

Benchmark Interview with a Counselor Educator

Suzy Vaile

Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies, Liberty University

**Author Note**

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Suzy Vaile, 1971  
University Blvd, Lynchburg, VA 24515. Email: [ssvaile@liberty.edu](mailto:ssvaile@liberty.edu)

### **Interview Summary**

I had the honor of interviewing my mentor and friend, Dr. Gay, for this assignment. Dr. Gay is a dually licensed clinician, counselor educator, and full-time graduate professor with Wake Forest University and Wake Forest University School of Medicine. She began her counselor educator journey in 2017 where, while pursuing her PhD., she served as adjunct faculty for a community college in the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as adjunct faculty for NC A&T. In addition to her full-time counselor educator roles at Wake Forest University and Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Dr. Gay serves as adjunct faculty at Catawba University, Winston Salem State University, and Northern State University.

Dr. Gay's philosophy of teaching and learning is centered in constructivism. Dr. Gay noted that she uses action-oriented, student-centered approaches to help individuals build and expand the lens in which they see and understand the world. She views her role as a counselor educator as a platform for helping counselors in training develop and construct their counselor identity, while also exploring their concept of research and its importance for the profession. When reflecting on how her philosophy informs her assessment and evaluation practices, Dr. Gay shares that her constructivist lens prompts exploration of learning *how* counselors in training come to know what they know as it relates to being a counseling professional. Those measures include both clinical and interpersonal elements. For example, Dr. Gay explores how trainees hold fidelity to their counseling orientation or model they are utilizing, in addition to their ability to appropriately apply them. She assesses multicultural layers, exploring the lens in which trainees see their client and ways in which they broach those situations. Another area of evaluation includes ways in which trainees assess themselves, the environment, and other

external factors that could impact the process. Dr. Gay notes that awareness of self and other is a vital element for counselors, as it can strengthen or negatively impact the therapeutic alliance.

The process of screening, remediation, and gatekeeping is of paramount concern for Dr. Gay as a counselor educator. She strives to make counselor development a priority by helping counselors in training sharpen their skills that help identify strengths as well as areas for growth. She recognizes that there is not a “one size fits all” approach to counselor education and immerses herself in the process of developing future counselors. She believes that student awareness from an interpersonal and academic perspective. When considering the remediation process, Dr. Gay believes the goal is to help empower counselors in training to understand their “why” and encourage them to recognize their potential. She believes it is her job as a counselor educator to exhaust all means necessary to help a new counselor succeed. Regarding gatekeeping, Dr. Gay offers an engaging and exploratory attitude that invites new counselors or students that are struggling in the field to apply the competencies, skills, knowledge and abilities the opportunity to examine if their perception of counseling is in alignment of what’s required to become an ethical, sound counseling professional. As a gatekeeper, protecting the public and clients is essential, which means fostering and supporting individuals towards a profession in alignment with their goals, whether it is outside the counseling program/field or entering additional training that will help strengthen their counseling foundation.

When I asked Dr. Gay what mentoring meant to her, she smiled and said, “Mentoring is demonstrating the practices and behaviors that I expect to see from my students; it looks different for everyone because people need different things. My job is to walk beside them to consult and encourage them, in front of them to advocate and guide them, and behind them to

motivate their ability to lead and teach me and others.” I almost started cheering when she said that because she has modeled this mentorship in that way for me.

Regarding multicultural considerations both in curriculum development and in counselor preparation, her philosophy is simple and profound; promote awareness of self, then you will be open to the lens of others. To bring awareness of culture, we must first look within ourselves to discover any internal bias. One of the key components that is paired with self-awareness is being willing to openly have the hard discussions around bias and stereotypes to help promote awareness and education of other cultures. Only in transparency can we truly address multiculturalism.

I asked Dr. Gay if she had concerns about the field of counselor education and its future and she shared that her biggest concern was regarding clinical preparation of counseling students. Are they gaining enough exposure and experience with diverse populations to prepare them for the profession? She is also concerned with the rate of burnout and lack of self-care in new counselors, and she thinks it might be a good idea to require master’s students to experience counseling for themselves to promote awareness, strengthen coping skills, and help foster longevity for them as they prepare to enter this challenging field.

As we concluded the interview, Dr. Gay shared that she thought supervision was an especially important topic to address as counselor educators. She passionately believes that consultation in supervision should include goals and challenges for the new counselor and/or counseling student. While it should include discussing clients and challenges, it should also encourage professional development of the counselor. I have benefitted personally and

professionally from the wisdom that Dr. Gay has imparted to me, and I am deeply grateful that she took the time to share her thoughts with me in this interview.

### **My Reaction**

Dr. Gay is a deeply respected mentor of mine, so my reaction was one filled with gratitude for her time that she gave so generously and for her wisdom that she shared freely. She did not rush through any of the questions and gave me honest and helpful answers to each part of the interview. I felt like my knowledge cup had been filled to the brim, and I will certainly be carrying all that she shared with me throughout my counselor educator journey.

### **Alignment with my Expectations and Knowledge**

When I reflect on the responsibilities of a counselor educator as outlined in our text, I think of someone who is responsible for curriculum development, provides supervision and mentoring, provides support in remediation, when necessary, engages in gatekeeping for the profession, and strives to remain ethically and culturally relevant in their counseling strategies (Haddock and Whitman, 2019). Dr. Gay truly embodies all these qualities of a counselor educator. Her counselor educator career is a woven tapestry of vast and diverse experiences that she models so well and inspires me to do as well.

### **Summary of the Experience and Personal Growth Opportunities**

I left this interview inspired to continue my PhD journey wholeheartedly, and to continue to look for places that I can insert myself and provide innovative and collaborative mental health care, as well as education and support. My motto regarding personal growth is, and will continue


to be, “the answer is always no if you do not ask.” Spending time with Dr. Gay has inspired me to continue asking.







### **Biblical Application**

When I reflect on how my Biblical worldview will inform my philosophy of teaching, I consider Solomon. In 1Kings 3:3-15, God came to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted from the Lord. Solomon asked God for an understanding mind to govern God’s people well, and for the ability to discern what is right. And God blessed him with wisdom and so much more because he chose humility. My hope and prayer are that I will be wise as I instruct future counselors and counselor educators, and that God will be glorified in all that I do.


## Appendix A



RE: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Interview summary

 Yasmin Evette Gay  
To: Suzy Vaile

  Reply  Reply All  Forward  

Thu 11/7/2024 12:37 PM

 You forwarded this message on 11/7/2024 6:12 PM.

 Interview Summary Suzy.docx  
21 KB  Saved

Here you go

---

**From:** Suzy Vaile <[cvaille@wakehealth.edu](mailto:cvaille@wakehealth.edu)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 6, 2024 1:54 PM  
**To:** Yasmin Evette Gay <[ygay@wakehealth.edu](mailto:ygay@wakehealth.edu)>  
**Subject:** FW: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Interview summary

---

**From:** Suzy Vaile <[momofthree97@icloud.com](mailto:momofthree97@icloud.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 6, 2024 1:49 PM  
**To:** Suzy Vaile <[cvaille@wakehealth.edu](mailto:cvaille@wakehealth.edu)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Interview summary



**WARNING:** This email originated from outside of Advocate Health ([momofthree97@icloud.com](mailto:momofthree97@icloud.com)). **DO NOT** click links or open attachments unless you know and trust the sender. **NEVER** provide your login information to anyone. **USE** Squish the Phish to report suspicious email.

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Suzy Vaile <[momofthree97@me.com](mailto:momofthree97@me.com)>  
**Date:** November 2, 2024 at 12:56:21 PM EDT  
**To:** [ygay@wakehealth.edu](mailto:ygay@wakehealth.edu)  
**Subject:** Interview summary

Dr. Gay,

Attached, please find the summary of our counseling educator interview. Could you please confirm that I have accurately captured our time together?

All folders are up to date. Connected to: Microsoft Exchange   - 100%

### References

Haddock, L. R., & Whitman, J. S. (Eds.). (2019). Preparing the educator in counselor education: a comprehensive guide to building knowledge and developing skills. Routledge.

HarperCollins Publishers, & Collins Publishers. (2004). Bible: King James Version. Collins.

Vela, J. C. (2020). Teaching and Learning in Counselor Education. American Counseling Association.