

educated professionals to existing treatment and prevention programs and creating new generation of addiction and prevention professionals who both understood and helped to create evidence-based therapies. Prior to 1998, INCASE based accreditation standards on existing addiction and prevention education programs which displayed high levels of academic rigor and excellence. In 1998, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) published *TAP 21: Addiction Counseling Competencies*, which covers the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of professional practice, and INCASE piloted usage of *TAP 21* as the standard for addiction studies programs nationwide.

NASAC Accreditation

In 2011, after urging from federal agencies, INCASE partnered with NAADAC to create a new academic accreditation organization for higher education addiction studies programs called the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC). By doing so, we hoped to create a single standard for higher education addiction studies programs. NASAC is a single higher education addiction studies accreditation body commissioned to assess U.S. academic programs in addiction studies at regionally accredited institutions of higher education (not including workshop and continuing education programs). It is the only accrediting organization that represents addiction-focused major and minor programs, educators, and practitioners at the association, bachelor's, master's, post-graduate, and doctoral levels.

INCASE members are still active in the accreditation process, with three of six Commissioners, appointed from among INCASE leadership, and an additional INCASE Board Member/Accreditation Committee Chair sitting on the NASAC Advisory Committee. INCASE members also serve as evaluators for the NASAC Accreditation Process and on the INCASE Accreditation Committee. INCASE continues to offer accreditation to international non-U.S. based colleges and universities using similar standards as the original INCASE Accreditation with some integrated modifications made by NASAC.

The Importance of Quality Education from Accredited Institutions

As the professionalization process of addiction counseling has accelerated over the past decades, the growth of graduate-level academic programs in addiction studies has become more rapid and we have more counselors with graduate degrees than ever before.

In response to many the changes happening in our field and the increase in the demand for services, SAMHSA, in collaboration with key stakeholders including NAADAC, released a Model Scope of Practice and Career Ladder for substance use disorder treatment workers in 2011. SAMHSA's Career Ladder, includes four different categories of substance use disorder counselors: (4) Independent Clinical Substance Use Disorder Counselor/Supervisor; (3) Clinical Substance Use Disorder Counselor; (2) Substance Use Disorder Counselor; and (1) Associate Substance Use Disorder Counselor; and a fifth category: Substance Use Disorder Technician. While all of these categories require some level of education, the requirements range from that of a high school diploma or GED for the Substance Use Disorder Technician to a Master's or other post-graduate degree for categories (3) and (4).

This career ladder should not be misinterpreted as a method of shutting out those without college diplomas, but rather as reasonable scopes of practice for each level of education that provide gateways into the profession for everyone with a commitment to assist our clients. During a licensing panel forum at the 2015 California Association for Alcohol and Drug Educators Conference, I made the assertion that licensure (i.e. the career ladder) is not about reducing the number of people inside the tent of addiction counseling, but rather is about deciding who is in charge inside this "tent of recovery."

I personally can speak to those who do not wish the commitment in time, money and effort of an advanced degree. My career plan was to complete a Bachelor's degree in Addiction Studies, and begin my counseling career. I found myself dissatisfied with the job opportunities at that level, and moved on to more advanced degrees, but that choice was personal, and required the commitment of several personal resources which others simply may not be in a position to make. Part of our professional balance is deciding which level of the career ladder fits within the lives we wish to lead. If we lack that balance, we cannot be the best counselors for our clients. The "tent" surrounding this career ladder is meant to have a place for everyone who has a commitment to assisting our clients

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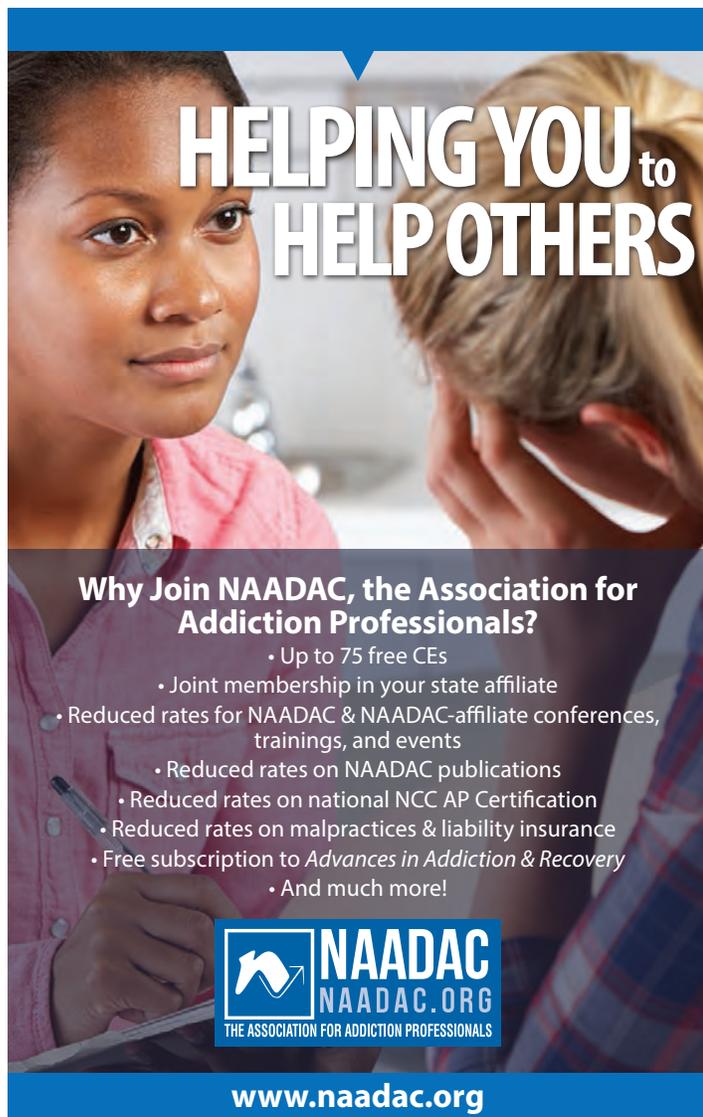
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suffering from substance use disorders. Assisting clients can and does occur at every level, beginning with recovery coaches and including counselors holding graduate degrees.

I personally cannot imagine the addiction profession, which grew out of the 12-step movement, ever shunning its extensive roots in that soil. Those who discuss the dichotomy between “experience” and “education” are really involved in a false comparison. The research and clinical experiences of people such as William White, James Prochaska, Terrence Gorski, Don Coyhis, William Miller, David Mee-Lee, Darryl Inaba, David Powell and many, many others are the shoulders we stand upon when we teach our students about practices that result in successful client outcomes. When supervisors talk to clinicians about their own work, they are providing knowledge to that new clinician. It has always been, and will always be about our clients, first and foremost. Many skilled counselors have both given and devoted their lives to creating knowledge that assists our clients in ways that were unimaginable as little as twenty years ago.

Therefore, taking into account the value of both education and experience, INCASE utilized an educational ladder in its initial accreditation package, and a very similar ladder (which includes programs from the Associate’s level through PhD levels) has been maintained by NASAC.



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It is important to stress caution when researching undergraduate or graduate addiction studies programs online. There are several online resources designed to assist student in finding college programs which fit their needs. However, many online searches will turn up addiction or prevention education programs that merely exist as a brief track within another helping professional program. Oftentimes, these tracks would not meet the NASAC accreditation standards, and should be avoided by the serious addiction or prevention counselor student.

Many students have been misled by non-accredited institutions in the past, and the addiction profession is not immune to programs attempting to lure our students with the promises of a cheaper and quicker route to licensure or certification. There truly are no quick and easy paths that exist to advancing our skills as addiction and prevention professionals. I urge counselors seeking education to seek programs which have met the rigorous test of the NASAC accreditation process.

Looking to the Future

The future of the addiction and prevention profession is supervised care under a trained addiction/prevention professional holding the appropriate addiction or prevention licensure. This is, as stated above, not a matter of kicking people out of the tent, but rather of deciding who is in charge of the “tent of recovery.” Based on my research, as of April 30, 2015, there are twenty-seven states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia that require licensure, and twenty-four states without licensure in the addiction and prevention professions. Each state has very different requirements and standards, thus it would behoove the student to look at the requirements to practice in each state before making a decision concerning coursework and career ladder placement.

My hope is that we are able to achieve a single set of addiction and prevention licensure standards adopted in every state, making reciprocity a simple and fast process, and that no one has a question concerning the status of addiction and prevention counselors as professionals in their own right. I hope to work towards no longer having a patchwork quilt of numerous standards and licensure requirements across the United States, and no longer worry that our profession will no longer be considered a specific profession and will rather only be considered a subset of other professions who don’t fully understand the important and specific work that we do.

The existential question is always, “What is right for me?” The profession will always need folks at all levels of intervention, and I, for one, am thankful that I could enter our profession and earn a living with a B.S. degree, even though I went on to later earn higher degrees. Education, as provided by our INCASE educators under the auspices of NASAC accreditation, is the single best route to assure an excellent future in this profession, a future which includes everyone!



John Korkow, PhD, LAC, SAP, received his PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of South Dakota in 2008. He completed an MA in Community Agency Counseling, and a BS in Addiction Studies, and has worked as an addiction counselor since 1999. He is a board member and conference committee planning chair of SDAAPP, member of NAADAC, President of INCASE, and board member of NASAC. He is currently an assistant professor in Addiction Studies at the University of South Dakota.