Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Counseling

Sara X. Carpenter

M.Ed. School Counseling, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2013
B.A. Communications, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2011

How School Counselors Cope with Student Suicide: A Qualitative Study

Date: November 13, 2018
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Place: 401 Marillac Hall

Abstract
Recognizing that school counselors will likely encounter the tragedy of youth suicide, many counselor educator programs focus on identification of suicidal ideation and prevention, but the field of school counseling remains largely under-equipped regarding how to cope with the aftermath of student suicide. In an effort to expand the qualitative research within the profession on how best to educate, support, and implement suicide postvention strategies, there remained a need to explore the experience of the school counselor in the aftermath of such tragedy. This study addressed how school counselors who were trained in CACREP-accredited programs experience the response to student suicide. Eight practicing school counselors who experienced the loss of a student to suicide were interviewed using a revised version of Seidman’s three-part model. Each participant took part in two individual 45-90 minutes long interviews at least a week apart. The qualitative study was guided by three questions: What is the school counselor’s experience of student suicide? What ways did the school counselor cope with the experience of student suicide? And lastly, what effect did suicide have the life of the school counselor, both professionally and personally? Data analysis was conducted utilizing Giorgi’s (2009) Descriptive Phenomenological Method. Six essential themes were described by participants forming the structural description of their experience of student suicide: (1) Historical Context: Early Experiences with Trauma and/or Loss, (2) Personal History with Counseling, (3) Training in Graduate Program, (4) Response of School/District, (5) Coping Reactions and Related Predictors, and (6) Shift in Perspective on Trauma and/or Loss. A potentially predictive model detailing factors that contributed to higher levels of adaptive coping in school counselors post tragedy is presented and discussed.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Mary Lee Nelson, Ph.D. – Chairperson
Emily Brown, Ph.D.
R. Rocco Cottone, Ph.D.
Wolfgang Althof, Ph.D.