The contents of this module were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

NOTE: Funding for TACE 8 ended on December 31, 2014. Materials can be used freely for their intended purposes.
How to Use the Learning Modules:

The learning modules are designed to provide rehabilitation personnel with relevant, applicable knowledge pertaining to the rehabilitation process. The ultimate goal is to assure that all rehabilitation personnel are adequately trained and prepared to provide high quality rehabilitation services to people with disabilities.

These modules can be utilized in a variety of ways: new counselor training (individual study or with supervisor mentoring); professional development or refresher for current rehabilitation professionals or CRC study guides.


Steps for Successful Completion:

Content for "Steps for Successful Completion" has been deleted as this section is no longer relevant with the conclusion of TACE 8 cooperative agreement between U.S. Department of Education and the University of Northern Colorado.

Proceed to page 1.
Rationale

Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling is a unique profession requiring a broad range of skills and knowledge. It is helpful for the vocational rehabilitation counselor to understand the roles and duties of the rehabilitation counselor, and how counseling in vocational rehabilitation differs from other types of counseling.
Goal:

- To provide an overview of the roles and duties of a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

Learning Objectives

- To differentiate between rehabilitation counseling and other counseling professions.
- To gain familiarity with the full range of duties of the rehabilitation counselor.
- To understand the duties and role of the vocational rehabilitation counselor within the context of consumer rights and choice.

Topics Covered

- Definitions of Rehabilitation Counseling.
- Duties and roles of the rehabilitation counselor.
- The role of the VR counselor and informed consumer choice.
- Paradigm shifts and the role of the VR counselor.
What is Rehabilitation Counseling?

Jaques (1970) offered a traditional description of rehabilitation counseling as a process where the counselor works collaboratively with the consumer to understand existing problems, barriers, and potentials, in order to facilitate the client's effective use of personal and environmental resources for career, personal, social, and community adjustment following a disability.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification provides a contemporary definition of rehabilitation counseling as:

“a systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the application of the counseling process. The process involves communication, goal setting, and beneficial growth and change through self-advocacy, psychological, vocational, social, and behavioral interventions. (Leahy, 1996, pp. 28-29).”

How is Rehabilitation Counseling Different from Other Forms of Counseling?

“The rehabilitation counselor has a specialized knowledge of disabilities and environmental factors that interact with disabilities and the world of work” (Jenkins, Patterson, & Szymanski, 1992). “This specialized knowledge differentiates rehabilitation counseling from other counseling fields and makes it a profession as
What is the Rehabilitation Counselor’s Role?

The rehabilitation counselor’s role and function has been thoroughly researched over the past several decades. Research has documented change in the rehabilitation counselor’s role and function as an adaptation to increased demands for accountability, new technologies, and the consumer empowerment movement.

Rubin and Roessler (1995) state that, “to fulfill the responsibility of their job role, rehabilitation counselors must carry out a) case finding, b) intake, c) diagnosis, d) eligibility determination, e) plan development and completion, f) service provision, g) placement and follow-up, and h) post-employment services” (p. 215). Rubin and Roessler further describe the rehabilitation counselor role and function based upon data obtained from national studies on the roles and functions of certified rehabilitation counselors using a five-factor Job Task Inventory (JTI). The results of the studies indicated that affective counseling, vocational assessment, vocational counseling, management and planning, job development and job placement were all crucial elements of a vocational rehabilitation counselor’s job.

The JTI provides a breakdown of basic job tasks in the basic rehabilitation counselor skill areas. The basic job tasks include:

A. Affective Counseling:

Affective counseling has several purposes within vocational rehabilitation counseling including the following:
1. Reduces the client's anxiety by helping him or her face and realistically assess problems that seem insurmountable.

2. Counsels with the client to help him or her achieve an emotional and intellectual acceptance of the limitations imposed by the disability.

3. Counsels clients to help him or her understand or change their feelings about themselves and others.

4. Discusses the client's interpersonal relationships in order to help him or her better understand their nature and quality. (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, p. 215)

B. Vocational Assessment:

The purpose of vocational assessment is to provide the counselor with an operational understanding of the components of a comprehensive diagnostic profile of the clients current and potential functioning in physical, educational/vocational, and psychosocial areas. Profile accuracy is essential for service planning. The major vocational assessment tasks identified were:

1. Uses test results as a diagnostic aid in gaining a thorough understanding of the whole client.

2. Interprets results of work evaluation to clients.
3. Consults with experts in a particular field prior to recommending a training/educational program to determine the potential for client placement in the field. (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, p. 216)

C. Vocational Counseling:

Tasks related to rehabilitation counselor vocational counseling responsibilities include:

1. Counsels with clients regarding educational and vocational implications of test and interview information.

2. Suggests to the client occupational areas compatible with the vocational, psychological, and social information gathered to improve the appropriateness of his or her rehabilitation choice.

3. Examines with the client the consequence of his or her disability and its vocational significance.

4. Explores with the client his or her vocational assets and liabilities in order to assure a realistic understanding and acceptance of them.

5. Recommends occupational and/or educational materials for clients to explore vocational alternatives. (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, p.216)

D. Case Management and Planning:

Case Management and planning involve the capability to utilize and coordinate
multiple resources to resolve specific consumer problems. Case management tasks of the vocational rehabilitation counselor include:

1. Develops a rehabilitation plan with the client.

2. Monitors client progress toward attaining the vocational goal specified in the written rehabilitation plan.

3. Coordinates the activities of all agencies involved in a rehabilitation plan to assure optimal benefits to clients.

4. Establishes timetables for performing assorted rehabilitation services.

5. Refers clients for medical evaluation.

6. Refers clients for psychological evaluation.

7. Refers clients to training facilities for development of vocational skills.

8. Explains available rehabilitation entitlement benefits to clients. (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, p. 217)

E. Job Development and Placement:

Discrepancies exist regarding the importance of job development and placement activities in the role of VR counselors. A study by Rubin, Matkin, Ashley, Beardsley,
May, Onstott, and Puckett (1984) showed that the following roles and functions were rated as important by counselors in state rehabilitation agencies but not by counselors in private nonprofit rehabilitation facilities, mental health or mental retardation centers, and general or mental health settings:

1. Visits employers to solicit job openings for particular clients.

2. Discusses the client's work with an employer and enumerates specific tasks the client can do.

3. Secures information about the client's performance on and adjustment to his or her new job from the employer and the client.


Research, however, suggests that the following placement activities are an important part of the counselor's job regardless of the setting:

1. Uses supportive counseling techniques to prepare clients emotionally for the stress of job hunting.

2. Instructs clients about ways to locate jobs.

3. Interviews an unmotivated client, perhaps over several meetings, to develop his or her motivation for remunerative employment.
4. Discusses with the client alternative ways to respond to employer questions about his or her disability.

5. Role plays an employment interview, and reviews common employer questions to reduce the client's anxiety about job hunting. (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, p. 217)

**Current Definition of the Rehabilitation Counselor Role**

The recent definition of the rehabilitation counselor's role is provided by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) which identifies the following:

- assessment and appraisal;
- diagnosis and treatment planning;
- career (vocational) counseling;
- individual and group counseling treatment interventions focused on facilitating adjustments to medical and psychological impact of disability;
- case management, referral, and service coordination;
- program evaluation and research;
- interventions to remove environmental and attitudinal barriers;
• consultation services among multiple parties and regulatory systems;

• job analysis, job development, and placement services, including assistance with employment and job accommodations; and

• the provision of consultation about, and access to, rehabilitation technology (http://www.crccertification.com).

The recent CRCC definition strongly emphasizes job development and job placement as one of the primary responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor. This is consistent with the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, the 1997 Code of Federal Regulations, and vocational rehabilitation program priority emphasis on employment outcomes. There is a clear expectation from congress, consumers and vocational rehabilitation program leadership that the rehabilitation counselor will view job development- job placement as a major job duty and will fulfill the responsibility in a manner that incorporates consumer informed choice and that facilitates quality employment in an occupation which offers job retention and career advancement opportunity.

What is the VR Counselor’s Role and Responsibility Today in Relation to Consumer Informed Choice?

The counselor's role and responsibility for facilitating consumer informed choice is outlined in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. The requirements, policies, and procedures regarding informed choice are stated in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 (Section 102(d)) as follows:
Each designated State agency, in consultation with the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has such a council, shall, consistent with section 100(a)(3)(C), develop and implement written policies and procedures that enable each individual who is an applicant for or eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation services under this title to exercise informed choice throughout the vocational rehabilitation process carried out under this title, including policies and procedures that require the designated State agency:

(1) to inform each such applicant and eligible individual (including students with disabilities who are making the transition from programs under the responsibility of an educational agency to programs under the responsibility of the designated state unit), through appropriate modes of communication, about the availability of, and opportunities to exercise, informed choice, including the availability of support services for individuals with cognitive or other disabilities who require assistance in exercising informed choice, throughout the vocational rehabilitation process;

(2) to assist applicants and eligible individuals in exercising informed choice in decisions related to the provision of assessment services under this title;

(3) to develop and implement flexible procurement policies and methods that facilitate the provision of services, and that afford eligible individuals meaningful choices among the methods used to procure services, under this title;

(4) to provide or assist eligible individuals in acquiring information that enables those individuals to exercise informed choice under this title in the selection of-
a. the employment outcome;

b. the specific vocational rehabilitation services needed to achieve the employment outcome;

c. the entity that will provide the services;

d. the employment setting and the settings in which the services will be provided; and

e. the methods available for procuring the services; and

(5) to ensure that the availability and scope of informed choice provided under this section is consistent with the obligation of the designated State agency. (p. 220-221)

Fry (1995) identifies additional counselor responsibilities related to informed choice including the following:

• To use his/her valuable counseling skills to encourage and support the reluctant, hesitant, insecure, doubtful, and defeated consumer to become a partner.

• To make certain the consumer is aware of all relevant options.

• To share responsibility for identifying options with the consumer - “partnership at work.”
• To be aware of the consumer's dream - to seek it out if it's not apparent.

• To involve the parent if the consumer is a minor, or a legal guardian if the consumer has one, or any other person selected by the consumer in the choice process.

• To recognize that, in a partnership, the consumer has an equal responsibility to do the “research” necessary to identify and analyze options.

• To make certain the consumer is aware of the implication of each option.

• To consider options from the consumer’s point of view.

• To understand choices are not “informed” choices unless they are based on the pool of options remaining after the possibilities have been identified, considered, and the less preferable options discarded by the consumer.

• To give the consumer the benefit of the doubt when things are “iffy.”

• To be sure the choices consumers make are truly their choices; that choices have not actually been made for them; or that consumers have not been consciously or unconsciously conditioned by a family member, guardian, teacher, or other well-meaning individual.

• To allow and encourage the consumer to stretch, to take some risks, to actualize potential.
• To avoid letting severity of disability stand in the way of believing the consumer has choices and the choosing should still be the consumer's, and to remember that there are accommodations and high-tech solutions to many difficult obstacles and it may be only a matter of seeking them out.

• To include the effect of wages on benefits now being received as they assist consumers in making informed choices.

• To advocate on behalf of the consumer when needed to ensure access to other programs and resources.

• To remember that every consumer is different and that individuals who share the same characteristics, whether gender, race, age, culture, or disability, are unique and should not be stereotyped.

• To say “no” when “no” is needed and to help the consumer understand that the universe of choices is not infinite. It is important for the consumer to understand that funds, availability of resources, danger to self or others, legalities, or the job market may limit some choices.

• To always be learning and growing so that both consumers and counselors bring state-of-the art knowledge to their role in partnerships.

• To share and to dare and to care. (p. 46-47)

What Changes and/or Paradigm Shifts are Impacting VR Counselors Now?
Contemporary rehabilitation philosophy is reflected in several paradigm shifts. These shifts include:

- a movement from an individual problem-solving approach to an ecological solution-focused approach;
- from institutionalization to community participation;
- from charity to civil rights (empowerment);
- from segregated vocational training models to community-integrated or community-supported employment and independent living models; and
- from a medical model with an illness pathology focus to a wellness model focusing on development and life stages. (Maki & Riggar, 1997, p. 5)

**Summary-Conclusion**

This learning unit has defined the term rehabilitation counseling and has described the rehabilitation counselor's role, past and present. Also, how and why the counselor's role has changed in recent years was presented. Rehabilitation philosophy has changed in response to cultural influences. One of the notable changes has been the shift towards consumer empowerment and choice. The consumer-counselor relationship has also changed significantly as a result. The counselor's role has moved from that of the “expert” to that of consultant/ information provider. In addition, rehabilitation emphasis has shifted from an individually focused medical
model, where the individual with a disability “is examined and treated relative to the extent and prognosis of his or her pathophysiology, impairment, and his or her functional limitations” (Maki & Riggar, 1997, pp. 15-16), to an ecologically focused model that gives equal consideration to the person and the environment. Finally, there has been a highly significant change in employment outcome philosophy within the field of vocational rehabilitation. The traditional successful employment outcome criteria of entry-level employment have shifted to that of employment in occupations with job retention and career advancement potential.

**Food for Thought for Rehabilitation Counselors**

A number of timely statements are found in several publications which provide important reminders for new rehabilitation counselors. A few of these tidbits are listed below for the readers benefit.

<table>
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<th>Information</th>
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<td>The core of rehabilitation counseling is sharing information with specific consumers.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 45)</td>
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<td>All information provided is for the overall purpose of moving the consumer closer toward meaningful and substantial employment.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 45)</td>
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<td>VR frequently assumes that consumers need guidance services and/or counseling. Realistically, some consumers come to VR because VR can pay for goods or service the consumer wants.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 46)</td>
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A great number of individuals with disabilities know where the resources are and do not seek “self adjustment,” “adjustment to disability,” “or guidance.” They know what they want and where they are going; they just need the financial resource to get there.

Consumers and counselors realize that if VR is to help vocationally rehabilitate people with severe disabilities, the system must change to provide professional career counseling and to become career oriented rather than entry-level job oriented.

There is need to help people with disabilities into jobs with a future, not into minimum wage, entry-level positions in the secondary labor market.

Rehabilitation counselors must emphasize career guidance and counseling, with a stress on quality outcomes.

Counseling is at the center of everything a vocational rehabilitation counselor does; it is the central purpose, and everything else follows.

Not all vocational rehabilitation consumers need counseling, but most will need some form of guidance.

Contemporary rehabilitation philosophy advocates for consumer choice and empowerment.

Full consideration must be given to the individual’s right to fail as one potential outcome involved with choice, growth, and risk.
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<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation philosophy embraces a person’s right to choose his or her relationships and goals, both personal and vocational.</td>
<td>(Maki &amp; Riggar, 1997, p. 5)</td>
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<td>The mark of a successful counselor is knowing not only to move forward with the provision of services and diagnostics but also when to seek help.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 25)</td>
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<td>Because rehabilitation services are time limited, and the demands for vocational services in the emerging workplace is likely to be intermittent, counselors and consumers must recognize the need to work together to forge a “working alliance,” with the goal of counseling for “personal flexibility.” Such strategies can help workers with disabilities to become adaptable, marketable, and productive in the new American economy.</td>
<td>(Hope &amp; Rice, 1995, p. 18)</td>
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<td>Career counseling is necessary only for a portion of the consumers. It is for those who have no clear vocational goals or have unrealistic ones.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 52)</td>
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<td>Guidance is an integral part of the rehabilitation process and is provided from referral to closure.</td>
<td>(Corthell, 1993, p. 65)</td>
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<td>For vocational rehabilitation to be a viable, relevant program, it must be shaped with the support of people who use those services. It simply can't be accomplished with the attitude of “we'll do it for them.”</td>
<td>(Fry, 1995, p. 1)</td>
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Consumers who approach VR from the perspective that “they have all the answers” may never know what some options may have been. VR counselors who approach the relationship with consumers from the viewpoint of “I have all the answers” may sadly miss the consumer's dreams.  

(Fry, 1995, p. 2)

Counseling and guidance may be the most meaningful services the VR counselor has to offer - not just services arranged or coordinated through other agencies, not just paying for services, but providing encouragement, support, problem resolution, and encouragement to seek other options and take risks.  

(Fry, 1995, p. 3)

When VR counselors are developing partnership relationships with consumers, they must consider what the consumers expect from them.  

(Fry, 1995, p. 42)

Counselors constantly need to remind themselves that every client is different and that the informed-choice process must be tailored according to those differences.  

(Fry, 1995, p. 43)
References


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