



VISTAS Online:

A Unique Tool for Career Services Practitioners

By Garry R. Walz and Jeanne C. Bleuer

The tool box of today's career services practitioner overflows with effective and practical tools, many of which have been developed *for* career specialists *by* career specialists. *VISTAS Online*, an ACA-sponsored electronic database is a valuable resource that fits this model.

It has become commonplace for persons viewing the growth of the world, specifically the United States, to stress the demographic changes that are occurring. Career services specialists, who deal directly with clients who reflect those changes in terms of ethnicity, culture, personal preferences, etc., have the challenging task of assisting individuals not only to cope with the emerging changes, but also to fashion life/career plans that are viable for the world to be. Thus, a bag of professional tools that were appropriate in a stable and placid world is clearly inappropriate for today's rapidly changing world. *VISTAS* addresses the need for new tools by placing a high priority on the solicitation and distribution of up-to-date articles that describe programs and practices that have worked for other counselors and career services specialists in a wide variety of diverse situations.

How VISTAS Began

VISTAS began as a print-only publication designed to capture the professional and practical wisdom of presenters at the 2004 ACA Annual Convention in Kansas City. The goal of *VISTAS*, as described in *VISTAS: Perspectives on Counseling 2004* (Walz & Yep, 2004, p. ix) was to build a "user-driven ACA-sponsored database of counseling resources that will capture the best ideas and practices of ACA members." In 2006, NCDA became the first ACA Division to become a "VISTAS Partner" when the NCDA Board approved the solicitation of *VISTAS* submissions from presenters at the national NCDA conferences. This has insured that a significant number of manuscripts that focus on practical approaches to facilitating career development are reviewed for inclusion in each year's edition of *VISTAS*.

continued on page 5

VISTAS Online *continued from page 3*

Today, VISTAS is a venue for professional, respectful, and vigorous idea exchange. This innovative resource is a tool that every career services practitioner can use. Although print versions of VISTAS were published in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, and 2009, the primary focus of VISTAS has been to create an online database reflecting the broad range of topics of interest as gleaned largely through annual convention presentations. Contributors are primarily professional counselors in all settings, counselor educators and supervisors, graduate students, and program administrators.

How VISTAS Online Has Evolved

The development of VISTAS has been a dynamic process, with significant enhancements being implemented each year. For the 2004 version of VISTAS, all 33 articles were rigorously selected by a peer review committee; and both a print and CD version were produced.

In 2005, only a print version was produced; and the editors selected 71 articles to be included. The cost of printing such a large publication proved to be prohibitive; but the number of good submissions continued to increase. So, in 2006, the editors selected 52 articles for the print publication and another 60 for "online only" inclusion. In 2006, VISTAS Online was created, and the full-text of the published articles from all three years as well as the 2006 "online only" articles were entered into the online database. In 2007, VISTAS went to "online only" and added 29 articles to the database. In 2008 and 2009, a rigorous peer-review process was established, and another 152 articles were selected for inclusion in the database. In addition, print versions were published containing the top 30 articles from each year.

VISTAS 2010 marked the official beginning of VISTAS as an annual digital publication and brought the total number of full-text articles in

the VISTAS Online database to just under 500.

VISTAS is supported by a small financial grant from ACA, collaborative support from "VISTAS Partners" such as NCDA, volunteer reviewers, and most importantly, the intellectual labor of authors.

Special Features of VISTAS Online

A special feature of VISTAS is that it embraces the new and increased importance of the need for all organizations and individuals to "go green." By utilizing a digital only format and stressing the importance of writing succinctly with a high priority on focusing on practical applications, VISTAS has shown its "true green" colors. This focus is consistent with the views expressed by Deneen Pennington's (2010) mission for NCDA to become "a greener association."

While VISTAS has become a regular component of the ACA family of publications, as a "digital

monograph," it differs from the other publications in both content and format. Among its distinct features are the following:

- Its ongoing influx of articles offers the user the advantage of access to new and up-to-date ideas and practices.
- Because the authors of the articles are ACA and/or NCDA members, the articles reflect the needs and interests of the many diverse and emerging sub-cultures served by career specialists.
- Its policy of emphasizing its acceptance rate rather than its rejection rate stimulates reluctant potential authors to submit articles knowing that VISTAS' cadre of empowering editors work to help new authors write papers acceptable for publication.
- It encourages the use of articles for counselor education and in-service training through its

continued on page 6



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VISTAS Online *continued from page 5*

- minimally restrictive copyright policy. If you like it, use it – just give appropriate credit to ACA and the source (VISTAS).
- The rapid expansion of access points to the Internet means that access to the useful resources in VISTAS is no further away than your laptop and a WiFi hot spot.
 - The often repeated policy of requiring all authors to stress the practical implications of their research and experience means that users typically come away from reading VISTAS articles with a mind-boggling collection of new ideas and resources that they can use immediately. (It probably means better interventions, too!)
 - Generations X, Y, and the coming Z all agree on the need to avoid wasted time. VISTAS responds to that need by providing a user-

friendly, menu-driven format that allows users to locate articles within each year by title, topic, and author. A newly installed “Topic Sort” feature allows users to search for topics across all seven years of input. Additionally, users who access the database through the ACA online library can use its search engine to locate articles by keywords and phrases.

- There is more than one kind of green! In addition to the environmental green discussed above, there is the kind that you sparingly put into a purse or wallet and never have enough of. VISTAS doesn’t eat into your green reserve. No expensive books or subscriptions to buy or contracts to sign! Be a member of ACA or NCDA, and it’s yours to reach for (electronically, of course).

Accessing the VISTAS Online Database

VISTAS is funded by ACA and was developed as a member benefit for ACA members. Therefore, the main entry point for accessing the VISTAS Online database is through the ACA Online Library on the ACA website. To access VISTAS Online, go to www.counseling.org and click on the RESOURCES button in the center of the top navigation bar. Once on the ACA RESOURCES page, scroll down to “VISTAS” and click the VISTAS Online button. The home page includes announcements about what is available and what is coming, with links to more resources and the Topic Sort page.

Submitting Papers to VISTAS

The over-arching characteristic of VISTAS that distinguishes it from other professional literature databases is that the articles it contains have been written primarily by practitioners for practitioners. Accessing the resources in VISTAS is very useful to career services specialists, but contributing your own ideas, research, and experience can bring even greater benefits. The VISTAS email inbox is filled with glowing testimonials from authors who describe their pleasure in developing their articles for publications and, in many cases, the unexpected outcomes (e.g. networking opportunities) that have occurred as a result of having their articles available to other practitioners.

As indicated above, VISTAS originally focused on soliciting papers from presenters at national conferences. However, now authors are encouraged to also submit non-conference-related “unsolicited” papers that meet the VISTAS criteria for selection. Papers submitted by October 31st are evaluated by the VISTAS peer review panel each November/December for possible inclusion in the following year’s edition. Specific guidelines for

The advertisement features a hand-drawn diagram on a chalkboard. At the top, it says "Job & Career Accelerator™". The diagram shows a cycle of four steps: "EXPLORE CAREERS" at the top, "GET HIRED" in the center, "CREATE RESUMES" at the bottom right, and "SEARCH JOBS" at the bottom left. Arrows connect these steps in a clockwise cycle. To the right of the diagram, it says "The Fast Track to Getting Hired!" with two orange arrows pointing right. Below the diagram, it says "Call for a Free Trial. 800.295.9556". At the bottom, it says "www.jobandcareeraccelerator.com" and "LEARNINGEXPRESS, LLC" with a logo of a lightbulb. Below the logo, it says "800.295.9556 • sales@learningexpressllc.com".

preparing and submitting papers can be found under "VISTAS Authors" on the Counseling Outfitters website (www.counselingoutfitters.com).

If you have developed a practice or program that works for a particular population or have conducted research that has practical implications, you are strongly urged to submit a paper to VISTAS. By doing so, you can share your knowledge and resources with others and communicate to others your area(s) of expertise. Many VISTAS authors have found that their VISTAS articles have led to valuable networking with other professionals who share their interests.

If you have a program accepted for presentation at an NCDA Conference, you will receive a formal invitation to submit a paper based on that program. However, VISTAS now accepts "unsolicited" papers on a year-round basis. The only timeline to keep in mind is that the review period takes place each year during November and December. Therefore, if you want to be considered for the next volume (e.g. VISTAS 2011), you must email your paper to VISTASOnline@Comcast.net by October 31, 2010.

Your paper will have a much greater chance of impressing reviewers and being accepted if it is in as close to "perfection" in terms of content and writing quality as possible. However, as stated in #3 above, a major goal of VISTAS is to help practicing professionals who have useful ideas and resources to share with others to develop papers that are suitable for professional publication.

Conclusion

Suffice to say, VISTAS is a highly useful tool that can be added to any career services specialist's bag of resources. To take advantage of what VISTAS offers and join in the greening of NCDA, which Pennington and Schwallie-Giddis speak to in the Winter, 2009, issue of

Career Developments, NCDA members need to take two steps.

First, they need to access the VISTAS Online database on a regular basis to locate articles that address topics relevant to their specific needs and interests. The menu-driven format allows users to search by topic, author, and title within each of the seven years currently covered in the database. A special topic search across all years is also available.

Second, they need to review their own programs and practices and identify ideas and resources (original or adaptations) that have been particularly useful to them in servicing their clients. Then they need to access the VISTAS Submission Guidelines on www.counselingoutfitters.com and prepare and submit one or more articles describing these programs or practices to VISTAS. Articles can be submitted at any time, but need to be emailed to VISTASOnline@comcast.net by October 31, 2010, to be considered for inclusion in VISTAS 2011.

Each year, authors whose papers have been accepted for inclusion in VISTAS Online are invited to attend an invitation-only reception held during the ACA national conference. This is a highly popular and joyous event in which authors have the opportunity to network with one another as well as hear about new developments by ACA and NCDA administrators and officers. A new feature planned for the 2011 reception will be awards for best written papers. All authors will receive a special "VISTAS Author" ribbon at the time of their registration.

Not many tools offer users a chance to add to the tool, celebrate it at an annual reception, and recognize quality through an award. Best of all this tool will continue to be developed for career specialists by career specialists!

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