

Professional Counseling in Romania: An Introduction

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The formalization and professionalization processes in Romania resemble the early history of counseling in the United States, where development initially took place in the educational and career/vocational sectors. Brief accounts of the relationship between select periods in Romanian history and access to education and career/vocational support services are presented to provide a context for present-day counseling activities. Information on the development of counseling in Romania, current practices, and future opportunities are presented as well.

Throughout the history of the *Journal of Counseling & Development* and its predecessor, *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, there have been examples of articles describing professional counseling in countries other than the United States (e.g., Goldman, 1974; Karayanni, 1996; Wehrly & Deen, 1983). Historically, articles of this nature have an informal style because there is generally a limited research base to cite from and authors must draw heavily from their own views; such will be the case with this article as well. The purpose of this article is to provide readers an account of the development of counseling in Romania. Significant social, political, and economic restructuring began in Romania following the 1989 fall of Communism. This restructuring has made the need for public services such as counseling critical (Watts, 1997). At the same time, counseling practice has been developing and professionalizing, much like in the United States, in the educational, career/vocational, and mental health sectors. However, because mental health services are less developed than educational and career/vocational counseling services, we focus on the latter.

Although counseling (as a service and as a profession) in Romania is being formalized in a pattern similar to how counseling in the United States was formalized, the rate at which this is happening is significantly accelerated—most formalization activities have taken place after 1995 (Peteanu, 1997). A brief description of events affecting the how and why of education and career/vocational services in Romania is provided. Subsequently, summaries of the development of Romanian professional counseling, current practices, and opportunities for continued development are presented.

An important nuance of counseling in Romania is that the counselor's status is contextual (Szilagyi, 2005). In other words, the authority to call oneself a *counselor* is contingent on employment in a school. If a counselor leaves his or her particular school, however, he or she loses the title. For the present article, we use the word *counselor* to identify individuals who provide counseling services, regardless of their work setting and their contextually defined title.

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The Need for Counseling Services

Events in the 20th century had the greatest impact on how and why educational and career/vocational services such as counseling are accessed in Romania. These events have contributed to how the public views counseling and how counseling is currently developing. Our review of 20th-century events relevant to counseling in Romania is organized into three time periods: the pre-Communist era (1924–1947), the Communist era (1947–1989), and the post-Communist era (1989–present).

Pre-Communist Era (1924–1947)

Following World War I (1914–1919), Romania continued on the path of industrialization that had begun in the late 19th century. The government encouraged development in the technical sectors of the economy as well as the development of a skilled workforce. Access to free education was introduced. Consequently, the literacy rate rose and a broader range of career options became available (Szilagyi, 2005). However, educational and career opportunities were not complemented by a formal educational/career guidance mechanism.

Communist Era (1947–1989)

Romanians experienced significant reorganization of available resources and institutions when Communists took control of the country. Educational and career/vocational decisions were no longer a matter of personal choice but rather a decision made by a state bureaucrat—theoretically for the benefit of the entire nation. Thus, students and their parents had limited choices regarding what subjects the student might study and whether he or she would attend university. Furthermore, job-seeking skills and other employment skills declined because individuals were not required to compete for their jobs and could hold their jobs into later life. Support services were seen as unnecessary because little decision making was involved.

Post-Communist Era (1989–Present)

With the fall of Communism in 1989, the average Romanian citizen experienced immediate changes. Instantly, skills such as entrepreneurship, independent thinking, and consumer decision making became critical. The administrators of educational and career/vocational support institutions were tasked with restructuring what services were provided, their institutional scope and roles, and how services were provided.

Education. Following the revolution (i.e., the fall of Communism), the Romanian education system was reorganized to more closely align with the systems of western Europe. The national curriculum and the grade promotion system were redrafted to better develop the skills necessary for competition in the free market as well (Bethell & Mihail, 2005; Szilagyi, 2005; Velea & Botnariuc, 2002). Included in the education reforms were various policies that highlighted the need for a counseling mechanism to replace the state's student assignment mechanism. Ministry of Education (MoE) orders and other central government policies provided a base for the development of Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Centers (PPACs) and Inter-School Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Centers (ISPPACs) in 1995. These centers provided services consistent with what counselors in the United States recognize as school counseling. Additionally, the Institute of Educational Sciences, a government research and policy development think tank, was granted the authority to develop school counseling recommendations.

Career/vocational. Reform in the career/vocational support sector after the revolution was grounded in the needs resulting from the widespread development of the private sector. Businesses demanded employees with knowledge and skills in a way that was new to most Romanians. For the average worker, employment was no longer guaranteed, especially if they were not qualified, and competition for jobs was now commonplace. Unfortunately, the skills to understand the job market or to promote one's skills to potential employers had not been developed during the Communist era. As a consequence of the adoption of market-driven employment practices, assignment offices were reorganized into employment assistance offices. Perhaps more important, the empowerment of individuals to make employment decisions was emphasized. As 20th-century events created a need for counseling services, formal structures for the provision of these services were introduced.

Historical Development of Counseling in Romania

As in many other countries, professional counseling in Romania has been moving from paraprofessional to professional status and has developed in response to the country's social, educational, and economic needs (Bond et al., 2001; Harper & Deen, 2003; Schweiger et al., 2005). Although the bulk of the development of counseling as a discipline has taken place

in the post-Communist era, we believe it is also important to acknowledge earlier events that facilitated the current development of professional counseling.

Pre-Communist Era (1924–1947)

During the period of industrialization between World Wars I and II, research psychologists began investigating personality and vocational profiles through standardized testing (Peteanu, 1997). The Ministry of Labor (MOL) created three *psychotechnical* institutes to house these researchers and promote guidance research activities. The staff at the institutes was charged with developing the tools necessary for vocational and educational guidance, placement, and personnel promotion (Peteanu, 1997).

The tools and techniques developed by the psychotechnical centers were further refined by practitioners serving the public at 15 Vocational Guidance Offices. The staffs at these offices were responsible for promoting new psychological and vocational outlooks in families and secondary education settings; developing job profiles for publication in the *Occupations Monograph*; and assisting in intelligence, personality, and vocational test development.

Communist Era (1947–1989)

The services at this time might be more accurately characterized as assignment because client choice was infrequently taken into account. Services continued to be provided in the MOL's Vocational Guidance Offices (Peteanu, 1997). Access to services was also improved by the MoE's development of School and Vocational Guidance Offices. Typically, service providers had limited training in helping skills, career development, or other counseling-related competencies.

Post-Communist Era (1989–Present)

The current period of counseling service development began with a series of educational reforms that took place in the early 1990s (Szilagyi & Paredes, 2004; Velea & Botnariuc, 2002). A time line of significant events is provided in Table 1. Most instrumental was the Education Law 84/1995, which mandated the creation of PPACs and ISPPACs to provide counseling services to children, parents, and educational staff (Peteanu, 1997; Szilagyi, 2005). School counselors were required to hold a bachelor's-level license in education, psychology, social work, or sociology. Although counseling-specific training was available, as continuing education or as master's-degree course work from select university faculties, this training was not required for school employment.

Another key development in the post-Communist era was the inclusion of a counseling unit in the 1998–1999 national school curriculum. This unit, the National Curriculum for Counseling and Guidance, mandated the allotment of 1 hour of counseling per week, starting in the fifth grade and continuing until secondary school completion. By 2006, more than 80,000

TABLE 1
Key Events in Romanian Counseling
After the 1989 Revolution

Year	Key Event
1991	Romanian Constitution ratified
1995	Education Law 84/1995 established school counseling in public education
	School counseling course offered at University of Bucharest
1996	Counseling and guidance unit added to national school curriculum
	Master's degree program in school counseling introduced at University of Bucharest
	First doctoral degree in counseling completed (as an independent study)
1997	International Association for Vocational and Educational Guidance held counseling conference in Brasov
1998	Government clarified role of PPAC and ISPPAC counseling service centers
	National Employment Agency created
1999	National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance opened as part of the European Commission's Euroguidance Network
	Master's degree program in psychological counseling introduced at Babes-Bolyai University
2000	Counseling unit in national curriculum updated
2001	<i>Consilierea Carierei</i> (Jigau, 2001) career counseling handbook published
2002	Standards for the educational and vocational assessment of children introduced
2003	Master's degree program in career counseling introduced at Polytechnic University of Bucharest
2004	Ethical code for counseling developed by the Institute of Educational Sciences
2005	First Romanian-hosted international counseling conference took place
	First Romanian Global Career Development Facilitator certified
2007	NBCC Romania incorporated in Bucharest
2009	Romanian Counseling Association created

Note. Revolution = fall of Communism; PPAC = Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Center; ISPPAC = Inter-School Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Center; NBCC = National Board for Certified Counselors.

dirigintes (loosely similar to a U.S. homeroom teacher) were specially trained by the Institute of Educational Sciences to deliver instruction in this curriculum area.

The Ministry of Labor Law No. 145 (1998) was as important to the development of career counseling services as the Education Law 84/1995 was to school counseling services. The Ministry of Labor Law No. 145 authorized the creation of the National Employment Agency (NEA). Through Information and Guidance Centres and Information and Vocational Counseling Centres, the NEA offered vocational counseling and placement; a job bank; interest, skills, and personality testing; job search training; and entrepreneurial education (Jigau, 2002). Although a master's degree in career counseling is required for NEA service providers, providers often have a master's degree in another field (Szilagyi, 2005). Thus, career counseling is often provided by individuals who may not have counselor training.

Significant advancements in the professionalization of counseling took place as social support services were intro-

duced. For example, formal counselor education programs were established. Leading counseling scholars at the Institute of Educational Sciences, such as Mihai Jigau, developed a code of ethics. For quality assurance purposes, a localized version of the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) certification program was introduced as well. Many of these advancements were facilitated by consultation with counseling bodies such as the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Current Practices

Summarizing current practices in Romania succinctly is challenging due to the lack of standardization. Currently, there is no widely accepted analogue to CACREP's (2009) *2009 Standards*, the American School Counselor Association's (2002) National Model, or the National Career Development Association's (1997) *Career Counseling Competencies*. Therefore, we cautiously provide a general description of what counselors do in Romania and hope to engender further descriptive research.

Educational Settings

School counseling activities vary depending on whether they are delivered within a PPAC/ISPPAC service center or a school and whether they are provided by a counselor or a *diriginte*. Services provided at the PPAC/ISPPAC service centers are typically on an individual counseling basis. As per the Education Law 84/1995, each county must have a PPAC, and schools with more than 800 pupils must have a corresponding ISPPAC. ISPPACs serve as adjunct service centers to schools but are not staffed by the teaching faculty. Session length is at the discretion of the client and service provider because no standard has yet been developed. ISPPAC counselors also provide in-service workshops to school staff (Szilagyi, 2005).

Within the school setting, counseling is provided by school staff during the *diriginte's* class. Similar to what counselors in the United States term *classroom guidance*, the services provided are largely informational and broad rather than tailored to the specific needs of individuals. The topics addressed during these sessions generally are within the personal/social realm of school counseling and include conflict resolution, friendship, hygiene, citizenship, and so on. Furthermore, the MoE classifies *dirigintes* as teachers rather than as counselors. School staff who are classified as counselors are charged with the academic and career development of students schoolwide. Despite large student-to-counselor ratios, school counselors make efforts to work with individuals as well as small and large groups.

Career/Vocational Settings

Career counseling services are provided through government agencies, such as the NEA, and private practitioners. These

services are generally oriented toward workforce entry. In addition to skills-based interventions (e.g., résumé writing consultation, job search skills development), counselors sometimes conduct personality assessments and encourage client self-exploration to identify possible career paths.

Counselor Education

Increased demand for counseling services has led to increased demand for counselor training programs. Although counseling is not recognized by the Romanian government as a unique licensure-level profession, counseling is provided by psychologists, sociologists, social workers, and teachers with additional training. Counselor-specific training is provided at the master's level and is provided in education, psychology, and management faculties. The University of Bucharest's school counseling program, which opened in 1996, was the first counselor-specific training program in Romania. Counselor training is mainly based on theories and techniques developed in the United States and western Europe. Individuals notable for the adaptation of existing resources and the development of new ones for Romanian counselors are Adriana Baban, Mihai Jigau, Gheorghe Tomsa, and George Vaideanu.

Opportunities for Development

Policy and social changes have created many opportunities for the Romanian counseling movement. Currently, there is some confusion regarding the role of counselors vis-à-vis other helping professionals (psychologists, social workers, etc.) and the services each provides. Thus, a clearly defined scope of practice that integrates the tasks identified in various government policies will help Romanian counselors better articulate their professional role. Just as counseling was viewed with skepticism in the United States a few decades ago, Romanian counselors know that many colleagues and consumers are skeptical of Romanian professional counseling. Thus, the leaders of the Romanian counseling movement have decided to address stakeholder concerns with a professionalization strategy that borrows from the experiences of counseling practitioners in the United States. Professionalization efforts in Romania are focused on the simultaneous development of a counseling association, counselor training standards, credentialing mechanism, and expansion of the knowledge base.

Romanian Counseling Association

Currently, Romanian counselors are fragmented and relatively isolated. In the United States, the merger that resulted in the creation of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (now called the American Counseling Association) facilitated the development of a singular professional identity (Remley & Herlihy, 2001; Sweeney, 2001). Romanian counseling leaders have therefore concluded that the creation of a Romanian counseling association is critical to the formation of a professional identity. Although Romanian counselors have

made attempts to create a professional association (i.e., the National Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance), they found this association is slow to grow and in need of a more inclusive scope. In 2009, a small initiative group of practitioners and counselor educators decided to create the Romanian Counseling Association, under the supervision of NBCC Romania. The association created a draft of a code of ethics and stated the following as goals: set training and practice standards, disseminate a body of knowledge, and organize advocacy activities.

Standardized Counselor Training

The work of organizations such as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and CACREP has helped professional counseling advocates describe the training that characterizes the profession in the United States. Although there is some similarity in Romanian career counselor training programs that have adopted the GCDF framework, programs with other areas of emphasis, such as school and psychological counseling, are also training counselors. Training standards and competencies that reflect a broader range of expertise will be needed as a foundation to foster the continued development of the profession.

Counselor Credentialing

Many of the identity and quality problems that the Romanian counseling community is facing could be solved by introducing a national certification. A clear set of education requirements that include field experience, assessment and supervision course work, as well as adherence to a code of ethics could facilitate description of the professional group. A national certificate in counseling would also allow the members of the various specialties to call themselves counselors regardless of the context in which they practice.

Knowledge Base

A significant need for the continued development of counseling is the development of a unique knowledge base. Although there is some research and other scholarly literature from the Institute of Educational Sciences and university professors, widespread dissemination of their findings is lacking. The introduction of a national journal would facilitate the dissemination of current research and provide information about new techniques and strategies.

Romanian counselors may also continue to use dissemination methods currently in use, such as the translation of select counseling texts into the local language, the invitation of foreign specialists to deliver lectures and workshops, and counseling faculty and student exchanges.

Conclusion

The growth of counseling services and counseling as a profession in Romania has progressed at an increasingly rapid pace since 1995 (Peteanu, 1997). This growth has been spurred by

the critical need for social, educational, and career/vocational support services following the fall of Communism in 1989 (Szilagyi, 2005; Watts, 1997). The transition from a Communist system to a free market system has resulted in significant changes to how education and career/vocational services are accessed by the average Romanian citizen. At the same time, counseling practitioners have been taking steps toward a unique professional identity.

The way in which counseling, both as a series of service programs and as a profession, has been developed is similar to the strategy used in the United States. Initial development has taken place in educational and career/vocational counseling. As services have gained increased public and governmental support, the need for standards characteristic of professionalization (e.g., training standards, ethical codes, credentialing) has become more evident. Recent activities by the leaders of the burgeoning Romanian counseling profession have focused on improving the quality of services provided and in promoting counselors as a unique professional group. The ongoing series of changes in Romanian society suggest that counseling will continue to grow in the foreseeable future.

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