
Counselors

(0*NET 21-1011.00, 21-1012.00, 21-1013.00, 21-1014.00, 21-1015.00))

Significant Points

- A master's degree is often required to be licensed or certified as a counselor.
- All but three States require some form of licensure or certification for practice outside of schools; all States require school counselors to hold a State school counseling certification.

Nature of the Work

Counselors assist people with personal, family, educational, mental health, and career decisions and problems. Their duties depend on the individuals they serve and on the settings in which they work.

Educational, vocational, and school counselors provide individuals and groups with career and educational counseling. In school settings—elementary through postsecondary—they are usually called school counselors and they work with students, including those considered to be at risk and those with special needs. They advocate for students and work with other individuals and organizations to promote the academic, career, and personal and social development of children and youths. School counselors help students evaluate their abilities, interests, talents, and personality characteristics in order to develop realistic academic and career goals. Counselors use interviews, counseling sessions, tests, or other methods in evaluating and advising students. They also operate career information centers and career education programs. High school counselors advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs. They help students develop job search skills such as resume writing and interviewing techniques. College career planning and placement counselors assist alumni or students with career development and job-hunting techniques.

Elementary school counselors observe younger children during classroom and play activities and confer with their teachers and parents to evaluate the children's strengths, problems, or special needs. They also help students develop good study habits. Elementary school counselors do less vocational and academic counseling than do secondary school counselors.

School counselors at all levels help students understand and deal with social, behavioral, and personal problems. These counselors emphasize preventive and developmental counseling to provide students with the life skills needed to deal with problems before they occur and to enhance the student's personal, social, and academic growth. Counselors provide special services, including alcohol and drug prevention programs and conflict resolution classes. Counselors also try to identify cases of domestic abuse and other family problems that can affect a student's development. Counselors work with students individually, with small groups, or with entire classes. They consult and collaborate with parents, teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, medical professionals, and social workers in order to develop and implement strategies to help students be successful in the education system.

Vocational counselors who provide mainly career counseling outside the school setting are also referred to as *employment counselors* or *career counselors*. Their chief focus is helping

individuals with their career decisions. Vocational counselors explore and evaluate the client's education, training, work history, interests, skills, and personality traits, and arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to assist in making career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop their job search skills, and they assist clients in locating and applying for jobs. In addition, career counselors provide support to persons experiencing job loss, job stress, or other career transition issues.

Rehabilitation counselors help people deal with the personal, social, and vocational effects of disabilities. They counsel people with disabilities resulting from birth defects, illness or disease, accidents, or the stress of daily life. They evaluate the strengths and limitations of individuals, provide personal and vocational counseling, and arrange for medical care, vocational training, and job placement. Rehabilitation counselors interview both individuals with disabilities and their families, evaluate school and medical reports, and confer and plan with physicians, psychologists, occupational therapists, and employers to determine the capabilities and skills of the individual. Confering with the client, they develop a rehabilitation program that often includes training to help the person develop job skills. Rehabilitation counselors also work toward increasing the client's capacity to live independently.

Mental health counselors work with individuals, families, and groups to address and treat mental and emotional disorders and to promote optimum mental health. They are trained in a variety of therapeutic techniques used to address a wide range of issues, including depression, addiction and substance abuse, suicidal impulses, stress management, problems with self-esteem, issues associated with aging, job and career concerns, educational decisions, issues related to mental and emotional health, and family, parenting, and marital or other relationship problems. Mental health counselors often work closely with other mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses, and school counselors. (Information on other mental health specialists appears in the *Handbook* statements on physicians and surgeons, psychologists, registered nurses, and social workers.)

Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors help people who have problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling, and eating disorders. They counsel individuals who are addicted to drugs, helping them identify behaviors and problems related to their addiction. These counselors hold sessions for one person, for families, or for groups of people.



Counselors must be able to inspire respect, trust, and confidence in order to assist people with their problems.

Marriage and family therapists apply principles, methods, and therapeutic techniques to individuals, family groups, couples, or organizations for the purpose of resolving emotional conflicts. In doing so, they modify people's perceptions and behaviors, enhance communication and understanding among all family members, and help to prevent family and individual crises. Marriage and family therapists also may engage in psychotherapy of a nonmedical nature, with appropriate referrals to psychiatric resources, and in research and teaching in the overall field of human development and interpersonal relationships.

Other counseling specialties include gerontological, multicultural, and genetic counseling. A gerontological counselor provides services to elderly persons who face changing lifestyles because of health problems; the counselor helps families cope with the changes. A multicultural counselor helps employers adjust to an increasingly diverse workforce. Genetic counselors provide information and support to families who have members with birth defects or genetic disorders and to families who may be at risk for a variety of inherited conditions. These counselors identify families at risk, investigate the problem that is present in the family, interpret information about the disorder, analyze inheritance patterns and risks of recurrence, and review available options with the family.

Working Conditions

Most school counselors work the traditional 9- to 10-month school year with a 2- to 3-month vacation, although increasing numbers are employed on 10½- or 11-month contracts. They usually work the same hours that teachers do. College career planning and placement counselors work long and irregular hours during student recruiting periods.

Rehabilitation counselors usually work a standard 40-hour week. Self-employed counselors and those working in mental health and community agencies, such as substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors, frequently work evenings to counsel clients who work during the day. Both mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists also often work flexible hours, to accommodate families in crisis or working couples who must have evening or weekend appointments.

Counselors must possess high physical and emotional energy to handle the array of problems they address. Dealing daily with these problems can cause stress. Because privacy is essential for confidential and frank discussions with clients, counselors usually have private offices.

Employment

Counselors held about 526,000 jobs in 2002. Employment was distributed among the counseling specialties as follows:

Educational, vocational, and school counselors	228,000
Rehabilitation counselors	122,000
Mental health counselors	85,000
Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors	67,000
Marriage and family therapists	23,000

Educational, vocational, and school counselors work primarily in elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities. Other types of counselors work in a wide variety of public and private establishments, including health care facilities; job training, career development, and vocational rehabilitation centers; social agencies; correctional institutions; and residential care facilities, such as halfway houses for criminal offenders and group homes for children, the elderly, and the disabled. Some substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors work in therapeutic com-

munities where addicts live while undergoing treatment. Counselors also work in organizations engaged in community improvement and social change and work as well in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and State and local government agencies. A growing number of counselors are self-employed and working in group practices or private practice. This growth has been helped by laws allowing counselors to receive payments from insurance companies and the growing recognition that counselors are well-trained professionals.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

All States require school counselors to hold State school counseling certification and to have completed at least some graduate course work; most require the completion of a master's degree. Some States require public school counselors to have both counseling and teaching certificates and to have had some teaching experience before receiving certification. For counselors based outside of schools, 47 States and the District of Columbia had some form of counselor credentialing, licensure, certification, or registration that governed their practice of counseling. Requirements typically include the completion of a master's degree in counseling, the accumulation of 2 years or 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience beyond the master's degree level, the passage of a State-recognized exam, adherence to ethical codes and standards, and the satisfaction of annual continuing education requirements.

Counselors must be aware of educational and training requirements that are often very detailed and that vary by area and by counseling specialty. Prospective counselors should check with State and local governments, employers, and national voluntary certification organizations in order to determine which requirements apply.

As mentioned, a master's degree is typically required to be licensed or certified as a counselor. A bachelor's degree often qualifies a person to work as a counseling aide, rehabilitation aide, or social service worker. Some States require counselors in public employment to have a master's degree; others accept a bachelor's degree with appropriate counseling courses. Counselor education programs in colleges and universities usually are in departments of education or psychology. Fields of study include college student affairs, elementary or secondary school counseling, education, gerontological counseling, marriage and family counseling, substance abuse counseling, rehabilitation counseling, agency or community counseling, clinical mental health counseling, counseling psychology, career counseling, and related fields. Courses are grouped into eight core areas: Human growth and development, social and cultural diversity, relationships, group work, career development, assessment, research and program evaluation, and professional identity. In an accredited master's degree program, 48 to 60 semester hours of graduate study, including a period of supervised clinical experience in counseling, are required for a master's degree.

In 2003, 176 institutions offered programs in counselor education—including career, community, gerontological, mental health, school, student affairs, and marriage and family counseling—that were accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP also recognizes many counselor education programs, apart from those in the 176 accredited institutions, that use alternative instruction methods, such as distance learning. Programs that use such alternative instruction methods are evaluated on the basis of the same standards for accreditation that CACREP applies to programs that employ the more traditional

methods. Another organization, the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), accredits graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling. Accredited master's degree programs include a minimum of 2 years of full-time study, including 600 hours of supervised clinical internship experience.

Many counselors elect to be nationally certified by the National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. (NBCC), which grants the general practice credential "National Certified Counselor." To be certified, a counselor must hold a master's or higher degree, with a concentration in counseling, from a regionally accredited college or university; must have at least 2 years of supervised field experience in a counseling setting (graduates from counselor education programs accredited by CACREP are exempted); must provide two professional endorsements, one of which must be from a recent supervisor; and must have a passing score on the NBCC's National Counselor Examination for Licensure and Certification (NCE). This national certification is voluntary and is distinct from State certification. However, in some States, those who pass the national exam are exempted from taking a State certification exam. NBCC also offers specialty certification in school, clinical mental health, and addiction counseling. Beginning January 1, 2004, new candidates for NBCC's National Certified School counselor (NCSC) credential must pass a practical simulation examination in addition to fulfilling the current requirements. To maintain their certification, counselors retake and pass the NCE or complete 100 hours of acceptable continuing education credit every 5 years.

Another organization, the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, offers voluntary national certification for rehabilitation counselors. Many employers require rehabilitation counselors to be nationally certified. To become certified, rehabilitation counselors usually must graduate from an accredited educational program, complete an internship, and pass a written examination. (Certification requirements vary according to an applicant's educational history. Employment experience, for example, is required for those with a counseling degree in a specialty other than rehabilitation.) After meeting these requirements, candidates are designated "Certified Rehabilitation Counselors." To maintain their certification, counselors must successfully retake the certification exam or complete 100 hours of acceptable continuing education credit every 5 years.

Other counseling organizations also offer certification in particular counseling specialties. Usually these are voluntary, but having one may enhance one's job prospects.

Some employers provide training for newly hired counselors. Others may offer time off or provide help with tuition if it is needed to complete a graduate degree. Counselors must participate in graduate studies, workshops, and personal studies to maintain their certificates and licenses.

Persons interested in counseling should have a strong interest in helping others and should possess the ability to inspire respect, trust, and confidence. They should be able to work independently or as part of a team. Counselors must follow the code of ethics associated with their respective certifications and licenses.

Prospects for advancement vary by counseling field. School counselors can move to a larger school; become directors or supervisors of counseling, guidance, or pupil personnel services; or, usually with further graduate education, become counselor educators, counseling psychologists, or school administrators. (See the statements on psychologists and education administrators elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Some counselors choose to work for a State's department of education. For marriage and family therapists, doctoral education in family therapy empha-

sizes the training of supervisors, teachers, researchers, and clinicians in the discipline.

Counselors can become supervisors or administrators in their agencies. Some counselors move into research, consulting, or college teaching or go into private or group practice.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of counselors is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012, and job opportunities should be very good because there are usually more job openings than graduates of counseling programs. In addition, numerous job openings will occur as many counselors retire or leave the profession.

Employment of educational, vocational, and school counselors is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations as a result of: increasing student enrollments, particularly in secondary and postsecondary schools; State legislation requiring counselors in elementary schools; and an expansion in the responsibilities of counselors. For example, counselors are becoming more involved in crisis and preventive counseling, helping students deal with issues ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to death and suicide. Although schools and governments realize the value of counselors in achieving academic success in their students, budget constraints at every school level will dampen job growth of school counselors. However, Federal grants and subsidies may fill in the gaps and allow the current ongoing reduction in student-to-counselor ratios to continue.

Demand for vocational or career counselors should grow as the notion of staying in one job over a lifetime continues to be rejected and replaced by the concept of managing one's own career and taking responsibility for it. In addition, changes in welfare laws that require beneficiaries to work will continue to create demand for counselors by State and local governments. Other opportunities for employment counselors will arise in private job-training centers that provide training and other services to laid-off workers, as well as to those seeking a new or second career or wanting to upgrade their skills.

Demand is expected to be strong for substance abuse and behavioral, mental health, and marriage and family therapists and for rehabilitation counselors, for a variety of reasons. For one, California and a few other States have recently passed laws requiring substance abuse treatment instead of jail for people caught possessing a drug. This shift will require more substance abuse counselors in those States. Second, the increasing availability of funds to build statewide networks to improve services for children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances and for their family members should increase employment opportunities for counselors. Under managed care systems, insurance companies are increasingly providing for reimbursement of counselors as a less costly alternative to psychiatrists and psychologists. Also, legislation is pending that may provide counseling services to Medicare recipients.

The number of people who will need rehabilitation counseling is expected to grow as the population continues to age and as advances in medical technology continue to save lives that only a few years ago would have been lost. In addition, legislation requiring equal employment rights for people with disabilities will spur demand for counselors, who not only will help these people make a transition into the workforce, but also will help companies comply with the law.

Employment of mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists will grow as the Nation becomes more comfortable seeking professional help for a variety of health and

personal and family problems. Employers also are increasingly offering employee assistance programs that provide mental health and alcohol and drug abuse services. More people are expected to use these services as society focuses on ways of developing mental well-being, such as controlling stress associated with job and family responsibilities.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of educational, vocational, and school counselors in 2002 were \$44,100. The middle 50 percent earned between \$33,160 and \$56,770. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$24,930, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$70,320. School counselors can earn additional income working summers in the school system or in other jobs. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of educational, vocational, and school counselors in 2002 were as follows:

Educational, vocational, and school counselors	228,000
Rehabilitation counselors	122,000
Mental health counselors	85,000
Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors	67,000
Marriage and family therapists	23,000

Median annual earnings of substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors in 2002 were \$30,180. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,350 and \$37,520. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$19,540, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,570.

Median annual earnings of mental health counselors in 2002 were \$29,940. The middle 50 percent earned between \$23,950 and \$39,160. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$19,760, and the highest 10 percent earned more than 50,170.

Median annual earnings of rehabilitation counselors in 2002 were \$25,840. The middle 50 percent earned between \$20,350 and \$34,000. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$16,840, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$44,940.

For substance abuse, mental health, and rehabilitation counselors, government employers generally pay the highest wages, followed by hospitals and social service agencies. Residential care facilities often pay the lowest wages.

Median annual earnings of marriage and family therapists in 2002 were \$35,580. The middle 50 percent earned between \$26,790 and \$44,620. The lowest 10 percent earned less than 20,960, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$59,030. Median annual earnings in 2002 were \$29,160 in individual and family social services, the industry employing the largest numbers of marriage and family therapists.

Self-employed counselors who have well-established practices, as well as counselors employed in group practices, usually have the highest earnings.

Related Occupations

Counselors help people evaluate their interests, abilities, and disabilities and deal with personal, social, academic, and career problems. Others who help people in similar ways include teachers, social and human service assistants, social workers, psychologists, physicians and surgeons, registered nurses, members of the clergy, occupational therapists, and human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists.

Sources of Additional Information

For general information about counseling, as well as information on specialties such as school, college, mental health, reha-

bilitation, multicultural, career, marriage and family, and gerontological counseling, contact:

► American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304-3300. Internet: <http://www.counseling.org>

For information on accredited counseling and related training programs, contact:

► Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Ave., 4th floor, Alexandria, VA 22304. Internet: <http://www.counseling.org/cacrep>

For information on national certification requirements for counselors, contact:

► National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc., 3 Terrace Way, Suite D, Greensboro, NC 27403-3660. Internet: <http://www.nbcc.org>

State departments of education can supply information on those colleges and universities which offer guidance and counseling training that meets State certification and licensure requirements.

State employment service offices have information about job opportunities and about entrance requirements for counselors.