room. When counselor educators and counselors-in-training (CITs) are well, they can more effectively support trainees and clients. Therefore, addressing wellness and self-care is vital in counselor education programs. This article will explore how counseling associations address wellness, its importance in counseling, the challenges of applying it to CITs and its place in the counselor education program.

As counselor education programs are under the counseling associations' umbrella, it will help us to understand how associations describe wellness and self-care in their standards. *The American Counseling Association (ACA) Encyclopedia of Counseling* defines wellness as a state of positive wellbeing that integrates the individuals' body, mind, and spirit (2017). It emphasizes that counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own wellness to best meet their professional responsibilities (ACA, 2014). The ACA sees it as the counselor educators' responsibility to provide appropriate accommodations that enhance and support diverse students' wellbeing and academic performance (2014). Similarly, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) indicates that "ethical and culturally relevant strategies for promoting resilience and optimum development and wellness across the lifespan"

are needed by counselors, as are "self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role" (CACREP, 2016, p.9). A strong counseling profession encourages wellbeing and human dignity in a global community, according to Chi Sigma Iota (CSI). All three counseling associations emphasize the importance of wellness to serve clients and to ethically meet the counselor role. However, challenges remain in supporting CITs' wellness and integrating wellness in counselor education programs.

## Challenges of Applying Wellness and Self-care to Counselors-in-Training

All the core counseling associations mention wellness and self-care in their standards. It implies that counselor education programs, educators, and CITs must highlight these concepts. Though we hear about wellness and self-care frequently in our counselor education setting, it is surprising that associations do not mention them more frequently in their standards. The definitions of wellness and self-care can be elaborated more so that individuals can better understand what wellness may look like. Lack of clarity on wellness and self-care may bring confusion and limitations in applying them in their personal and professional lives, as there are no feasible ways to promote wellness and self-care in counseling. (e.g., curriculum, utilizing wellness assessment in a program, etc.).

Furthermore, associations mainly elaborate on the importance of promoting wellness and self-care as a professional counselor to support

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clients; however, there needs to be more amplification on CIT's wellness and self-care for themselves. If CITs get exposed to an environment where the value of self-care and wellness is only to support the clients, and if the CITs themselves neglect their self-care, it causes struggles for their wellbeing and thriving. In that case, they may easily get exposed to burnout symptoms. Research indicates that the more individuals worked on wellness and self-care, the less frequently they experienced burnout symptoms (Gleason & Hays, 2018).

In their first year of their master's program, CITs are exposed to wellness and self-care, and some may learn strategies early on and learn how to apply them. Early and integrated exposure and emphasis on wellness in each course has the potential to allow counselors-in-training time to evaluate where they are at physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Additionally, it will enable students to think of their wellness and self-care as integral parts of themselves and their profession.

## Recommendations for Integrating Wellness in Counselor Education

One recommendation is to consider adding a wellness course as an independent course in the counselor education curriculum. There may not be a course that solely emphasizes personal wellbeing and self-care. Individuals will better understand themselves and their coping mechanisms by taking an independent course. With a whole semester to explore and

experiment, CITs will have the chance to understand how internal and external influences may affect their wellness and whether or not promoting and updating their self-care skills will be helpful in a specific circumstance.

A second recommendation would be to incorporate the topic of wellness and self-care in advising, mentoring, supervision, etc., to build each other to have a safe environment to talk about them. Personally, speaking with my advisor and supervisor about wellness and self-care has aided my personal and professional growth. Everyone's experience will be different but hearing about my mentor's wellness and self-care strategies and discussing it openly gave me a stronger sense of working alliance, the freedom to provide grace to myself, and a sense of solidarity.

## Message to Counselor-in-Training

I want to reassure you that you are not alone if you are currently distressed and exhausted. I cannot speak for others, but I know that the counselor education program's curriculum is demanding and challenging. It will eventually result in a wealth of experiences and opportunities for growth. In my master's program in 2018–2020, I found it challenging to balance my wellbeing and self-care with all the coursework, cultural adjustment, and personal and professional growth. I cannot comment on your current situation or how you are feeling. Still, I did want to let you know that any feelings of overload, sadness, or frustration you

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occasionally experience is valid.

## Recommendation to CITs

### 1. *Allow yourself to take a break.*

It is easier to say than do. However, taking a break to do what I love and enjoy allows me to be more centered when I want to focus on it effectively. Putting your task lists aside and doing what matters to you is okay.

### 2. *Don't be harsh on yourself and your performance.*

Sometimes, you will worry about your performance and doubt yourself and your abilities. Sometimes being hard on oneself can be beneficial to learning and growth. However, sometimes, giving your whole belief in what you are doing and learning and what strengths you have in you can be more beneficial. Balancing these two sides helps me to not criticize myself or my performance but also provides enough time to process and bring self-compassion into my everyday life. Furthermore, developmentally, it makes sense to make many mistakes and learn from these experiences. Eventually, you will continue to grow throughout and beyond the program. I am confident that you will be surprised with your growth and your ability to thrive upon your graduation.

### 3. *It's okay to say "no" to things.*

I say yes to many things, as there are various opportunities that we can learn from and enjoy. However, if you feel that it is too much on your plate or that you are emotionally or physically

unavailable for these opportunities; let them go. Though you add it to your plate, if you are not well, you might not be able to make what you want from it. Put yourself first and take the things that you want. Also, remember! Letting things go requires lots of courage.

### 4. *Use all resources you have.*

Ask for help! Ask for resources! Knock on the supervisors' and professors' doors! They are there to support you. There is nothing to lose by asking for help and guidance. As I mentioned, it may take a bit of bravery to show your vulnerability to others, but they expect you to ask for help.

### 5. *Take this time to learn about yourself as a human being and professional.*

Throughout the program, I could dig into myself deeper and learn about myself. You may learn things about yourself that you didn't know or realize. As learning to counsel is a lifelong journey, so is learning about yourself. How exciting it must be to find out new things about yourself! Both our personal and professional journeys will not end with our graduation. Take this period as part of your life journey and learn about yourself as a person and professional.

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*References available upon request.*

# COVID-19 Pandemic and Divorce: What Should Counselors do?

KAHYEN SHIN

COVID-19 has brought pervasive stress to individuals, couples, and families (Lebow, 2020). Over the past three years, social distancing and quarantines required individuals to work and study virtually at home. Spending longer time at home together, many families have reported more conflicts with the new adaptation in their family dynamics. Especially for parents in the family unit, the marital strain has become more salient during this period (Lebow, 2020). Consequently, this shift caused by the pandemic burdens relationships in some families (Lebow, 2020). Although the divorce rate has declined during COVID-19, along with the marriage rate (Manning & Payne, 2021), children still need more emotional support to process their parents' divorce since their social interactions and resources outside of the household have been limited due to the social distance policy from the pandemic.

## Implications for Parents

For counselors, providing resources for divorcing and post-divorce parents could be supportive (Lebow, 2020). Parents might encounter social and psychological distress during the divorce process, which impacts parental interactions with their children (Demir-Dagdaz et al., 2018). Therefore, as parents go through an overwhelming process, counselors need to assist them in looking after themselves by encouraging them to join formal social groups and to spend time with their families and friends (American Psychological Association, 2013).

Socializing can be challenging for parents during the pandemic, so counselors might support them with virtual support groups. Moreover, providing psychoeducation about communication in families can be beneficial for their households. Assisting the parents with psychoeducation, counselors can help parents understand their children's reactions and discuss the divorce process with their children. To ease the child's transition during a divorce, parents should keep any conflict away from the kids during the process (Demir-Dagdaz et al., 2018). Ongoing parental conflict can risk their children's psychological and social problems; therefore, communication is key to reducing divorce's negative consequences.

## Implications for Children

While parents struggle with their marital relationships, children could experience strained emotions and negative coping skills (Demir-Dagdaz et al., 2018). For instance, decreasing school performance, behavioral difficulties, social withdrawal, and somatic complaints (Cohen et al., 2016) might be common signs of required intervention. Counselors, including other clinicians, need to be aware of potential symptoms so that they can lessen children's psychological distress through appropriate interventions at the beginning of their journey. Through early intervention, children might acknowledge that they did not cause the divorce and cannot bring their parents back together (Cohen et al., 2016).

# COVID-19 Pandemic and Divorce: What Should Counselors do?

KAHYEN SHIN

Affirmation of parental love could empower children to maintain emotional stability. Parents should consistently express their love for their children, including by having them spend quality time with both parents even if both reside separately. If counselors have reasonable cause to be concerned about a significant risk of current or future abuse, or neglect, related to living with a particular parent, counselors should make a report to child protective services (Cohen et al., 2016).

Children might encounter their parents' separation, although they recognize and understand the circumstances better as they get older. To support younger children who have a vague conceptualization of divorce, research from Cohen and colleagues (2016) suggest several books could support them practically. Below is the list of book recommendations:

1. Cole J. How Do I Feel About My Parents' Divorce? Brookfield, CT: The Millbrook Press; 1998
2. Holyoke N. A Smart Girl's Guide to Her Parents' Divorce. Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing Co; 2009
3. Lindsay JW. Do I Have a Daddy? Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Express; 2000

## Consultation and Referrals

Teachers, pediatricians, and school counselors are at the frontline where they can notice children's emotional needs from their parent's divorce as a third person. Besides mental health

counselors, the role of other professionals is also imperative since they can provide early interventions. Appropriate referrals, such as referral to a family counselor, may reduce parental hostility (Cohen et al., 2016). In order to lessen the stigma and stereotypes of divorce, professionals who are on the frontline are encouraged to examine their own attitudes, religious beliefs, and ethical positions concerning divorce, especially if they have experienced divorce in their own families (Cohen et al., 2016). Further, counselors can collaborate with teachers and other clinicians to provide a multidisciplinary treatment approach. Consultation with experts who understand child clients from different settings and perspectives could be conducive for counselors to support their clients holistically.

## Conclusion

There have been insufficient resources for children with parents who are either undergoing or have undergone divorce during the pandemic, despite a significant number of divorce cases. Children also experience additional struggles at this time along with parental divorce, such as virtual classes and less direct physical contact caused by limited outdoor activities. Hence, a considerable amount of attention is needed to support this population. Counselors are not limited to working with couple and family counselors and school counselors, but can also work with other professionals such as social workers and pediatricians.

# COVID-19 Pandemic and Divorce: What Should Counselors do?

KAHYEN SHIN

Focusing on easing family relationship strains can buffer the negative consequences of divorce that children might experience. A multidisciplinary approach will ultimately assist children in expediting secure parental interactions and thus gradually processing their parents' divorce, resulting in favorable treatment outcomes during and beyond the pandemic.

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*References available upon request.*

# Departmental Highlights

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## CONGRATULATIONS TO EVERYONE WHO...

### Passed another program milestone:

#### Qualifying Exam

Aazi Ahmadi

Jess Gerthe

Dasol Hwang

Meaghan O'Shaughnessy

Sarah Roundtree

Qingyun Zhang

#### Comprehensive Exam

Kanyinsola Ariyike Charis

Nancy Valverde

### Received recognition from professional counseling organizations:

Nkenji Clarke - *2022 ACES Research Grant*

Ashleigh Johnson - *Edwin L. Herr Scholarship for the Education of Counselors*

Paris Cashmere Pruitt - *Edwin L. Herr Scholarship for the Education of Counselors*

Sarah Roundtree - *Edwin L. Herr Scholarship for the Education of Counselors*

Nancy Valverde - *2022 ACES Research Grant, 2022 NARACES Conference Emerging Leader*

### Published an article:

Phillips, B. N., Fleming, A. R., Bean, B., Umucu, E., Lee, B., Roundtree, S. M. & Grenawalt, T. A. (2022). Relations among gratitude, adaptation to disability, and flourishing among adults with disabilities: A longitudinal mediation model. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 67*(4), 546-555. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/rep0000448>

### Presented at a conference:

Aazi Ahmadi - AARC

Dasol Hwang - AARC

Kahyen Shin - AARC

Mihee Woo - SACES, NBCC

PLEASE REACH OUT TO YOUR COLLEAGUES TO  
PERSONALLY CONGRATULATE THEM!



# Upcoming & Current Events

## RESONANCE

Dr. Janice Byrd, Assistant Professor of Counselor Education, founded Resonance with the generous support of the College of Education's equity fellowship, and doctoral students Azaria Cunningham and Araya Baker assist with coordination and facilitation.

Resonance is a new affinity group that fosters the critical consciousness and developmental assets of graduate students of color across Penn State. It is a space where they can celebrate differences that PWIs often stigmatize, a space where they can transcend isolation and speak their truth without apprehension, and a space which demystifies the ivory tower and democratizes institutional knowledge. Decolonized wellness programming also offers opportunities to cultivate life-long wellness strategies for coping with racial trauma. Within the College of Education, Resonance furthers the racial justice and systemic awareness facets of the College's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan.



## CSI SPRING SOCIAL

During spring term, CSI will be hosting a Counselor Education social event which will include bingo, card games, music, pizza, snacks, and time to meet other students. Stay tuned for updated event details! All Counselor Education students are invited to join.

## MEET THE AUTHORS

### Mihee Woo



**Mihee Woo** is currently a first-year doctoral student in Counselor Education. Her research interests include intervening in and promoting college students' wellness in a counseling setting, as well as counselor trainees' wellness.

Particularly, she is interested in minorities and underrepresented populations, and counselor trainees' identity development. She loves exploring new things, food, and traveling.

### Kahyen Shin



**Kahyen Shin** is a second-year master's student in Clinical Mental Health in Schools and Communities of Counselor Education. Her research interests are in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), addictions, and play therapy. She is an intern counselor/community health educator at State College Area High School and Health Promotion & Wellness at Penn State.



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