



# Graduate Student Newsletter

Spring 2017

## On Your Radar

- ❖ (LAST) Graduate Student Committee Meeting: Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9:30 am. To hear a guest presenter and learn more about what's going on in WSCA, attend our meeting. You can attend virtually by emailing Amy at [SylvesteAM19@uww.edu](mailto:SylvesteAM19@uww.edu)!
- ❖ Summer Leadership Academy: Two full-day workshops being offered on Tuesday, July 25<sup>th</sup> at UW-Steven's Point. Learn more information and register [here](#).
- ❖ WSCA Conference 2018: Tuesday, February 20<sup>th</sup> – Thursday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> at Monona Terrace in Madison!

## Co-Coordinators' Corner

Welcome fellow graduate students! Can you believe it's already April? Where has the time gone? We are wishing all of you the best as you wrap up the loose ends of the rest of the semester. Those finishing your programs and graduating soon – CONGRATULATIONS! Those who are finishing up a semester, finish strong!

In this edition, you will be able to read three articles written by fellow graduate students! Check out what they have to say about mindfulness, making connections, and a school counselor's role in helping childhood poverty.

Keep on the lookout for more great information in our next newsletter, coming out in May! At the WSCA conference in February, fellow graduate students shared resources, thoughts about joining the field and tips related to resumes and interviews. The summer 2017 newsletter will be jam packed with information so make sure to check it out!



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## Mindfulness in Schools

One of my favorite trends within the field of counseling right now is the implementation of mindfulness practices into schools. No one can argue that within any school there are many students suffering from high levels of stress, anxiety, trauma, mental illness, etc. For a long time, we've needed a plausible solution that has the capability of reaching all students, doesn't take away extended time from academics, and is effective in reducing stress and increasing attention. I think we're onto something with mindfulness.

Mindfulness is not new, it's rooted in ancient Buddhist spiritual practices and was brought into counseling in the 1970's. It's the practice of being aware of your present experience, accepting who you are in that exact moment without judgment (Jennings & Jennings, 2013). From experience, I can tell you that it takes practice and for me it certainly did not come naturally, but once it starts to click, the benefits can be enormous.

Mindfulness has the potential to reduce depression, anxiety, improve sleep quality, decrease PTSD symptoms, increase self-awareness and increase focus and attention (Wisner & Norton, 2013). Research shows that those who practice mindfulness in schools report a high correlation with quality of life and academic competence. These students showed a decrease in internalizing symptoms and externalizing behavior problems (Greco, Baer, Smith, 2011).

The delivery of mindfulness into schools can come in many forms. If you're not sold, you can start small. Choose one of the many guided mindfulness exercises on YouTube and test it out with an individual student who might benefit from the practice. If you find something you like, you could bring it into a small group setting, giving those in your group a few moments to connect with the present and slow their breathing. From here move into the classroom. Give a lesson on mindfulness and leave time for practicing mindful meditation or maybe mindful yoga.

I am hopeful that mindfulness can be a useful tool within schools used preventatively and when a student is in need. I encourage you to give the practice a try yourself and share it with your students. To get you started I've included a couple helpful links.

### Mindfulness Practices for Students Poster

<http://www.counseling.org/images/default-source/cam2017/mindfulness-practices-for-students.jpg?sfvrsn=2>

### Resources on Mindfulness in Education

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/mindfulness-resources>

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## Building Connections

A lot of times when I ask someone what they think a school counselor does, they describe a person who is in their office all day and schedules students' classes. This image is created because typically that has been their experience with their own school counselors. As school counselors who are just going into the field, it may be difficult to get our name and what we do out there. Students may constantly ask if you are a new teacher, depending on the level and how young you look. When parents have concerns over their children, they may not know who should be contacted to have someone check in with them. Teachers and staff may be aware that you are the new counselor, but may be unsure of what you do and what your role is as a pupil services staff member. It is our job to educate others on what we do and to build connections with the school community. The following are some ways to work on building connections at a school—



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### Introduce Yourself

I know, this seems like the obvious thing to do and yet the obvious things are often the ones that are overlooked. Send out an email to staff members letting them know who you are and what you will be doing as a new member of the team. Ask teachers if you could take a couple of minutes of their class time in order to introduce yourself to students. Giving students information about what services you offer and how they can request to see you. Provide a handout/email to parents, letting them know your role in the school.

### Participate in Staff Meetings

Most schools have staff meetings scheduled a couple of weeks before students officially start school. During these meetings make connections with teachers, staff, and administrators.

### Go Into the Classrooms

Ask a teacher or two every week if you could sit in on one of their classes. Just to be able to see how students interact with each other. This will help you in continuing to build rapport with teachers. Also, it will give you great information on how some students act in a classroom setting.

### Walk the Halls During Passing Periods

This is a great way to be a normal presence in the students' school day. This is also a great way to be a positive adult interaction with students who may not usually receive any. Overtime, this will help build trust with some of these students.

### Checkout the School Website

Take a look at the website in order to start learning names of the people you will be working with. It also helps if you take a look at the district wide website in order to see who is on the school board, who are the coordinators, and the directors of different services in the district.



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## Students Living in Poverty: How School Counselors Can Help

Children living in poverty is a very complex and sometimes challenging circumstance for not only the families, but individuals that wish to help those in need. There is a high population of individuals that live in poverty and children compose a large majority of that population. While it may seem like a challenging obstacle to face when working as a school counselor, these students need any help they can get and there are ways to provide assistance.

Poverty can have a variety of different implications for children ranging from academic, social/emotional, or future complications for the child. Many children that are raised in poverty do not have access to the necessary materials or environments to thrive as a student in general education classrooms. This may result in an overrepresentation of low-income students in special education classrooms, especially minority students. It is important for all professionals in a school to understand their students and their culture to better serve them. Many students that are raised in low-income households experience chaos which may impact their behavior in school. This may cause a lot of distress for teachers or other professionals in a school, but it is important to know your students and determine whether their behavior is a result of their environment.

Lastly, poverty can have lasting impacts on children throughout their lives. Many children that were raised in poverty find it difficult to work their way out of poverty due to the challenging circumstances they find themselves in. Low-income students find it hard to focus in school, learn at the same pace as other children, and regulate their emotions which make it more difficult to complete in high school. When children are having difficulties at school they may become discouraged and not want to continue.

This may extend the poverty the child experienced in childhood into adulthood. The consequences of being raised in poverty have the possibility to be detrimental to students, but there are ways to combat and stop the negative side effects that poverty can have.

School counselors can advocate for these students to help provide them the necessary resources to help them succeed. Initiatives to help teachers, parents, and other professionals in a school connect in a positive manner can help students succeed. Many parents of low-income students are only addressed when their child is struggling or having issues in class, but it is important to also reach out to parents when their child is excelling or to simply get to know the child and their family. When parents feel welcomed in the school they will be more likely to be involved in their child's schooling which will help grades and outlook on school improve for both students and parents. School counselors can also help to create programs to involve the parents of low-income children by getting to know the parents and how they would like to be involved. This may include providing the parents resources on childcare so they can be more involved in the school, providing them with books or other resources to use at home, and other methods to make them feel comfortable and welcomed. School counselors also have the responsibility to reach out to students personally, that may be falling behind. It is important to get to know all students and especially those that may need a little more help along the way. After-school programs are also beneficial for not only all students, but low-income students as well. This allows them an opportunity to complete homework and ask any questions they may have along the way. These programs also allow all children the opportunity for a safer environment to enjoy time with their peers. There are many creative and innovative ways that school counselors can help low-income students and it is important to reach out earlier rather than later.

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