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Recommended Citation
Bertulu, Giovanna; Kim, Sharon; Santilli, Sara; Sestu, Valentina; Taylor, Will; Waechter, Bianca; and Williams, Amy Elizabeth (2014) "The University of Cicerone & Matthew College," *The William & Mary Educational Review*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/wmer/vol3/iss1/6

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This articles is available in The William & Mary Educational Review: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/wmer/vol3/iss1/6
The University of Cicerone & Matthew College

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Dean Jones of Matthew College is a former counseling professor who is interested in creating an exchange partnership for the graduate students in the counseling program to study at an Italian institution of higher education. One of Dean Jones’ research interests is internationalization of counselor education and the counseling profession. As a result of this interest, and coupled with a growing interest identified by professional counseling organizations and program accreditation bodies to expand counselor education training and practice internationally, Dean Jones is exploring study abroad partnership possibilities in Italy.

Matthew College is a medium-sized public university located on the East Coast. The counseling program at Matthew College accepts approximately 30 students each year for its master’s programs and 5 students each year for its doctoral program. The program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), a national accrediting body for counselor education programs. Due to the program’s CACREP accreditation, specific courses are required in each program of study; these courses are designed to address competency objectives identified by CACREP.

Dean Jones has a friend and colleague, Professor Marzia, who is an Italian vocational counseling and psychology professor at the University of Cicerone. The University of Cicerone is a large public university in Italy that enrolls approximately 200 individuals in its assessment and counseling degree programs. The university offers master’s degrees in assessment and counseling, with a focus on vocational counseling. The program is not governed by an accreditation body, although in response to the Bologna Process, the university has standardized its credit system to align with other European institutions.

Professor Marzia is interested in exploring a possible study abroad partnership with Matthew College and Dean Jones; however, he has several concerns. First, English is not a language commonly spoken by the Italian population; therefore, Italian students may not be able to travel abroad. Dean Jones comments that the language barrier may also prevent the students from working together in
small groups, as collaboration is not a common form of instruction at the University of Cicerone. Further, the language barrier may prohibit students from interacting with one another with a common vocabulary of professional language. Specifically, in the context of vocational counseling, terms such as mental health, career, goals, and collaboration may not be recognized between students.

As Dean Jones continues planning for a successful partnership of study abroad experiences with the University of Cicerone, Professor Marzia wonders how the credit system will be equated between the two universities. The University of Cicerone does not utilize the American system for offering course credit, nor does it utilize similar structures of instruction for its courses. Professor Marzia wishes to provide a meaningful yet fair experience for the students from Matthew College, but does not understand how course credit could be offered with an incompatible system.

Although both Dean Jones and Professor Marzia are dedicated to establishing a partnership between their two institutions, aligning the interests of each is difficult. Although Matthew College is committed to internationalization, the administration at Cicerone has reservations. Bureaucracy further slows this process as many administrators are hesitant to establish a partnership and do not see the value in establishing international relationships. Student exchanges are expected to be equal between institutions, especially concerning financial resources. Because of the differences in tuition between the American and Italian systems, creating equal exchanges will be difficult.

Dean Jones seeks the support of his faculty to explore the possibilities of an academic sequence for the proposed program. Along with Professor Marzia, they select a committee of faculty at each institution to steer the development of a potential course of studies for master’s-level counselors. The first issue they encounter during this dialogue is the lack of a term for counseling in Italian. As the professors and faculty members continue to explore what a course of studies might look like, further issues are uncovered that highlight the differences in orientation to education between the two systems. A primary challenge is found in creating coursework offerings that meet the needs of each training program. While faculty in Matthew College’s program emphasize experiential and practical teaching and learning experiences, the faculty at Cicerone prioritize lecture-based theoretical knowledge as key to the development of counselors. A second challenge is identified in selecting course materials, as the language limitations of students in both programs make the text selection process a complex undertaking.

Additional concerns are raised by faculty members at both institutions regarding the core tenets of training required by each location’s licensing agency. Because CACREP guides the course offerings and learning outcomes of Matthew College’s program, a further concern is raised about the adherence of the Italian course offerings to these standards. Prior to adjourning, the committee decides that the use of a
comprehensive exam would meet the
needs of both programs to measure
learning outcomes, although the type
of exam becomes an issue of further
contention. Following these
discussions, the faculty members
express frustration at the
overwhelming complexity of
developing this program. Nonetheless,
both groups of faculty continue to
identify the great benefits of being
able to make this program a reality for
students, particularly with the growing
interest in internationalization of
counselor education and counseling.

Student access is also a concern
for this exchange partnership. Funding
is a challenge, especially for students
with lower socio-economic status.
Students with visual, motor, or
cognitive disabilities may also have
difficulties in participating in the
exchange. Appropriate instructional
materials need to be developed for
students with visual, motor, or other
impairments. Of additional concern
are the challenges concerning cultural
differences; the differences between
Italy and the United States can be
challenging for students studying
abroad in either country for a variety
of reasons.

Although there are many
challenges presented in the
collaboration efforts of Dean Jones
and Professor Marzia, a successful
program between the universities
could be valuable for students from
both institutions. Matthew College and
the University of Cicerone plan to
continue to seek appropriate solutions
to the differential structures within the
two existing programs in order to
create globalized learning
opportunities. They decide that the
best place to begin is to find novel
solutions to the most pressing issues
of implementation.

**Questions**

1. What are the benefits associated
   with the internationalization of
   the counseling programs at each
   institution? What are the
   possible risks and liabilities of
   this?

2. In what ways does the language
   barrier impact aspects of the
   planning, implementation, and
   assessment of the students’
   experiences in this program?
   How might these challenges be
   managed?

3. In what ways do educational
   values of each culture impact the
   planning, implementation, and
   assessment of learning activities?
   How might these challenges be
   managed?

4. What challenges do faculty face
   in implementing this program?
   What solutions might you
   propose to make this program
   manageable for faculty and
   beneficial for students?

5. What student support issues are
   identifiable in this situation? How
   might faculty at each institution
   plan for and manage issues of
   student support before, during,
   and after participation in the
   program?

6. In what ways might the faculty
   promote equal access for all
   students to this opportunity?
   What challenges prevent this and
   how might faculty plan to address
   these concerns?

7. Overall, how might each
   institution promote this
   experience to faculty members
who may be apprehensive about or opposed to changing the program and student composition of their classes? What might be the arguments faculty would give for not wanting to take on this task? What counterarguments would you offer in response?

About the Authors

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