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# Gatekeeping in Online Learning: Best Practices to Facilitate Non-Traditional Learning

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## Abstract

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## Keywords

online learning, gatekeeping, student engagement, best practices


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**Abstract**

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Traditionally, counselor educators work to train future counselors in on-ground, face-to-face modalities. The in-class format has served as a quality platform for educators. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in counselor educators using technology to facilitate didactic and experiential learning environments (Snow & Coker, 2020). In this article, the authors highlight the strengths and challenges of gatekeeping in a distance learning environment and discuss potential strategies for effective teaching, gatekeeping protocols, rubrics, and action plans.

Distance education has been defined by the U.S. Department of Education as the use of one or more types of technology to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor asynchronously (e.g., emails, electronic discussion boards) or synchronously (e.g., videoconferencing, live group discussions) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n. d.). Over the last two decades, researchers have noted a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in distance education programs each year (Seaman et al., 2018). In 2020, several institutions globally transitioned their education platform to an online modality, further adding to the already-increasing online world. The statistics on online learning in the United States indicate that 52% of graduate students and 39% of undergraduate students are opting for online learning as an option rather than traditional classroom learning (NCES, 2022). The future of higher education is moving towards distance education with increasing enrollment rate (Seaman et al., 2018), even before the start of the pandemic.

## Misconceptions in Online Learning

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There are certain misconceptions regarding online learning that need to be addressed. Some counselor educators and students believe that the quality of online learning is not equivalent to traditional face-to-face learning, particularly the efficacy of teaching counseling skills in an online platform (Fominykh et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2021). While the quality of education has been a primary concern, nearly 100 online counseling programs have met the standards set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and became accredited as such (CACREP, 2022). The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) also embraces online teaching pedagogies and emphasizes that online courses can expose students to many activities just as those experienced in traditional counseling programs (Kaufmann et al., 2021).

Many online counseling programs have shown that online learning can be as experiential and reflective as traditional learning (Fominykh et al., 2018). The utilization of roleplay, live observation, interactive discussions, skill demonstrations, student presentations, and other experiential activities can take place in an online learning environment, similar to the traditional, face-to-face classroom environment. In addition, the student and faculty interaction has been found to be positive in an online learning environment. Palmer and McBride (2012) reported in their study that students in an online counseling program experienced positive and supportive interactions with their faculty and reported high levels of general satisfaction with the quality of their learning. Furthermore, peer interaction, through online group interactions, also enhances professional identity development of students in an online counseling program (Perry, 2012).

Even though the quality of online learning appears to be equivalent to that of traditional learning, there are also misconceptions that students perform poorer and tend to engage in academic dishonesty activities at a higher rate than those who are in traditional learning programs. In fact, there are no significant differences in student learning outcomes and academic dishonesty reports between online and traditional learning programs (Gilbert et al., 2019; Holmes & Reid, 2017; Kaufmann et al., 2021; Mantravadi & Snider, 2017; Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, students in online programs reported higher levels of counseling self-efficacy beliefs (Watson, 2012) and perceived learning efficiency (Smith et al., 2015) than those in traditional, face-to-face programs. Snow et al. (2018) reported that students in online programs were also as successful as students in traditional learning programs in gaining postgraduate clinical placements, obtaining state licensure, and getting acceptance into doctoral programs.

## Gatekeeping in Counselor Education

Gatekeeping is an ethical responsibility of counselor educators regardless of the delivery format of the program. The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics, standard F.9, emphasized evaluation and remediation as primary gatekeeping responsibilities of counselor educators to enhance students' professional and personal growth, protect the welfare of current or future clients served by students, and safeguard the counseling profession. The ACA (2014) Code of Ethics also asserts that counselor educators assist counselor trainees to acquire adequate knowledge (standards F.7.d., F.7.f.), enhance skill development (standards F.7.c., F.7.i.), become aware of their responsibilities (standard F.7.a.), and uphold ethical and professional behaviors (standard F.7.e.) while they are students. In addition, CACREP (2015) standards suggest counseling program faculty to follow the gatekeeping procedures set up by the university and the profession's ethical codes, even requiring doctoral students and future counselor educators to be taught evaluation, remediation, and gatekeeping in clinical supervision. Many scholars (Schuermann et al., 2018; Snow et al., 2018; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014) believe that gatekeeping should begin at the admission process and continue throughout the program to ensure students are

prepared to facilitate counseling effectively and abide by ethical standards.

Gatekeeping is not only limited to academic performance of students, but also their professional dispositions. While gatekeeping is essential in counseling programs, there are some students who may be professionally impaired or problematic and still receive no remediation due to various reasons such as faculty personal concerns, legal concerns, and institutional pressures (Glance et al., 2012; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Many faculty tend to be hesitant to enforce gatekeeping procedures related to non-academic concerns, such as students' emotional challenges, psychological issues, and/or personal biases (Glance et al., 2012; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014).

"Gateslipping" is when potentially deficient students are able to advance through a program without remediation (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). To address an issue of gateslipping, many scholars pointed out that well-defined, written, and preventive gatekeeping policies that clearly explain the process of gatekeeping and focus on rights and responsibilities of students and educators are important (Schuermann et al., 2018). There are several tools, involving both formal and informal evaluation procedures that counselor educators can utilize to increase the efficiency and consistency of gatekeeping processes (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Most common tools that counselor educators use to make informed decisions during the admission process include the grade point average (GPA), the standardized test (e.g., Graduate Record Examination), personal statements, letters of recommendation, faculty-administered assessments (e.g., Carkhuff Rating Scale, interpersonal skills assessment), and interviews (Glance et al., 2012; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). These tools are essential for the screening process to ensure that students who demonstrate emotional and mental fitness in the counseling field are admitted to the programs.

After the admission process, counselor educators can develop a self-evaluation form for students to self-assess their knowledge and level of professional development. Students can then be encouraged to review this form together with their faculty advisors at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of their program matriculation. This self-assessment and review monitoring could include the use of standardized instruments such as Counseling Competencies Scale (Lambie et al., 2018) and Personal Characteristics Evaluation Form (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995) to evaluate students' skill development and professional competencies. Lastly, counselor educators are recommended to create the Student Review and Remediation Evaluation form for use in their programs (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). This form might include such components as the review of program policies and the ACA Code of Ethics, the nature of concerns, the response of students, specific goals or changes for students, timeline to complete the established goals, and recommendations for the remediation plan such as increased supervision, personal therapy, tutoring, repeated coursework, and taking a leave of absence (Glance et al., 2012). These formalized procedures have been found to reduce gateslipping in counseling and counselor education programs (Glance et al., 2012) and can be applied to distance education or online learning programs.

When online education extends to multiple states, additional legal considerations need to be noted. On-campus faculty tend to be aware of the laws and stipulations of their state, but in a nationwide university, it is noted that there are often differences in other states (Sheperis et al., 2020). For example, licensure laws vary, as do the requirements of site supervisors. There are also variances in other legal issues, such as mandated reporting laws and duty to warn/duty to protect laws. At the time of writing, 30 states have mandatory duty to warn laws; 15 states have permissive duty to warn laws; four states have no specific legislature; and one state (Georgia) has variances in permissive versus mandatory verbiage, based on specific factors like the setting the patient is in (National Conference of State Legislators [NCSL], 2022). Online faculty teaching students in various states must either keep up on the changes of the other states or disclose and acknowledge the

differences to ensure students have awareness of the legislature in their prospective states. Furthermore, we have to train faculty and students with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations as a fully online counseling program to promote confidentiality and record-keeping procedures (Sheperis et al., 2020).

## Strengths and Challenges in Online Learning

The evolution of online learning has presented counselor educators with several opportunities and challenges. Technology is used to deliver advertisements for programs, deliver course content, and facilitate record keeping. Currently, online courses are delivered through platforms such as Canvas, D2L, Blackboard, Pearson E-College, or Moodle (Bridges & Frazier, 2018; Snow et al., 2018). Some counselor educators have encountered difficulty in re-creating experiential classroom activities in online platforms (Murdock et al., 2012). While modern technology helps to ease this challenge, it takes a major commitment on behalf of the faculty to ensure equality in learning (Albrecht & Jones, 2001; Murdock et al., 2012). Skill demonstration is essential for counselor educators. To ensure proper gatekeeping in online learning, it is necessary for counselor educators to be sure students have the needed counseling skills to be successful in the field, which increasingly is using more technology (telehealth, etc.). Online educators should utilize technology to employ the use of videotapes, recorded role play, and/or live virtual activities as means to review students' skills and empathy development (Bridges & Frazier, 2018; Murdock et al., 2012). The U.S. Department of Education (2020) proposed that instructors in an online program should meet qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency. Counselor educators in CACREP accredited online programs must be trained in best practices in online learning (CACREP, 2016) and be able to demonstrate substantive engagement and learning opportunities for students by providing direct instruction, responding to a student's questions, assessing a student's coursework, providing information about the content of a course, facilitating student interaction, and engaging in other instructional activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

One of the prominent challenges of gatekeeping in distance education is the emotional and physical distance between the faculty and the students. It may be difficult for some educators to communicate the observed behaviors to the student. Furthermore, on distance education campuses, the faculty who is reporting the initial screening may be blinded by the procedure of the disposition committee or not be involved in the process. Not having a strong relationship with students and being excluded from follow-ups may result in gateslipping, emotional exhaustion, poor student evaluations, job security, and other conflicts among colleagues (Bodner, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2019; Glance et. al, 2012; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

There are some studies in literature (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2019) emphasizing the importance and necessity of thoughtful gatekeeping strategies via engagement that are tailored if necessary to the educational delivery system. Further, the conclusion of these studies is clear and consistent - effective online gatekeeping strategies will look different from practices generally used in traditional settings. The research is also consistent in regards to the importance of quality student-faculty interaction regardless of instructional methodology. Presented below are principles and best practice strategies that counselor educators can implement in their online classrooms to improve overall engagement and effective gatekeeping.

### The Impact of an Open and Accepting Climate in the Classroom

Regardless of the delivery methods of the instruction, counselor educators can develop an online learning community for their students. Before the class starts, counselor educators can create a welcome page on their online course shells. They can introduce themselves, share their pictures and personal interests, and discuss the communication methods with students. Creating separate discussion boards for introductions and/or socialization can help foster a sense of community (Aloni & Harrington, 2018; Jeong, 2004). Counselor educators can allow students the opportunity to create their own PowerPoint slides that contain information about themselves, their families, their pets, their goals, or something unique about them. Students should be allowed to get creative with discussion prompts, such as incorporating audio or video recordings of themselves (Aloni & Harrington, 2018).

Counselor educators are highly encouraged to learn and memorize their students' names in the first few sessions of class. Classroom norms, including an inclusive and safe learning environment as well as respectful comments/feedback, should be discussed in the first session of class and throughout the semester. Frequent and prompt communications are essential for successful distance education programs (Snow et al., 2018), and weekly class announcements were found to be helpful for keeping students informed and engaged in class (Mantravadi & Snider, 2017). Counselor educators should also discuss their virtual office hours and/or preferred method of contact with students. If emails will be used as a primary method of communication, counselor educators must set clear boundaries and inform students when they can expect a response from their instructors (i.e., within 24 or 48 hours, excluding weekends and university- recognized holidays).

## The Instructor Awareness of Rapport and Group Cohesion

Counselor educators are responsible for monitoring the group cohesion and relationship among students in the classroom. In a synchronous course, counselor educators need to pay attention to how students interact and participate in class discussion, activities, and group work. Students should be encouraged to have their cameras on, so faculty can see what students are doing and engage in a more traditional fashion (Chen et al., 2020). Having cameras on has the added benefit of observing how students interact, which is essential to gatekeeping. If the classroom tends to have certain students who try to monopolize the class discussion and/or those who do not participate in class activities, counselor educators must design the classroom that allows equal participation of all students. This can include the use of break-out rooms for small- group discussions/activities and the chat box for students who hesitate to speak up in class to share their comments/feedback in a safe environment (Chen et al., 2020; Sheperis et al., 2020).

In an asynchronous course, counselor educators can enhance the rapport building by utilizing the online discussion board and assigning group projects where students can work collaboratively with their peers (Mantravadi & Snider, 2017; Sheperis et al., 2020). Counselor educators must pay attention to how students share their responses, provide feedback, and interact with one another in the discussion board. In group projects, counselor educators can encourage students to use online collaboration tools (e.g., Blackboard Wikis, Google Drive) and monitor how students work together in groups. These types of activities allow for gatekeeping and early interventions if students appear to lack good communication and interpersonal skills or experience any difficulties or challenges that require further support or remediation. The discussion board structure and techniques in a later section of the article.

## The Instructor Acknowledgement of Student Input and Contributions

To create a learning community in the online classroom, the acknowledgement of student input and contributions is very important (Jaggars & Xu,

2016). Counselor educators can validate students' thoughts and feelings when they share their personal experiences in the virtual classroom. For those who choose to express their ideas in the chat box, counselor educators are encouraged to read students' text messages and acknowledge their input and contributions to the classroom. In an asynchronous online discussion, it is meaningful for students to see their instructors validate their responses by sharing their comments/feedback regarding the topic and interacting with students in the discussion board (Snow et al., 2018). This approach could help support psychological and social connection between students and counselor educators as well as among students (Jaggars & Xu, 2016). By using this strategy, counselor educators can also serve as a role model for students to learn to appreciate their peers' inputs and validate one another's experiences.

### The Instructor Ability to Challenge and Affirm Students

Counselor educators in online programs face unique gatekeeping responsibilities. One of the major concerns is that students in online courses may 'hide behind' their discussion posts and other written assignments in ways that keep the instructor from fully ascertaining their honest opinions, biases, and personality traits that may be conveyed via their facial expressions, nonverbal behaviors, and other interpersonal observations. While student affirmation is important, counselor educators should also be able to challenge students to enhance their optimal learning experience, promote the quality of online learning, and perform gatekeeping for any red flags expressed in students' responses, assignments, and/or interaction. Counselor educators should set high expectations in the classroom and communicate these expectations with students in a clear manner (Glance et al., 2012; Snow et al., 2018). For instance, students should be affirmed that their ideas and input matter in class discussion, and they can also significantly contribute to the quality of the discussion by providing rich and relevant ideas that offer new perspectives and stimulate thoughts and probes.

### The Instructor Accessibility to Students

Distance learning programs should not compromise the interaction between faculty and students. Counselor educators must acknowledge the work and time constraints of non- traditional learners and be available for students outside of their office hours. Educators are encouraged to utilize various methods of communication with students (e.g., email, phone, videoconference) and invest in quality technological and IT support to ensure that students will be able to reach out to them without difficulties (Jaggars & Xu, 2016; Snow et al., 2018). Technological issues can discourage students from maintaining their communications with the faculty and impact their levels of engagement in the online course (Mantravadi & Snider, 2017). Without engagement, use of technology, and "seeing" the student in the course frequently, gatekeeping would be extremely challenging.

## Gatekeeping and Engagement in an Asynchronous Environment

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2002) noted the importance of changing a course's design to be taught in an online modality. This requires educators to take a good look at their formerly traditional courses and ensure it is converted in a way that mimics the traditional experience as much as possible. In a synchronous setting, technology allows us to offer an experience that is not drastically different from traditional learning, but literature on asynchronous learning is far more limited.

Asynchronous educators have to be mindful of the prevalence of plagiarism and cutting corners. In fact, a large portion of online teaching is verifying that the students actually did the assigned work (CHEA, 2002). Research shows that faculty interaction is an important factor in facilitating

online learning (Ekong, 2006). Fortunately, with modern technology, interaction in a remote setting is more possible than ever. In the event that students have disposition concerns or require remediation, a specific set of standards should be in place, including heightened efforts by online faculty to engage in the process. While gatekeeping online does not look much different that gatekeeping in a traditional program, individual programs will have to consider their circumstances to determine their level of risk (i.e. open admissions) and gauge their gatekeeping efforts accordingly (Haddock et al., 2020).

Snow et al. (2018) found that online faculty reported positive gatekeeping experiences using the following methods: emails, phone calls, synchronous online discussions, asynchronous discussion boards, and individual video discussions. Notably, some of these methods allow for similar means to "knowledge check" students without meeting them in person while still maintaining the benefits of remote learning. Meeting virtually does not have to be much different than meeting in person. Technology allows for quizzes, interactions, role plays, breakout rooms for group work, etc. (Sheperis et al., 2020). Additionally, asynchronous teaching allows for communication to happen at different times. This allows students time to thoughtfully share information in discussions, which can stimulate critical thinking and build additional knowledge (Lindsey & Rice, 2015; Trepal et al., 2007).

Because distance learning is quickly rising, faculty attitude towards distance education is critical (Lederman, 2020). A successful online program requires faculty to believe positive outcomes are possible, offers prompt feedback, and maintains high expectations, while acknowledging the time constraints of a non-traditional learner (Snow et al., 2018). As such, faculty should consider their beliefs and preferences when opting to teach online. However, regardless of the modality, student interaction is crucial for learning and gatekeeping. This might include synchronous meetings, meeting with students for office hours/appointments, prompt responses to emails, and/or engagement in the online course itself (Jaggar & Xu, 2016; Lederman, 2020; Sharoff, 2019).

One of our authors has had success by taking critical looks at the general expectations of the asynchronous setting and how it could be improved. For example, it is common to see courses that have weekly discussion requirements. The discussion prompt will be posted and students might be required to make a response to one or two of their peers. Discussion boards are a valuable means to communicate with students and interact as a class. However, how can educators be sure students are submitting their own work when ChatGPT and other Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs have become available for students in higher education? How can they be sure students are reviewing the posted materials and not simply doing an internet search for answers to the discussion prompt or using ChatGPT and the AI program? How do they know students are not looking at the work of other students to summarize an answer of their own? How do they know students are engaged and reading their peers' posts and not just doing the required reply, never to be seen again? Gatekeeping online requires attentive and purposeful actions from faculty (Gilbert et al., 2019). Below are some ideas to consider when designing your online course and to address some of the above questions (Moorhead et al., 2013).

## Student Accountability/Plagiarism Tools

Per the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), students should not be engaging in plagiarism. Many universities offer tools that assist with the detection of plagiarism by recognizing work found from online resources and/or former students as well as the use of ChatGPT and other AI programs. Khalil and Er (2023) listed a few electronics tools educators can use to promote academic integrity, including Turnitin®, iThenticate, and iParadigms LLC. Counselor educators should enable these tools for

all available discussions (Mantravadi & Snider, 2017; Snow et al., 2018) and assignments. Additionally, discussion posts do not necessarily need to be typed. Counselor educators may consider video recording posts as a viable option at times. Not only does it cater to different learning styles, it also allows educators to ensure it is the student who is making the post.

Educators can use specific instructions in the course syllabus and curriculum regarding the use of AI software (Neumann et al., 2023). Additionally, the instructors can use the following keywords in the course assignments to increase students critical thinking: summarizing the content of the posted lecture, assigning immersion projects, applying the learning material and illustrating with an example. The educators teaching computer related courses can incorporate AI and model the usage with the course shell. Educators teaching counseling, psychology, social work, nursing, and other helping professional fields can highlight the consequences of relying on AI software while obtaining a degree in working with people (Neumann et al., 2023). Counselor educators should consider everything they can as a gatekeeping opportunity, and varied submission requirements give an opportunity to view writing ability, knowledge, general disposition, body language, facial expressions, etc.

## Feedback to Students

Students should expect to receive timely feedback from their instructors in order for them to identify their own strengths and areas in need of improvements, which in turn, enhances a sense of belonging to the class as they learn that their instructors care about their learning experiences (Snow et al., 2018). When grading students' assignments, counselor educators are encouraged to personalize their feedback/comments to each student, discuss areas that they did well and those that need some improvements, and express their appreciation to students' ideas and efforts put forth to complete their assignments. Offering feedback to students allows them to work towards improvement while subsequently allowing educators to observe the responsiveness and general disposition towards feedback, an essential component of gatekeeping (Haddock et al., 2020; Mantravadi & Snider, 2017; Snow et al., 2018).

## Wording of Discussion Prompts

Discussion prompts are an important tool, especially with the asynchronous modality. One of our authors has had success revamping the typical discussion process of posting and replying to peers. Asking students to discuss something specific might mean the ability to quickly find answers online without reviewing the posted material that the educator initially found to be necessary. Wording prompts in a more general/comprehensive way can decrease the chance of that happening.

To offer an example of what one of our authors might do, a counseling skills class will be used in this context. Let us assume the learning goal for the week is to learn some of the basic counseling skills. Knowing a common area of concern for counselors-in-training is the use of silence, the educator created this prompt: "Describe what silence is in counseling. What are some challenges associated with silence and when can it be useful?" That prompt is valid, but also easily looked up online, possibly excluding other vitally important material. Here are some ways to expand on that to increase the odds that students have learned and understood the materials: "Describe two basic skills from the learning resources this week. What stood out to you about those two skills? When do you think they might be useful? Please give an example for each," or, "Which counseling skills from your reading did you see demonstrated in the video? Give an example of at least two skills. In your opinion, did the use of those skills enhance the session?" The slight difference in wording made it far more challenging for students to cut corners. The first prompt would allow a counselor educator to confirm a basic understanding of silence. The later prompts allow the educator to confirm understanding of more than one skill, when it can be used, and even reflect on its use.

Using discussion prompt wording is also a way to explore the critical thinking abilities of a student.

In a synchronous situation, educators can usually assess this by having a live discussion or doing a role play, but asynchronous programs can use the discussion board to meet this requirement. Faculty can create opportunities for students to reflect on their belief systems, triggers, and blind spots. This opportunity for students is also an opportunity for faculty to explore their responses, any potential for cyber incivility, their response to feedback, and their level of cultural competency (Haddock et al., 2020).

## Facilitating Expanded Student Engagement

Educators should consider the importance of social interaction on learning satisfaction and motivation (Lederman, 2020). With distance learning, it becomes necessary to replicate some of the in-person interaction, remotely. In an asynchronous environment, this can often be accomplished with group projects. Group projects facilitate interaction while giving a sense of community within a large, virtual environment where motivation can easily be lost (Sharoff, 2019).

Another common method used to facilitate student conversations among peers and instructors are through discussion boards (Belenky, 2020). What has commonly been seen in asynchronous courses is the requirement for students to reply to one or two peers. Sometimes, there are additional requirements, such as bringing in an outside resource to support their points. In reality, if the goal is to mimic the traditional experience as much as possible, this is not the best example of a discussion. If a student asked a question to another student, that student would not respond by staring blankly. They would likely answer the question or offer some form of reply. Allowing online students to ask a question and never get a response is the virtual version of the blank stare. Discussions in person (or synchronously) might go back and forth a bit, or involve multiple people, coming to a close when it was organically appropriate to do so. With some effort, this experience can be mirrored online.

In an asynchronous online course, if a student replies to a peer and never logs back into the course because their reply requirement was met, counselor educators have minimal ability to gatekeep their knowledge, ability to work with others, or disposition. After observing this phenomenon, this author altered the response requirements to include ongoing discussion. As a measurable event for a rubric, students were required to respond to three of their peers while logging in a minimum of three times per week to engage in ongoing discussion. Given the need for flexibility in scheduling, the students were able to select the days that worked best for them, the times, and even the amount of time they spent logged in. However, the requirement to log in and show some evidence of that on the discussion board encourages a more organic form of conversation and increases posts substantially. Whether faculty seek to improve gatekeeping abilities, increase student engagement, or desire for distance learning students to build connections and feel less “distant,” this minor change in requirements seem to show promise. Instructors should get creative and consider video posts/responses and not only writing when it comes to the discussion board.

One of our authors suggests the use of a rubric that clearly outlines the expectations of a discussion post. Making it worth a substantial grade and offering examples of what a quality response looks like is helpful for students to have a visual format and ensure all components are met. It is important for students to understand that initial peer responses are not enough and that ongoing discussion, like a traditional classroom, would be expected. Table 1 illustrates a generic example of a rubric that can be altered based on the needs of the course.

**Table 1**
*Rubric example*

| Description | Does not meet expectations | Nearly meets expectations | Meets expectations | Exceeds expectations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relevance of Initial Post | Missing more than half of the prompt elements<br><br>No clear evidence that course materials were reviewed. | Missing some elements of the prompt<br><br>Uses opinions/ experiences over showing evidence that material was reviewed | Addressed all elements of the prompt, showing evidence that course material was reviewed | Addressed all elements of the prompt, showing evidence that course material was reviewed while bringing in additional material to support points |
| Citations/ Formatting | No relevant citations are included in initial posts and responses to peers<br><br>APA 7th formatting is not present. | Few relevant citations are missing in initial posts and responses to peers.<br><br>APA 7th formatting with substantial errors | All relevant citations are included in initial posts and responses to peers.<br><br>APA 7th formatting is present with minimal errors. | All relevant citations are included in initial posts and responses to peers.<br><br>Citations are included on peer responses to support points or further carry the conversation.<br><br>APA 7th formatting is present and free of errors |
| Level of Engagement/Ongoing Discussion | Appearance (validate/ challenge/add more content) on discussion | Appearance (validate/ challenge/add more content) on discussion | Appearance (validate/ challenge/add more content) on discussion | Appearance (validate/ challenge/add more content) on discussion board more than 3x |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | board less than 2x<br><br>Did not maintain discussion with peers<br><br>Did not reply to at least 2 peers initially | board less than 3x<br><br>Missed engaging with peers in ongoing discussion on at least 1 thread | board at least 3x<br><br>Engaged with peers in ongoing discussion on at least 1 thread | Engaged with peers in ongoing discussion more than 1 thread |
| Response Quality | Responses to peers were superficial in nature and did not add to conversation in a meaningful way (i.e., "I agree"). | At least 1 response to peers was substantial, referencing course materials and/or additional sources. | At least 2 responses to peers were substantial, referencing course materials and/or additional sources. | More than 2 responses to peers were substantial, referencing course materials and/or additional sources. |

## Implications

The authors of this article hope to contribute to the important conversation about gatekeeping in online counseling programs. As the number of online educational programs are increasingly attractive and on the rise, it is more critical than ever that faculty be trained and prepare for this phenomenon. As such, it is important to engage in both qualitative and quantitative research on some of the aforementioned techniques, such as discussion board wording and requirements. While research has generally supported synchronous learning, research on asynchronous learning techniques remains sparse, but finding ways to perform gatekeeping obligations should remain a primary concern of online faculty. Sheperis et al. (2020) suggests that most programs opt for at least one in-person experience with the students as a way to ensure there are no disposition, knowledge, or skills concerns.

As previously mentioned, the attitude and beliefs from faculty towards online learning plays a large role in the success of the class (Lederman, 2020; Snow et al., 2018). While research might be able to assist with teasing out what works and does not work well, it will be important to consider the attitude and level of dedication to online learning to determine which faculty is the best fit for a remote modality. The Department of Education (2020) requires adequate training in online teaching to address the differences from traditional modalities. Just as screening students at admissions is important (Glance et al., 2012; Schuermann et al., 2018; Snow et al., 2018; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014), faculty should also be screened before engaging in online teaching. Universities should include comprehensive training on techniques, existing

research, challenges, and added needs would be beneficial for faculty to fully understand the benefits and complexity of this style of teaching.

For fellow counselor educators and department chairs, it should be remembered that gateslipping can be a problem in asynchronous education (Glance et al., 2012; Schuermann et al., 2018). We will have to examine if the student learning outcomes and related CACREP key assessments in the distance education setting surpasses the traditional face to face learning environment (Reicherzer, et al., 2012). As educators responsible for teaching the next generation of counselors and supervisors, we have an obligation to keep current with changing educational practices and professional trends, including regular use of technology. Full mastery of gatekeeping should be taught to doctoral students, with specific mention of online environments, as they prepare for careers as counselor educators. While the quality of education does not need to differ from that of traditional environments, the skills needed to provide proper gatekeeping do. Programs considering increasing their online presence should consider a training program that encompasses all areas of gatekeeping. The future of our profession depends on it.

## Conclusion

This article aims to bridge the gap in the literature concerning gatekeeping and gate slipping within asynchronous online counselor education. The strategies for gatekeeping provided in the article offer assistance to counselor educators who are teaching in online classroom settings, especially those in an asynchronous environment. The article also includes directions for future researchers interested in using empirical methods to study gatekeeping procedures in an online learning environment.

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