

# Coaching Education: Coming of Age

Irene F. Stein, PhD, Linda J. Page, PhD, and Terrence E. Maltbia, EdD

As longtime coaching educators, we started our graduate-level coaching programs in executive coaching at Adler Graduate Professional School in 2002 (Linda) and Columbia University in October of 2007 (Terry) with scant resources available to inform our programs of what needed to be included in a graduate-level curriculum. During the “needs assessment” phase of the curriculum development process at Columbia, we searched for coach-specific research to inform our design only to discover a real scarcity of evidence-based resources in peer-reviewed journals to support the popularity of coaching in general, and executive and organizational coaching in particular. A notable exception was a special issue found at the time on executive coaching in *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, published back in 1996, edited by Richard Kilburg, yet not much else was available.

This state of affairs was reinforced by Brotman, Liberi, and Wasylshyn’s (1998) call for standards and accountability by researchers and practitioners alike to inform and educate organizational decision makers about the core skills, competencies, and experiences critical to successful outcomes of executive coaching. In a critical examination of the literature on executive coaching, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) also supported the need for enhanced standards of practice and supporting research. However, by the mid-2000s we were only able to locate (1) a few comprehensive literature reviews focused explicitly on the topic of executive coaching in other peer view journals (e.g., Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005) and (2) many more books on coaching often reflecting the point-of-view of its authors, as well as (3) articles on the topic in the popular press. In a call for more research and theory to support coaching as a profession, Bennett (2006) identified the ways in which coaching fell short of meeting formal requirements for a “profession,” in part because it had not yet embraced an agreed-upon body of knowledge (Freidson, 2001).

Developing a curriculum in the mid-2000s necessarily involved studying competency models and ethical frameworks from professional coaching associations around the world to cull out the stable core of coaching competencies and statements of ethical conduct that were consistent across bodies as well as leveraging existing evidence from more established helping professions (e.g., positive psychology, solution-focused theories, and counseling). Graduate-level coaching programs were being formed in a variety of schools with disparate foundations for curricula, depending on the legacy programs from which they sprung, such as business or psychology.

The founding of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) in 2005 marked the first organization to focus on graduate coaching education. All three of us sought membership in GSAEC to be a part of a professional body made up of like-minded educators and researchers and to join in the work of closing a number of the knowledge gaps apparent in existing coach training and education models at the time. From its inception, GSAEC sought to develop consistency in what graduates of its member programs would learn related to coaching.

In an article published in the first volume of this journal, Stein and Page (2010) traced the increasing interest in graduate coaching education as growing out of early coach training offered primarily through proprietary nondegree organizations. Using the work of the GSAEC as a basis for discussion in that article, a number of considerations necessary for the development of graduate programs in executive coaching were suggested, including "... organizational, curriculum, professional development, and ongoing quality-assessment standards" (p. 58). The four years since the 2010 article have seen considerable changes in

both content and context of coaching, resulting in a quickening pace toward the emergence of coaching as a profession.

In spite of questions about whether coaching is yet a "real" profession, an increasing number of individuals around the world identify themselves as professional coaches. The expanding global context of coaching is illustrated by the formation in November 2012 of the Global Coaching Mentoring Alliance (GCMA) consisting of the Association for Coaching (AC), the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and the International Coach Federation (ICF). The GCMA's purpose is "to professionalise the industry in the field of coaching and mentoring and express a shared view of the practice of professional coaching" (ICF, 2014a).

The context of coaching is further broadened as, in addition to those who intend to become professional coaches, many more coaching courses and programs draw participants who are adding coaching skills to other practices such as consulting or counseling or to leadership or managerial roles. Graduate-level coaching programs necessarily teach not only professional coaches, but also managers, consultants, human resource (HR) professionals, and corporate leaders the theory and skills to use coaching to be more effective in their respective roles.

In order to present a coaching curriculum at a graduate level, the foundation of coaching research and theory must continually grow. Throughout the world, coaching associations, training organizations, and universities are promoting research and providing education that adds content to a growing body of knowledge. For example, the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Affiliate, promotes itself as "... dedicated to enhancing the integrity and credibility of the field of coaching by advancing

coaching research, education, and practice ...” (Institute of Coaching, 2014). The IOC’s Center for Research administers annual grants to coaching researchers, and the Institute of Coaching Professional Association offers access to peer-reviewed journals as a benefit of membership.

Today, we are happy to report there is a growing body of research to support coaching educational practices (Grant, 2011), an increased number of coaching outcome studies published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Leonard-Cross, 2010), along with support for the use of various coaching scales (e.g., Hagen & Peterson, 2014), and, as you will read about later in the article, academic standards for graduate-level coach education programs. In short, coaching education is truly coming of age!

## Coming of Age

The basis of the focus on “coaching education” is that there is a need to better understand not only how to do coaching but also how to prepare coaches to do coaching well. The concept of coaching education has advanced to the point that we propose 2014 as marking its “coming of age.” We make this claim based on the following events:

1. At its annual meeting on March 27, 2014, the GSAEC board and members voted to change its name from “Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching” to “Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching” in order to better reflect its activities and growing interests. Originally formed in 2005 as an association of graduate executive coaching programs, the organization restated its purpose in 2014 to put more emphasis on its educational mission:
2. The GSAEC sponsors the “First International Conference on Graduate Coaching Education: Theory, Research, and Practice” on March 27 and 28 at Menlo College, Silicon Valley, California. Thirty-three participants representing nine countries met for a day of discussing research papers and principles of coaching education. Most of the articles in this issue are drawn from that conference and are discussed in more detail below.
3. While the year 2013 saw the completion of the GSAEC’s major initiative, Academic Standards for Graduate Programs in Executive and Organizational Coaching, June 2014 marked the move from disseminating and reviewing to implementing, with the first graduate schools engaging in self-studies based on the Academic Standards. These Academic Standards are intended to underlie curricula of graduate-level coaching programs, such that there is some

As an alliance of academic institutions, the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC) members strive to collaboratively support continuous improvement of graduate-level education in executive and organizational coaching (GSAEC, 2014).

This change was proposed in order to respond to needs for development of a coaching body of knowledge and the support of graduate academic institutions and initiatives to produce, gather, and maintain that body of knowledge.

consistency in graduate-level coaching programs without dictating specific requirements. The resulting document and the history of the GSAEC's Academic Standards development illustrate how the study of coaching education has progressed in the past nine years within the broader context of efforts to raise the bar for coaching education and training. Additionally, this set of graduate-level coaching education standards help to provide a stronger foundation for designating coaching as a profession, particularly in the specialty sector of executive and organizational coaching.

With the completion of the standards, graduate school members of the GSAEC can now put them to the test by applying them to their own coaching programs, both degree and nondegree. As of June 2014, at least four institutions have begun a process of comparing each standard to their own programs' procedures and performance, resulting in a self-study document for each institution's program that will subsequently be submitted for peer review.

The preceding three items indicate the GSAEC's lead in graduate coaching education, but interest in the development of an international knowledge and research base for coaching is illustrated by events sponsored by other organizations, particularly the ICF and the Association of Coach Training Organizations (ACTO).

The ICF, which is the largest worldwide association of professional coaches, has initiated for the first time the position of director of research. It is anticipated that the position will be filled in 2014, further strengthening the ties between

the professional organization and graduate schools that perform coaching research. In addition, the ICF has recently sponsored the ICF Advance 2014: Science of Coaching in May 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia, which was promoted as follows:

The body of knowledge that shapes the coaching profession runs deep, with a diverse set of theories and frameworks contributing to the science of coaching. ... This intensive, interactive 2½-day branded educational event will deliver in-depth content covering the theories that underpin coaching (ICF, 2014b).

The ACTO was formed in 2000 to provide the opportunity for independent coach training schools to share information, particularly with regard to ICF accreditation and credentialing. With several GSAEC member institutions also belonging to the ACTO, the Association refers to itself as "... the steward of high quality coach education and training" (ACTO, 2014).

Though originally mostly focused on coaching competencies, ACTO member organizations are increasingly seeing the need for understanding the research and theory underlying the various coaching models that training schools teach. ACTO representatives participated in the First International Conference on Graduate Coaching Education. Increasing interest in neuroscience, adult education principles applied to diversity and ethics training, and advanced coaching training have been reflected in sessions held at recent annual ACTO conferences.

As conversations about standards for coach education continue, it is promising that the GSAEC, ACTO, and ICF are concurring, even if informally, on the importance of training as well as theory and research for professional education in coaching.

## **Creation of GSAEC's Academic Program Standards**

During 2014, several GSAEC member institutions have been in the process of applying the newly created "Self-Study Program Review Guide," based on the GSAEC's Academic Standards for Graduate Programs in Executive and Organizational Coaching. The GSAEC first developed a set of academic guidelines in 2007 under the leadership of Lewis R. Stern as the chair of the Academic Standards Committee. This first version of the guidelines was informed largely by the experience of the committee members, including extensive work conducted by the Executive Coaching Forum, which provided a solid foundation and resulted in a set of 15 standards for graduate programs in executive and organizational coaching.

Between 2008 and 2009, GSAEC members attended a number of conferences to stimulate dialogue among academicians around the world as an input to making informed choices to "finalize" the standards. In 2010, the GSAEC standards committee was reconstituted with a renewed commitment to explicitly ground each standard in academic literature and relevant research (i.e., academic disciplines, related theories and models), grounded in accreditation source materials for standards to ensure that the GSAEC standards for academic programs align with best practices already under way in established accreditation bodies, as compiled by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). This work resulted in the current version consisting of 20 academic standards with a consistent structure.

The standards are presented and organized into four major sections: Organizational Review, Program Review, Engagement & Growth, and Quality & Sustainability (see Figure 1). These

guidelines are intended to communicate the "story" embedded in the journey of creating and sustaining highly effective graduate executive and organizational coaching programs. They are intended to assist institutions and faculty in developing executive and organizational coaching education and training programs that will provide high-quality education consistent with similar professional education and training programs within academia.

Each of the standards listed under the four sections of Figure 1 are described in the Executive Summary of the Standards available on the GSAEC website ([www.gsaec.org](http://www.gsaec.org)). Institutions may request the full standards document, including substandards and references, by e-mail ([lav.org.online@att.net](mailto:lav.org.online@att.net)).

The work devising academic program standards is conceived as ongoing, with a focus on documenting each standard with further reference support and sample citations. Accreditation, at the institutional and program level, is intended to strengthen and sustain higher education, making it worthy of public confidence, while minimizing the scope of external control. GSAEC's longer term aim is to partner with an established accreditation organization to promote the full implementation of 20 program academic standards as a means of self-regulation. Further, accreditation demonstrates a commitment to continuous self-assessment. Completing the self-study procedures outlined in the associated "Self-Study Program Review Guide" represents an important first step toward full program accreditation.

## **Connecting Conference and Journal Articles to Standards**

The First International Conference on Graduate Coaching Education: Theory, Research, and Practice, sponsored by the GSAEC, provided a

**Figure 1**  
**GSAEC Academic Standards**

Section A Organizational Review	Section B Program Review	Section C Engagement & Growth	Section D Quality and Sustainability
Standard 1.0 Program Mission & Objectives	Standard 6.0 Curriculum and Program Plan	Standard 11.0 Professional Practice and Development	Standard 16.0 Program Values & Ethical Standards
Standard 2.0 Program Context	Standard 7.0 Body of Knowledge	Standard 12.0 Requirements for Coach Supervision	Standard 17.0 Faculty Qualifications & Supervision
Standard 3.0 Requirements for Admission	Standard 8.0 Core Coaching Competencies	Standard 13.0 Requirements for Assessing Progress	Standard 18.0 Stakeholder Relations (e.g., students, faculty, etc.)
Standard 4.0 Program Administration & Resources	Standard 9.0 Coaching Process	Standard 14.0 Cultural Diversity & Individual Differences	Standard 19.0 Program Assessment/ Quality Enhancement
Standard 5.0 Relationship With Accrediting Body	Standard 10.0 Organizational Acumen	Standard 15.0 Contribution to Body of Knowledge/Field	Standard 20.0 Policies Regarding Advertising & Stating Claims

valuable resource for expanding the list of references that support various academic standards for university-based coach education programs. Most of the articles in this issue are drawn from that conference, with this issue's three feature articles all based on empirical investigations.

The first feature article, written by Francine Campone, entitled "Thinking Like a Professional: The Impact of Graduate Coach Education," presents an example of the application of GSAEC's Academic Standard 6.0 focused on Curriculum and Program Planning by providing a detailed account of educational strategies for building a capacity in learners to observe, assess, and understand nuanced aspects of a coaching interaction resulting in making appropriate judgments in the

moment to inform invention choices in service of helping their clients achieve their intentions. This article also demonstrates the important interplay between the curriculum (Standard 6.0), select bodies of knowledge (Standard 7.0), and related core coaching competencies (Standard 8.0).

The article by Dima Louis and Pauline Fatien Diochon, "Educating Coaches to Power Dynamics: Managing Multiple Agendas Within the Triangular Relationship," extends our understanding of one critical element of the GSAEC's Academic Standard 9.0, The Coaching Process, by exploring the impact of power dynamics on the work of entry and contracting during the early stages of the process and beyond. This piece also demonstrates the integrative nature of the academic standards in

outlining how coaches can leverage specific competencies such as relating, questioning, and listening (i.e., Academic Standard 8.0) in combination with specific areas of knowledge (i.e., selection of specific theories captured in Academic Standard 7.0) to inform the coach's approach to attending to the complexity often associated with the multiple, including hidden, agendas embedded in a coaching engagement.

The third featured article, "Shape-Shifting: A Behavioral Team Coaching Model for Coach Education, Research, and Practice," written by Laura L. Hauser, moves the focus from the more common one-on-one application of coaching interactions to an emphasis on working with multiple clients/coachees within the context of an intact team—an important contribution for organizations interested in scaling the overall impact of coaching beyond the individual. The new framework presented in the article, including the four roles enacted by the team coach, is an excellent example of integrating relevant theory and knowledge (i.e., Academic Standard 7.0) to inform the work of coach practitioners, coach educators, and credentialing bodies.

While the three feature articles in this issue each provide a unique contribution to deepening our understanding of select academic standards that align the Program Review section of the GSAEC framework, collectively they further ground the standards in existing literature sources and provide methodological examples for conducting coach-specific research (i.e., Standard 15.0, Contribution to Body of Knowledge/Field). In the Practitioner's Corner, the article by Pam Van Dyke, "Virtual Group Coaching: A Curriculum for Coaches and Educators," readers are exposed to important distinctions between peer coaching, team coaching, and group coaching, with the latter explored in the context of virtual environments.

This piece concludes with a description of topics to include in a curriculum focused on this form of coaching (i.e., Standard 6.0).

Next, Kent Blumberg, in his article entitled "Executive Coaching Competencies: A Review and Critique With Implications for Coach Education," clarifies the current status of the strengths and limitations of the various competency structures used to inform many coach education and training curriculums and related credentialing protocols. Employing Brannick and Levine's (2006) competency modeling structure (i.e., knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics), the author presents a rather comprehensive analysis of 24 competency frameworks.

Blumberg's findings confirm conclusions derived from the GSAEC's academic standards research suggesting that as the field of coaching continues toward professionalization, it will be increasingly necessary to (a) move beyond a focus on ethical standards and competencies as the foundation of credentialing systems, (b) require explicit and empirically grounded competency modeling to establish the validity and reliability needed to realize market creditability, (c) make publicly available the procedures employed to ground credentialing systems, (d) ground credentialing systems in frameworks that include research linking coach KSAO's to performance indicators; and (e) use a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies to help close the gap in the current lack of empirical evidence to support coach credentialing systems.

Finally, Alexandra Barosa-Pereira's article, entitled "Building Cultural Competencies in Coaching: Essay for the First Steps," raises the important question of the cultural appropriateness of existing competency frameworks and related learning strategies employed in coach preparation programs and credentialing systems. Tracing the evolution of the field of professional coaching in

general, and the major professional coaching associations in particular, having their origins in the Western region of the world, calls for a critical analysis of the cultural appropriateness of perspectives and practices completely developed in the context of related Western cultural ethos. Pereira's article concludes with a call to action suggesting a first early step would be to conduct a systemic, global study comparing the ICF core competencies with the dimensions of intercultural competence.

Bringing together the articles in this issue of *JPOC* can be seen as confirmation that coaching education has entered an era of greater influence, as befits its "coming of age." This issue is also intended to further that influence. ♦

## References

- Association of Coach Training Organizations. (2014). ACTO. Retrieved March 11, 2014, from [www.actoonline.org](http://www.actoonline.org)
- Bennett, J. L. (2006). An agenda for coaching-related research: A challenge for researchers. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 58(4), 240–248.
- Brannick, M., & Levine, E. (2006). Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAS). In J. Greenhaus & G. Callanan (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of career development* (pp. 451–452). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:10.4135/9781412952675.n157
- Brotman, L. E., Liberi, W. P., & Wasylshyn, K. M. (1998). Executive coaching: The need for standards of competence. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 50(1), 40–46. doi:10.1037/1061-4087.50.1.40
- Feldman, D. C., & Lankau, M. J. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 829–848. doi:10.1177/0149206305279599
- Freidson, E. (2001). *Professionalism, the third logic: On the practice of knowledge*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Grant, A. M. (2011). Developing an agenda for teaching coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 6(1), 84–99.
- GSAEC. (2014). Bylaws of the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching. Available from [www.gsaec.org](http://www.gsaec.org) (Note: new purpose not yet posted on website.)
- Hagen, M. S., & Peterson, S. L. (2014). Coaching scales: A review of the literature and comparative analysis. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 16(2), 222–241. doi:10.1177/1523422313520203
- Institute of Coaching. (2014). News & publications. Retrieved March 11, 2014, from <http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/index.cfm?page=journals>
- International Coach Federation. (2014a). Global Coaching Mentoring Alliance. Retrieved March 29, 2014, from <http://www.coachfederation.org/about/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=3276&navItemNumber=3338>
- International Coach Federation. (2014b). ICF Advance 2014: Science of coaching. Retrieved March 11, 2014, from <http://www.coachfederation.org/events/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=3283&navItemNumber=3284>



Joo, B. K. (2005). Executive coaching: A conceptual framework from an integrative review of practice and research. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4(4), 462–488. doi:10.1177/1534484305280866

Kampa-Kokesch, S., & Anderson, M. Z. (2001). Executive coaching: A comprehensive review of the literature. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 53(4), 205–228. doi:10.1037/1061-4087.53.4.205

Leonard-Cross, E. (2010). Developmental coaching: Business benefit—fact or fad? An evaluative study to explore the impact of coaching in the workplace. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(1), 36–47.

Stein, I. F., & Page, L. J. (2010). Graduate study in executive and organizational coaching: Considerations for program development. *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture*, 1(3), 56–64. doi:10.1002/jpoc.20029

---

*Irene F. Stein, PhD, is associate core faculty for research at the University of the Rockies, where she works with dissertation students and faculty. She is a GSAEC board member and a long-time promoter of coaching research. She can be reached at Irene.Stein@faculty.rockies.edu.*

---

*Linda J. Page, PhD, is president and founder of Adler School of Professional Studies and Adler's ICF-certified Professional Coaching Program in Toronto, Canada. She is a GSAEC board member and cochair of GSAEC's Academic Standards Committee. She can be reached at ljpage@adler.ca.*

---

*Terrence E. Maltbia, EdD, is faculty director, Columbia Coaching Certification Program, and a senior lecturer for the Department of Organization and Leadership, Teachers College, Columbia University. He is a GSAEC board member and cochair of GSAEC's Academic Standards Committee. He can be reached at Maltbia@tc.columbia.edu.*