

## Foreword

### You and ACA: Partners in Knowledge Utilization

Counselors today are assuming enormous responsibilities for assisting clients of all ages and backgrounds with widely disparate interests and needs. Through their preservice counselor education programs, they are prepared for some of what they are called upon to do. However, much of the information they need has been acquired through in-service training and their own professional development and learning initiatives. Struggling to cope with expanding caseloads and diminished resources, counselors often have difficulty finding the time to locate and acquire the information and resources crucial to their ability to relate and be helpful to their clients. Even the most resourceful counselors are frequently reduced to a hit- or-miss approach, reaching out for whatever they can find, but having to resort to using what's available – even though it may be outdated or not exactly on target for their needs.

It is in this atmosphere of a compelling need for reliable and relevant resources that ACA has played a major and increasingly important information-provider role. ACA-sponsored journals, an active and comprehensive publications program, and national conventions focused on high-priority topics, online courses, and learning institutes are just some of the information and training services offered to members. As judged by comments received by ACA, these resources are helping counselors make a difference in the lives of the clients they serve.

However effective ACA has been as an information provider in the past, it has been the view of ACA staff and recent ACA presidents that the association should work to move more fully into the information age. The goal is to use new and emerging electronic technology and ACA's enhanced computer capability to move ACA's information delivery from a bricks-and-mortar library to a virtual library that members can access anywhere anytime. Under the leadership of ACA Executive Director Richard Yep, an initiative has been launched to create an "Ask ACA" capacity that will provide members information and direct answers to their questions as well as guidance in accessing other relevant ACA resources. The point man in implementing the *Ask ACA* concept is ACA Associate Executive Director for Professional Affairs David Kaplan. He is putting the pieces together that will allow

every member to *Ask ACA* and receive the information he or she needs – whether it's a direct answer to a question or guidance in accessing ACA's virtual library. Kaplan is seeking to seamlessly bring together important historical and existing ACA documents with emerging information and resources focusing on contemporary issues and effective counselor interventions. Basic to the implementation of the *Ask ACA* concept are 10 goals:

1. Have the system function electronically.
2. Have a single point of contact at ACA for counselors with questions.
3. Draw information and resources from a multitude of sources, e.g., literature searches, empirical research, best practices data, former ERIC/CASS resources.
4. Include historically valuable as well as current cutting edge and best practices materials.
5. Actively solicit information and resources from practicing counselors.
6. Minimize cost to the user.
7. Adopt an experimental and pragmatic approach, and incorporate that which satisfies users.
8. Conduct regular surveys to determine what's right and what needs fixing in the system.
9. Use a virtual library format that places information in easy-to-search-and-retrieve categories.
10. Most importantly, operate under the philosophy that every member can be both a contributor and a user of the system. This is not an elitist system, but a system designed to serve all users, whoever they are.

ACA and Counseling Outfitters, LLC, will be holding informal focus sessions at their booths during the 2005 ACA Convention in Atlanta. Input from these and other meetings with ACA members will be used to launch the *Ask ACA* prototype in the summer. Member comments and suggestions are always welcome, especially now in the formative stage.

## ***VISTAS – A Key Element in Ask ACA***

A centerpiece in the *Ask ACA* system is the annual production of *VISTAS*. Its receptivity to articles stressing new ideas and practices provides a highly useful input for the *Ask ACA* database. By opening it to any and all ACA members who wish to contribute, it focuses on where the members are and what they need and want. This is especially important with the demise of the original ERIC system and its focus on providing users with practical resources.

Garry Walz and Jeanne Bleuer, formerly codirectors of the ERIC/CASS Clearinghouse and now codirectors of Counseling Outfitters, LLC, are working closely with ACA to maximize what of the previous ERIC/CASS virtual libraries can be imported into ACA's new virtual library, thus making the best of ERIC counseling resources available to ACA members.

*Ask ACA* is an initiative in process. Members' interest and participation in *VISTAS* will help to determine how much and how fast the system is built. As ACA President Sam Gladding has so aptly observed, the interaction between new members and older members of ACA, as reflected in what they contribute to *VISTAS*, can result in a synergy that will benefit all members of the counseling profession.

As a user-focused initiative, *Ask ACA* needs ACA members to identify what they want in the system and how it should work. The complete system will not occur overnight, but there is a strong organizational commitment to seeing it become a working reality. Please share with us your reactions and suggestions, and add your brick to the walkway of viable counseling resources that ACA is building for and by its members.

Garry R. Walz and Richard K. Yep