

Surviving and Thriving

in Your

Counseling Program

Julius A. Austin • Jude T. Austin II



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

WILEY

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6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600 • Alexandria, VA 22304

www.counseling.org



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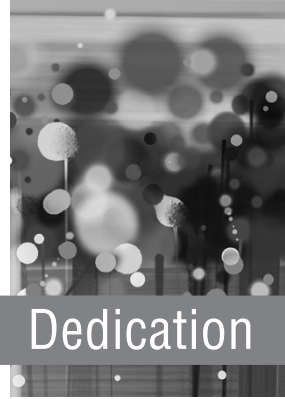
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*This book is dedicated to our kids.
Your smiles make surviving and thriving in our
counseling and doctoral programs worth it.*



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Preface

As students, we were desperate for a book that would help us prepare for and get through our counseling program. We could not find one that spoke to us. Maybe some of them were written above our heads, or perhaps some authors just could not reach two Black kids from the country. Regardless of the reason, our unsuccessful hunt for literary support sparked an idea and promise that when we could, we would write the book we needed. We believe we accomplished that goal with this book.

You may not have been born and raised in a country town in Louisiana, but we tried our best to be mindful of the diversity of our audience when writing. In our minds, our audience is recently graduated undergraduates who applied to a graduate counseling program, got accepted, and are now in a cold sweat thinking about how they will get through the next 2–3 years. Keep reading. We may also be speaking to someone in the throes of their counseling degree who may feel like they are in a spin cycle. Your assignments are backed up, your email inbox just displays an infinity sign instead of numbers now, your relationships are strained, your self-care is a distant dream, and your next session is in 10 minutes. Keep reading.

No one can fully explain the physical, psychological, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and relational strain students sign up for in graduate counseling. Don't get us wrong: The reward is well worth the struggle. But the struggle is real, and we were hilariously unprepared for it. If you have picked up this book because the struggle bus is currently doing donuts in your life, know that you are not alone. Keep reading. Throughout the book are chapters dedicated to some of those struggles, with down-to-earth discussions and suggestions to help you not only survive but also thrive in your counseling program.

Rather than providing a book focused on an exhaustive review of the empirical and scholarly literature on the graduate school experience, we share our experience getting through our counseling program. We have also invited contributions from a diverse group of recent graduates, new professionals, and current graduate students to share their experiences of thriving in their counseling programs. Their contributions can be read in the *Voices From the Field* sections.

Students can use this book the moment they decide to pursue a graduate degree in counseling. Counseling professors can also use this book as supplementary reading in undergraduate professional preparation courses as well as in graduate seminars and entry-level courses.

This book contains 10 chapters that guide you through your graduate and professional journey into counseling and offer tips for success. Chapter 1, “You Got In. Now What?,” offers an introduction to graduate school. We start from the moment you get accepted. We discuss the expectations placed upon you now as a graduate counseling student. We also talk about how to prepare for this journey, both personally and professionally.

Chapter 2, “First Year,” addresses some of the issues and experiences you may have during your first year. We share ways to organize your life to set you up for success before you start working with clients.

Chapter 3, “Second Year,” focuses on clinical experience. We discuss not only the professional challenges you will face but also obstacles to be mindful of in your personal life. We share experiences of our first counseling session and discuss other experiences the second year brings.

Chapter 4, “Third Year,” highlights the switch from graduate student to a professional counselor. We discuss closing the chapter of graduate school and share insights from our journey.

Chapter 5, “Life After Graduation” offers insight into the world you will now face as a legitimate therapist. We start from the moment you step off of the stage during graduation and discuss career plans later in life. We discuss the licensure process and the best ways to get the most out of this critical part of your counselor development.

Chapter 6, “Getting a Doctoral Degree,” illustrates what you may face if you choose to continue your education by obtaining a doctoral degree. We generally discuss our experiences as well as offer other’s experiences. We walk you through a step-by-step process of getting into a doctoral program.

Chapter 7, “Emotional Maturity,” focuses on the intangible characteristics that define who you are as a student and counselor. Some

of these characteristics cannot be taught but pulled out of you. We not only discuss these elements but also share ways you can grow into them.

Chapter 8, “Dealing With Setbacks,” addresses an inevitable part of your counselor training journey: setbacks. We outline some of the most common ones and share ways to bounce back and continue to thrive in your program.

Chapter 9, “Managing Conflicts,” offers insights into the potential conflicts you may face while in training. Whether those conflicts are personal or with family, colleagues, or faculty, we break them down and suggest ways to come out of those conflicts with stronger relationships.

Chapter 10, “Multicultural Considerations,” highlights the cultural issues embedded in counselor training. We discuss the areas of culture you may want to familiarize yourself with and process through as you start your counselor journey.



Acknowledgments

Writing this book was challenging and more rewarding than we could have imagined. It would not have been possible without the support of our loving and patient wives, Lindsay (married to Jude) and Megan (married to Julius). Both delivered babies around halfway into this book’s writing process. While being amazing mothers, they pushed us to keep writing when we felt drained. They put blankets over us when we fell asleep at our desks. They recorded Arsenal Football Club’s games and didn’t tell us the score when we worked through weekends. We could go on and on. We love you both immensely.

We are eternally grateful to our parents. Their consistent love and guidance steady us and give us the security to be genuine, humble, and vulnerable in this book, with our students, and in session with clients. When people describe us in session and class, we hear them describing our parents. Our therapeutic relationships are secure because they taught us how to love. Knowing we are loved by them gave us the security to explore who we are professionally. There is no failure when you know you can always go home to mom’s crawfish étouffée and dad’s fried chicken and everything will be all right.

To our baby sister, Dr. Jasmine Austin, thank you for continually inspiring us as you move through academia with style and grace. Your unflinching commitment to your identity in a world that aggressively attempts to define you leaves us in awe. Thank you for driving, flying, crawling, and doing whatever you had to do to get to us when we needed you. Thanks for holding babies while we wrote and slept. Thanks for never asking us how the book is going when we call.

We also want to thank the contributors, who, without hesitation or without even being asked sometimes, stepped up for us when we needed you. Whether you reviewed the proposal, wrote a piece, re-

viewed the first draft, or just listened to us craft the idea for this book, we appreciate you. Thanks for always believing in us and being willing to be vulnerable with us.

Saying thank you is not enough for our counseling program faculty members at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, specifically Dr. Leonard, Dr. Chou, Dr. Eary, Dr. Benner, Dr. Howard, Dr. Statz, and Dr. Ballard. You have given us and our growing families a future. You have taken the lessons we have learned and our character, built by our parents and grandparents, and molded them into the therapists we are today. Thank you for seeing and training the person in us. Thank you for allowing us to be ourselves. Thank you for showing us how to serve the field and our communities with integrity. We survived and thrived in our counseling program simply because you gave us the opportunity to do so.



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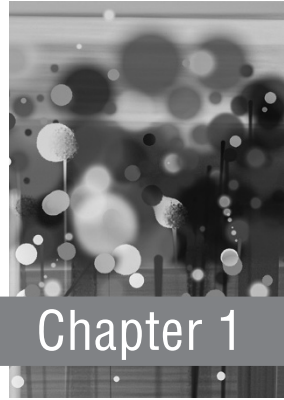
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Chapter 1

You Got In. Now What?

For starters, take a deep breath and try to become increasingly aware of the sacrifices you and your family have made up to this point in your life. There may have been times where your life depended upon making one decision: turning left or right, going or not going to an event, saying no or yes, or ending or beginning a relationship. Think about your hustle—that side job you hated but needed because it helped you pay tuition or rent. Reflect upon the group projects you were required to do as an undergraduate where no one did their share, so you carried the whole team because you wanted a good grade. Be humbled by everyone in your life who contributed, in small and large ways, to you being where you are today. Know that all of those decisions and experiences have led you into this graduate counseling program for a reason.

Now, take another deep breath and read the rest of this book knowing that you have everything you need to make it through counselor training. Purchasing this book should indicate that you already seek out the support you need when you need it. You have been surviving and thriving your whole life. You will need this mentality to make it through counselor training because it is a crucible of self-determination. The training process holds, molds, and changes you forever. Everyone's journey is different, but how you process this change and the person you are becoming can either help or hinder your development as a counselor.