



## IRCEP reaches India

Imagine being in a rural city in India. It is early morning, still dark outside and pouring rain. You are racing into a train station with your bag held high over your head to keep it out of the mud. Hundreds of people are in the station trying to catch the 6 a.m. train. Some are sleeping on the concrete floor of the platform, so you try not to step on them or trip over them. You hear someone calling your name. It sounds like a warning. At the same time, you feel a shove against your back. You turn around to see a bull right behind you pushing you up to the tracks.

This is a true story experienced by representatives of the International Registry of Counsellor Education Programs (IRCEP) on their trip to India this past February. One of many memorable encounters, it does not represent our most colorful experience. Nor is it the story that needs to be told.

The story that needs to be told involves encounters with students, faculty and administrators at universities who have begun to embrace the counseling profession. It is a story of celebration, with recognition being bestowed on Veer Bahadur Singh (VBS) Purvanchal University as the first institution in Asia to offer a counseling program reviewed and accepted for inclusion in IRCEP. It is also a story about developing a national understanding of basic counseling principles applicable in an Asian context through a focus on the integration of the mind, body and heart. Finally, it is a story about creating opportunities for preparing counselors in India who can make a difference in the lives of all people. IRCEP is honored to be part of this story.

### What is IRCEP?

IRCEP is a program arm of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). It was created in 2008 in response to multiple requests from other countries for CACREP to review their programs against a set of international standards. Because CACREP Standards were developed for use by higher education institutions in the United States, they were not easily applied to other national systems or cultures.

IRCEP's stated vision is to promote the ongoing development and recognition of the counseling profession worldwide through a registry of approved counselor education programs that use common professional requirements essential to the education and training of counselors, regardless of culture, country, region, work setting or educational system. In August 2009, the IRCEP Steering Committee met in Buenos Aires to accomplish these tasks. The committee was an international group with representatives from Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania. The committee's greatest challenge was to establish a review process that would emphasize the empowerment of programs that were appropriate for their respective cultures, while also including the broad tenets of education and training common to the practice of counseling across cultures. By establishing these common requirements, the committee essentially created a global definition of the knowledge and skills that define counselors and counseling practice.

Since that 2009 meeting, the staff and committee have focused on spreading the word about IRCEP and assisting programs with the application process. IRCEP now recognizes 36 CACREP-accredited programs in the United States, Mexico and Canada, as well as two non-CACREP programs, the Centro Argentina de Psicologia in Argentina and VBS Purvanchal University in India.

### IRCEP in India

When VBS Purvanchal University learned that its application for inclusion on the international registry had been reviewed and approved by the CACREP Board, it organized a celebratory conference and invited IRCEP representatives to attend with faculty from other counseling programs in India. Located in Jaunpur, VBS Purvanchal University serves one of the most densely populated areas in the world. It enrolls around 500,000 students, approximately 90 percent of whom belong to socially disadvantaged groups. The university's counseling program helps prepare counselors to work with patients who have AIDS or are infected with HIV. Students are also taught how to organize mental health awareness programs in the nearby villages.

The approval for the university's counseling program to be added to IRCEP would not have been possible without the evolution and recognition of the counseling profession in India. The counseling profession received its first major boost when the World Health Organization and U.S. Agency for International Development established counseling clinics for the prevention of AIDS. Due to the shortage of strong advocacy for counseling, most of these positions are now filled with clinical psychologists and social workers. The second phase started with the hiring of school counselors at



1,094 Kendriya Vidyalayas, a system of schools directly managed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). CBSE and Kendriya Vidyalayas are funded by the central government. These schools need candidates with master's degrees in psychology or related fields who also have a postgraduate diploma in guidance and counseling. CBSE recently passed a resolution requiring each of the 9,586 CBSE-affiliated schools in India to have a school counselor available to serve the needs of students. This is a positive step toward recognizing the importance of school counselors, but less than 3 percent of all school-going students attend CBSE-affiliated schools in India.

Although the counseling profession has been advancing in India, the identity and eligibility of counselors still have not been defined. Lack of fair recruitment of educators has resulted in a mushrooming of diploma mills and unskilled counselors in the nation. During the IRCEP visit to counseling centers at various universities, team members found professors from a wide range of disciplines directing university counseling centers. For example, a business professor is directing

the Centre for Career Planning and Counselling at the University of Kashmir; an engineering professor is supervising the Career Planning and Counselling Center at the Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology & Sciences; and an English professor is in charge of the Career Counselling Cell at Aligarh Muslim University. Indira Gandhi National Open University, serving 4 million students in India and 36 other countries, defines the counselor's role as providing "advice and guidance to learners on specific problems (mostly nonacademic matters) to overcome learning obstacles."

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council, the authorized accreditation body for universities in India, will be working with IRCEP to help strengthen the counseling profession.

### **Global partners**

IRCEP's impact in India and elsewhere will be shaped and defined by our openness to new or different ideas about how counseling occurs, where it occurs and what may or may not be considered ethically appropriate in various cultures and societal contexts. IRCEP must display

this willingness, while simultaneously maintaining strong adherence to the belief that to be a profession, there is a common set of knowledge and skills that define who counselors are and what they need to be able to practice effectively. This requires a partnership between IRCEP and the programs seeking to be on the international registry. With programs from four continents having sought IRCEP recognition, and with a growing number of inquiries from around the world, it appears the development of global partnerships is well on its way to strengthening the counseling profession worldwide. ♦

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