

To: WACAC Executive Board
From: Steven Mercer, Ed.D.
Date: March 19, 2014
Re: Independent Educational Consultant Taskforce Executive Summary

IEC Executive Summary

Background

WACAC is one of the largest regional affiliates of NACAC. Representing California and Nevada, we are currently over 1700 active members strong. College admission personnel make up the largest percentage of our members. For many years, high school counselors were the second largest group of WACAC members. But just this year, Independent Educational Consultant (IEC) members are virtually equal in number to high school professionals.

In the five years prior to this, WACAC had already seen an increase in the number of IECs applying for membership, attending conferences, volunteering for committees, taking on leadership roles, and joining the WACAC sponsored summer college tour. While we are excited about this new wave of professional engagement in our association, there are a number of challenges this presents. Questions about WACAC membership, professional development, ethics, professional competencies, and relationships between IEC members and school-based or college members were raised at Board Meetings and were more and more frequently factors in decisions made by the Board.

Taskforce

In response to these developments, WACAC President Robynne Royster convened a special Taskforce on IECs. In fall 2014 she asked WACAC Board Member Dr. Steven Mercer to Chair the Taskforce.

The first activity of the Taskforce began with a presentation at the Annual Conference of the Independent Educational Consultants Association in San Diego, CA on November 15, 2013. Deren Finks, Steven Pultz, Steven Mercer, and the CEO of the IECA, Mark Sklarow discussed the recent developments within WACAC, the field-at-large, and what the future may hold for the role of IECs in the world of college admission counseling.

Immediately after the November 2013 IECA conference Dr. Mercer convened a working group of counseling professionals to design and administer a survey for all WACAC members. The working group is comprised of:

Deren Finks
Jeana Kawamura
Ester Lopez
Stephanie Meade
Steven Mercer
Robynne Royster
Jenny Umhofer

Survey

The Taskforce designed a 32-question survey that was administered electronically to all 1700+ members. The total response rate was over 30%. Respondents who were IECs made up slightly fewer than 50%. School-based counselors and college members together made up just over 50% of respondents.

Summary Survey Results

WACAC Membership

- 70% agree that **WACAC should have minimum requirements** for college consultants in private practice.
- The majority of respondents agree that **the following minimum requirements are important** (Scale of 1 to 8, 8 = most important).

Hold a bachelor's degree or higher.	7.54
Be a current member of one of the following: Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA), Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), or National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC).	6.24
Demonstrate experience as an educational consultant (1 year minimum)	6.11
Attend WACAC new Independent Counselor member orientation within a year of joining	6.26

Respondents indicated **the following minimum requirements are moderately important**

Demonstrate experience as a high school counselor, college admissions officer, or college counselor at a non-profit (1 year minimum).	5.31
Enrolled in a college counseling certificate program with intent to complete.	5.78
Past attendance at a college admissions conference within the last 18 months, and a minimum of 10 college visits within the last 18 months.	5.64

- 61% of Respondents Agree that WACAC should have an **Associate Level of membership**.
- 85% Agree that **WACAC should be an entry point** for professional development.
- 93% Agree that **WACAC should be the organization that brings together college consultants in private practice, school-based counselors, and college admission professionals together to collaborate in helping students reach their higher education goals**.

High School Counselor Perspectives

- Most high school counselors (79.9%) reported collaborating with a college consultant in private practice in the past.

- While 8.2% of high school counselors were “completely satisfied” and 10.4% “not at all satisfied” with their experiences working with a college consultant in private practice, 65.6% reported being at least “somewhat satisfied.”
- When asked how they felt about students at their schools working with consultants, the majority of high school counselors (57.6%) said it depends on the consultant and 9.3% said it depends on the student. The remaining responses were more negative than positive: 7% felt positive, 13.2% felt neutral, and 12.6% felt negative.
- When asked how they prefer to interact with consultants who are working with the same students, 43% of high school counselors prefer open communication (after all appropriate waivers/authorizations are signed by parents), while 34% of counselors want to be aware that a student is working with a consultant but do not want any interaction with him/her. 31.3% said they prefer to interact only as needed, and 8.8% prefer no interaction.

College Admission Officer Perspectives

- Most college admissions officers (78%) report having collaborated with a college consultant in private practice.
- While 8.3% of college admissions officers were “completely satisfied” and 1.2% “not at all satisfied” with their experiences working with a college consultant in private practice, 79.7% reported being at least “somewhat satisfied.”
- Almost all college admissions respondents (95.8%) prefer to interact with college consultants by answering questions about their school and programs. More than half (56.8%) report being open to discussing an individual student with a consultant before the student applies and 36.8% would discuss an individual applicant.

College Consultant Perspectives

- College consultants are very interested in volunteering in high schools by offering workshops and presentations to students (78.3%), offering workshops and presentations to parents (80.2%), and assisting schools counselors as needed (73.6%). Fewer (43.4%) are interested in mentoring other consultants in private practice or school-based counselors. Only 6.6% are not interested in volunteering.
- When college consultants in private practice were asked how they have interacted with school counselors and college admissions personnel, 39% said only at conferences, 69.3% said by working together on a student/client, and 65.9% said “other professional collaboration.” Only 2.9% said they never interacted with these professionals.
- While 10.1% of college consultants were “completely satisfied” and 7.3% “not at all satisfied” with their experiences working with school based counselors, 76.6% reported being at least “somewhat satisfied.”

- While 14.7% of college consultants were “completely satisfied” and less than one percent “not at all satisfied” with their experiences working with college admissions officers, almost all (90.3%) reported being at least “somewhat satisfied.”

Recommendations

- Membership – There are opportunities and challenges regarding WACAC’s membership procedures. We recommend that the Membership Committee begin to modify and implement new membership requirements for IECs that better match the needs of the association and align with the survey results of the membership-at-large.
- Professional Development – There are also significant opportunities for all WACAC members to develop a better understanding of each other’s domain and improve the work we do together to help the students of California and Nevada. We recommend that a sub-committee of the Professional Development Committee be charged with designing and implementing targeted professional development opportunities for IECs.
- Strategic Planning – We recommend that specific measures of success for the above initiatives be developed by the WACAC President and communicated to the responsible committees. Better integration of IEC members into the ongoing work of the association should be a part of the annual strategic planning process.
- One Year Review – In one year, we recommend that the WACAC Board review the progress made on the above recommendations and consider new initiatives at that time.