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Article 29

Promoting Advocacy and Leadership in Counselor Education Through an Innovative Student and Alumni Association

Paper based on a program presented at the 2010 Rocky Mountain Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, October 2, 2010, Jackson Lake Lodge, WY.

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Counselors need to be introduced to opportunities for advocacy and leadership early in their professional careers. Chi Sigma Iota (see <http://www.csi-net.org/>) provides an avenue for such opportunities, but leadership activities can be limited and maintaining alumni participation is often challenging. A student and alumni counseling association has provided unique opportunities for leadership, which has opened up involvement from the community of professional counselors beyond graduation from a counselor education program.

The Regis Alumni Counseling Association (RACA) was an innovative student and alumni counseling association which began as a collaborative effort between the university alumni association, the faculty, and graduate counseling students. Initially, students who were graduating expressed the desire to stay connected to each other and the university through the licensure process and beyond. At Regis University, the Chi Sigma Iota Rho Epsilon chapter is actively connected to RACA. While supporting and encouraging the membership of Chi Sigma Iota, students expressed the belief that their membership in Chi Sigma Iota was beneficial, but limited in terms of activities outside the university, and not available to those students and alumni who were not interested in Chi Sigma Iota membership.

As RACA became well known within the Regis community, students requested more involvement in the program. The RACA leadership decided to encourage the increasing student participation and added "student" to the RACA name making the name

what it is today: Regis Alumni Student Counseling Association (RASCA). In response, students took a more active role within the RASCA organization. The mission statement stated:

RASCA seeks:

- To support students and alumni in the counseling community through education and mentorship.
- To promote opportunities for leadership, networking, advocacy, and skill enhancement.
- To contribute to the greater welfare of society by service to the community and promote lifelong learning.

In order to fulfill the mission of the RASCA organization, leadership positions were strategically created in order to promote active involvement from students and alumni.

Leadership Positions

RASCA established a solid foundation in leadership through well-defined positions within the organization. In addition to traditional leadership positions, such as president and vice-president, there were positions based on program needs, as well as student and alumni interests and abilities. Some examples of positions were student and alumni representatives, event coordinator, and specific program representatives (such as the marriage and family therapy and clinical mental health counseling representative). The clinical mental health counseling representative was responsible for maintaining communication and involvement with the state organization of the American Counseling Association (ACA). RASCA demonstrated the value of communication, coordination, and collaboration with honor societies such as Chi Sigma Iota and the Veteran's National Honor Society (see <http://salute.colostate.edu/>) by establishing liaison positions to those organizations. Appendix A provides detailed descriptions of the various positions within the organization.

Activities and Events with Mission in Mind

RASCA was open to all graduate counseling students, and monthly meetings were held on campus. Events were planned throughout the year which promoted the mission of the organization. Workshops were offered based on student selected topics, including equine assisted-therapy, effective treatment planning, working with couples, building a private practice, and imago therapy, just to name a few. Students and alumni participated in prospective graduate counseling student "meet and greet" events and new student orientation. During the graduate counseling program's annual clinical internship fair, students were present to represent their internship site, while alumni members offered a panel discussion on the clinical internship process and beyond.

RASCA started a lending library, in which students, faculty, and alumni could donate books, DVDs and licensing exam study materials for fellow students to borrow. Members created a cookbook with recipes donated by graduate counseling students, which included a picture and story of significance behind the recipe. The monies raised from cookbook sales went to establishing a fund for students and alumni to attend state,

regional, and national conferences for counselors. RASCA members have presented with faculty at state and regional conferences. RASCA members coordinated a campus-wide charity donation effort to give to underserved populations in the community. A quarterly e-newsletter was published with columns represented by the specific areas of leadership such as the RASCA news and events, alumni career highlights, CSI events, and articles written by members. The newsletter included recommended books and resources for counselors, as well as community events of interest to counselors. In addition, RASCA was able to get a web developer to donate and create a website (www.rasca-cs.org) for the alliance, which was launched in 2010.

One of the highlights for RASCA was the annual welcome back picnic in the fall, an event in which students, alumni, and faculty get together in a casual setting to share a meal with each other and their families. During the festivities, RASCA honored several exceptional members with awards given at the picnic. See Appendix B for the specific awards and criteria. Award winners were highlighted in the newsletter, along with quotes from fellow students, faculty, and alumni who recognized the accomplishment.

While students joined RASCA and participated in events throughout the year, a more formal invitation to become involved in leadership through RASCA was provided during the annual leadership training academy.

The Leadership Training Academy

Leadership was fostered from the beginning of the counselor education program by inviting potential student leaders to become involved in leadership opportunities. Students were selected for the leadership training academy by faculty based on their demonstrated or potential leadership qualities. The students invited to participate in the leadership training academy were informed of their option to participate in the leadership opportunities within RASCA and the graduate counseling program. The invitation included a questionnaire to be completed prior to the event, which asked the students to identify their leadership ideas, abilities, and experience.

The leadership training academy was a 4 hour event held on campus in which students learned about leadership styles and principles, counselor advocacy, mentoring, and opportunities for application of what they learned at the academy. The university and the community provided small gifts of appreciation and lunch. The leadership academy event was organized and facilitated by RASCA student leaders with faculty assistance. After lunch and discussion of student's responses to the leadership questionnaire, the participants engaged in the leadership styles presentation and experiential activity.

Leadership Styles

The purpose of the leadership styles presentation and activity was to help potential leaders recognize that leaders can be diverse in their approach to organizational tasks, relationships and decision-making. Four leadership styles were presented which were represented by animals; the golden retriever, the otter, the beaver, and the lion (Phillips, 1989). The golden retriever represented the leader who desires warmth and harmony in relationships, avoiding potential conflicts, and willing to assist with tasks for the benefit of all. The otter loved to have fun, often distracted or overwhelmed by details of tasks, but effectively facilitating group cohesion and enjoyment. The beaver worked

diligently attending to detail, but resisting too much change or quick decision making. The lion represented the guiding force for others, providing direction and leadership, while sometimes having difficulty taking time to listening to all the ideas from the group.

The presentation included information to help participants recognize the strengths and limitations of each style. Participants took a brief questionnaire to identify their leadership style, then broke into small groups to discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and identified what they need from the other styles. Finally, the groups discussed their insights with each other. The current leaders reported a better understanding of different leadership styles represented within RASCA. The current leadership, as well as the leaders-in-training, became better equipped for working effectively as a team, handling conflicts, valuing strengths, and balancing each other's weaknesses based on their identified leadership styles.

Chi Sigma Iota and Leadership Principles

Membership in Chi Sigma Iota was highly encouraged. The potential leaders were introduced to Chi Sigma Iota by the liaison from Chi Sigma Iota who presented the application process and membership expectations and requirements of Chi Sigma Iota. The Chi Sigma Iota leadership principles and practice of leadership excellence were discussed, including the philosophy of leadership, commitment to mission, preservation of history, vision of the future, long-range perspective, preservation of resources, respect for membership, mentoring, encouragement and empowerment, recognition of others, and feedback and self-reflection (Chi Sigma Iota, 1999).

Counselor Advocacy

Living in service to others is part of the mission at Regis University. Consistent with the mission is the component of training on advocacy which was done collaboratively among students, alumni, and a community representative. The participants in the leadership training were asked to identify advocacy for themselves, their clients, the counseling profession, and the community at large. An advocate from an oppressed population, an agency serving victims of domestic violence, presented advocacy for oppressed client populations from a counselor's perspective.

On behalf of Chi Sigma Iota, the liaison presented the goals for advocacy in action presented at the National Chi Sigma Iota meeting at the 2008 ACA national conference, which included: 1) to insure that all counselor education students graduate with a clear identity and sense of pride as professional counselors; 2) to develop and implement a unified collaborative advocacy plan for the advancement of counselors and those whom they serve; and 3) to establish collaborative working relationships with other organizations, groups, and disciplines on matters of mutual interest and concern to achieve our advocacy goals for both counselors and their clients.

In terms of self-advocacy, counselor wellness and self-care was discussed, including identifying signs of counselor impairment as well as the development of a wellness plan during the counselor education program. Specific self-care ideas were shared amongst participants. Finally, participants were encouraged to identify a specific plan for implementing advocacy for themselves, their clients, the counseling profession, and the community at large.

Mentoring

Mentoring was a key component of RASCA's success. RASCA and the faculty at Regis co-created a mentoring program for new students in the counseling programs to be matched up with either an alumnus or a student that was farther along in the program. During the Leadership Academy, students were taught the core principles of mentoring, including active listening skills, building a collaborative relationship, and the seven habits of highly effective mentors. Alumni and students who participated in the mentoring program shared the benefits with the group, which in turn encouraged new members to get involved. Mentors completed a mentoring questionnaire (Appendix C), and the RASCA liaison for the program (such as clinical mental health counseling) kept the current roster of potential mentors for matching with a new student. New students entering the Graduate Counseling program during orientation had the opportunity to complete a similar questionnaire (Appendix D), and they were matched based on their level of interest in the mentoring program. The mentoring program was an asset to those involved, as students reported that the mentoring helped them navigate the challenges of graduate school. Another benefit of this program was that mentees often become more involved as RASCA leaders or future mentors, in some cases giving back much more than they received.

Innovation

RASCA fostered and nurtured innovative ideas and activities from the membership. The attitude of the RASCA group was to lift each other up, help each other to become their best; rather than to compete with each other, argue over personality differences or serving one's self. Students and alumni were invited to write articles for publication and present at regional and national conferences. As a result, members came up with creative ideas to help continue moving the group forward. RASCA members have presented at the annual Rocky Mountain Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors (RMACES) conferences in Breckenridge, Colorado, and Jackson, Wyoming. One student created a military spouses support group, an idea which will be presented at the National ACA Conference in New Orleans in 2011. Other students and alumni have proposed to present at the local Colorado Counseling Association (CCA) conference in Denver, Colorado, in 2011. Alumni have created workshops to share their talents in areas such as equine-assisted therapy and developing a private practice. Other members have helped to coordinate community fundraising events like a charity golf tournament. Currently, several students are working with the legislators to help create a Colorado Military Mental Health Week.

Conclusion

Through RASCA, leadership, innovation, mentoring, and advocacy was fostered in students in a counseling program, which increased the commitment to lifelong learning, and continued the creativity within the counseling community after graduation. In addition, these opportunities gave the future and newly practicing counselor experiences that would not have otherwise been available, and fostered their ability to create a solid network. Students and alumni who have been involved in RASCA have

reported increased interest in the counseling practice, and appreciation for the additional support, training, leadership and networking opportunities that evolved from this student and alumni counseling association.

References

- Chi Sigma Iota. (1999). *Statement of leadership excellence: CSI Academy of Leaders for Excellence*. Retrieved from <http://www.csi-net.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=79>
- Phillips, B. (1989). *The delicate art of dancing with porcupines: Learning to appreciate the finer points of others*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm

Appendix A

RASCA Official Positions

President -Interacts with Regis Alum Association and support staff in Denver. All official paperwork must be reviewed by this person before being sent out. The President is to be the center point for all information, members must cc all email correspondence to him/her concerning RASCA. The President makes all final date, time and place decisions concerning meetings and events. No one has the authority to make changes without approval. The President will support all officers of RASCA, however support does not include taking over delinquent responsibility incurred by other officers. The President will disperse all new or upcoming information to RASCA members in a timely fashion, usually by way of email. They will interact with Regis Colorado Springs Campus Staff for needs of RASCA-usually presented by the Faculty Advisor. This person will work with the Vice President and collaborate as to what types of speakers, events, and the contacts, speakers or organizers for each one of these RASCA events. The President will set the agenda for RASCA meetings, runs said meetings and adjourns meetings in a timely fashion, however, is always willing to hear from other members. Members need to submit a meeting agenda idea to the president at least a week in advance of each meeting. The President sets the tone of the meeting and helps other officer's problem solve. This person will be actively engaged in working on new opportunities to improve RASCA, and proposing ideas to the members on special events, and opportunities. The President will keep in close contact with the Newsletter Press Officer, and the Community Outreach Officer to make sure that the newsletter discusses upcoming issues, events, and special interest articles. The President will do most public speaking on behalf of RACA, and will represent RASCA's Mission at all times. *Must Be Alumni*. **Term:** 2 years, **Commitment:** 5 Hours per week or more as needed

Vice President -Will be of great help to the President, and will work side by side. May assume the leadership position after the president's term is up, or in the event that the president relinquishes his/her position. Main responsibility is to arrange and recruit speakers for events, and gain contacts for community events. May facilitate the RASCA meetings in place of president if president is unable to attend. Is well informed on all the positions in RASCA, and can answer questions. Will assist the President in forming ideas for improvement, and finding new opportunities for RASCA. May assist the administrative assistant in accomplishing things with a financial interest, or assisting the treasurer in the yearly budget. May also speak publically on behalf of the President if necessary. Must be a team player, and know they're role within RASCA. **Term:** 2 years, **Commitment:** 5 hours per week or more as needed

Administrative Assistant - The AA will be responsible for keeping a binder of the current RASCA positions descriptions, and who is filling those positions (pictures may be a good way to record). Included in the binder will also be the monthly meeting notes from the alumni association & RASCA. This person will also be responsible for taking and transcribing the meeting minuets from RASCA, and e-mailing them to the president within a reasonable amount of time, so they can be sent out. The AA will help make,

copy, and distribute flyers, brochures, and other items to members and the community for RASCA's events, seminars, workshops, community events, and monthly meetings. This person will also help keep up the full membership list. **Term:** 1 or 2 years if desired, **Commitment:** 1-3 hours per week, other hours may be required surrounding meetings and RASCA events.

Treasurer-This person will be responsible for helping to create, and maintain a working budget for RASCA, as well as purchasing the necessary equipment, food, and items necessary for special events and workshops. In addition, this person will keep track of all the registration forms for events, and record payments for such events. They will also provide the thank you cards and payments to RASCA's guest speakers at events. This person will show the President and VP a monthly accounting of RASCA's financial standing. They **MUST** get all transactions approved through the president before purchasing anything. Required to attend monthly meetings. **Term:** 2 years, **Commitment:** As Needed Basis Surrounding Events and Meetings

Faculty Advisor - This person must be a Regis Staff member and must be affiliated with the counseling program. This person is responsible to attend all monthly meetings, give input, and encourage the support of the counseling program. This person may be responsible for setting up room arrangements for special events, or making contact with other Regis Faculty members surrounding needs of RASCA. May also be a valuable team player and suggest ideas and activities that RASCA can support that would further out mission. Although this person is a valued member of our team, he/she cannot make decisions or changes in place of the President and still needs to go through the president for any suggestions, questions, concerns, or changes.

CSI Liaison-This person's primary responsibility is to attend both the CSI and the RASCA meetings, and report back to each on the upcoming events, changes, and news. Assist with membership development and inform students on NCE information. Can assist the Administrative Assistant. **Term:** 2 Years, **Commitment:** Come to RASCA meetings, and Travel to CSI meetings

Newsletter Press Officer -The officer's primary responsibility is to collect all the data, resources, pictures, and articles for the newsletter from the President, Vice President, Faculty Advisor, CSI Liaison, and secretary and put it together every quarter in a newsletter that will be sent to the Alumni members, student members. Also responsible for adding to and maintaining RASCA newsletter member list. In addition, will be responsible for making and sending out monthly press releases pertaining to regis's monthly events that are sponsored by RASCA. All articles, ideas, pictures, etc. need to be approved by the president in order to be printed. The materials need to be given to the press officer by a deadline of the 20th of each month so that the newsletter can be printed and received by readers on the 5th of each month. This person will also be responsible for soliciting articles and ideas for articles from RACA members, students, faculty, and alumni. May need to perform interviews for articles at times. **Term:** 2 years **Commitment:** Collect all the data by last week of the month, 5 hours to put everything together and write articles, come to the RACA meetings.

Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC) Student Representative- This person should be within a short amount of time from graduating and be willing to talk to the current and graduating students in the counseling program about RASCA, and the MAC program at Regis. They will be the contact person for MAC students, and should be able to help with recruiting new students, new RASCA members, and answering questions pertaining to RASCA. This person will be coordinating with the alumni rep, the MFT rep, and CMF rep to find out common concerns or share positive outcomes, as well as ideas about improvement. This person will be responsible once per month to arrange in coordination with other reps to visit all the counseling classes and inform them of upcoming events, RASCA membership, leadership opportunities, and feedback on student needs, wants, or concerns to bring it back to RASCA. They will attend the CCA meetings and report current events and information from LPC's at the State level. **Term:** 1 year **Commitment:** 1-3 hours surrounding events to get the word out to students. Come to monthly RASCA Meetings, attend monthly CCA meetings

Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) Student Representative- This person should be within a short amount of time from graduating and be willing to talk to the current and graduating students in the counseling program about RASCA, and the MFT program at Regis. They will be the contact person for MFT students, and should be able to help with recruiting new students, new RASCA members, and answering questions pertaining to RASCA. This person will be coordinating with the alumni rep, the MAC rep, and CMF rep to find out common concerns or share positive outcomes, as well as ideas about improvement. This person will be responsible once per month to arrange in coordination with other reps to visit all the counseling classes and inform them of upcoming events, RASCA membership, leadership opportunities, and feedback on student needs, wants, or concerns to bring it back to RASCA. They will attend the CAMFT meetings and report current events and information from LMFT's at the State level. **Term:** 1 year **Commitment:** 1-3 hours surrounding events to get the word out to students. Come to monthly RASCA Meetings, attend monthly CAMFT meetings.

Counseling Military Families (CMF) Student Representative- This person should be within a short amount of time from graduating and be willing to talk to the current and graduating students in the counseling program about RASCA, and the CMF program at Regis. They will be the contact person for CMF students, and should be able to help with recruiting new students, new RASCA members, and answering questions pertaining to RASCA. This person will be coordinating with the alumni rep, the MAC rep, and MFT rep to find out common concerns or share positive outcomes, as well as ideas about improvement. This person will be responsible once per month to arrange in coordination with other reps to visit all the counseling classes and inform them of upcoming events, RASCA membership, leadership opportunities, and feedback on student needs, wants, or concerns to bring it back to RASCA. *Preferably a military veteran or family member.* **Term:** 1 year **Commitment:** 1-3 hours surrounding events to get the word out to students. Come to monthly RASCA Meetings.

Alumni Representative -This person's primary responsibility is to recruit and speak with all interested alumni. They also will be the primary contact person for alumni questions or concerns. This person will be coordinating with the student rep to find out common concerns or share positive outcomes, as well as ideas about improvement. They will also be responsible for contacting alumni and inviting them to events, as well as getting feedback from them. *Must be an alumni.* **Term:** 1-2 years as desired **Commitment:** 1-2 hours per week, and 1-2 hours surrounding RASCA events.

Community Outreach Officer - This person will be responsible for maintaining the counseling portion of the bulletin board, informing the RASCA members of upcoming training events in the community for counseling, sharing resources or writing articles about continuing education, community concerns, or upcoming news stories pertaining to counseling. In addition, this person will have to be willing to submit information to be placed in the newsletter for counselors regarding all the above listed things. **Term:** 1 year **Commitment:** 2 hours per week, and come to RASCA meetings

Career Development Officer-Submitting to the newsletter and the President-recent job openings, and career development opportunities in the community. Also may do guest speaking & workshops for alumni and upcoming counselor graduate students.

Events Coordinator- Responsible for assisting the members in putting together training events, helping to coordinate the leadership training, the internship fair, and the annual picnic, and graduation celebration. Light shopping may be required. Duties include-flyers, guest lists, handling rsvps, decorations, food, and coordination with the treasurer for monetary withdrawals and deposits based on need and event donations. **Term:** 1-2 years as desired **Commitment:** 1-2 hours per week, and 1-2 hours surrounding RASCA events.

Appendix B

RASCA AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Commitment to Advocacy Award:

This award recognizes a student who has reached out community, championing for those in need, for fellow students, and the Regis Counseling program. This person has to have demonstrated an advocacy for a special population through creativity.

Leadership Award:

Student demonstrates creativity, ability to inspire fellow students, and motivates positive change with their self- motivation.

Innovation in Counseling:

This award is presented to a student who has shown unique contributions to the field of counseling.

Outstanding Student Award:

Presented to a current student who has demonstrates consistent academic outstanding effort, and real passion and thought towards counseling in their academics.

Outstanding Alumni Award:

Presented to an alumni who has demonstrates consistent involvement in RASCA and the community- at-large, and who continues to promote the counseling field after graduation through their career.

Outstanding Graduate:

A graduating Student who has demonstrated academic excellence, service to community, support to the counseling program, leadership, advocacy, innovation and who is a role model to fellow students.

Conference Scholarship Awards

The Regis Alumni Student Counseling Alliance (RASCA) is offering several conference scholarship awards for the 2011-2012 academic year which have been established to support the mission of RASCA in an effort to promote student and alumni leadership in the counseling community and to provide opportunities for continuing education in counseling.

1. MFT Student Representative (RASCA) – CAMFT Annual conference. Conference registration awarded to the current MFT student representative from RASCA.
2. MAC Student Representative (RASCA) – CCA Annual Conference. Conference registration awarded to the current MAC student representative from RASCA.

3. Regis Alumni - MAC or MAMFT – Conference registration awarded to Regis University Alumni of the Graduate Counseling program (MAC, MAMFT and/or certificate programs) to attend the CAMFT, CCA, or RMACES annual conference. Award will be based on alumni demonstration of leadership, advocacy and/or service to the community. Alumni must apply to RASCA by January 30. Recipient agrees to present what they learned at the conference they attended to RASCA at a future meeting or workshop.
4. Student Research Award – Conference registration awarded to student with outstanding research poster presentation submitted to either CCA or RMACES annual conference (or other AAMFT or ACA endorsed conference). Student must provide verification of submission in order to be awarded.

Appendix C

ALUMNI/STUDENT MENTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Alumni/Student Mentor Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone(mobile): _____ Phone (home) _____

Preferred E:mail: _____

Are you a military veteran or family member? _____

Started in Program (semester and year): _____ MAC or MAMFT (circle one)

1. Please list the interests you have in the field of counseling: _____

2. Please list the interests you have in your leisure time: _____

3. What do you hope to provide in your mentoring relationship?

- _____ Answer questions about Regis' Graduate Counseling Program
MAC or MAMFT (circle one)
_____ Answer questions about degree choice
_____ Answer questions about Regis certificate programs (MFT, Child &
Adolescent, Transformative Counseling, Counseling Military Families)
_____ Someone to listen to me, someone to lean on
_____ Someone to help guide me through stages of the Regis' Graduate
Counseling Program
_____ Someone to tell me what to expect in the Regis' Graduate Counseling
Program
_____ Someone to help me plan for the future in the counseling profession
_____ Someone to give me information about practicum and internship
_____ Someone to give me resources that will help me as a student and
professional
_____ List any other hopes you have for your relationship with your mentee:

4. How would you be in contact with your mentee? (check all that apply)

_____ e-mail _____ telephone _____ meetings in person

5. How often could you be in contact with your mentee? _____ (i.e. weekly,
monthly, quarterly, checking in every now and then, only when the need arises?)

Appendix D

STUDENT/MENTEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Student/Mentee's Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone(mobile): _____ Phone (home) _____

Preferred E:mail: _____

Are you a military veteran or family member? _____

Started in Program (semester and year): _____ MAC or MAMFT (circle one)

1. Please list the interests you have in the **field of counseling**: _____

2. Please list the interests you have in your **leisure** time: _____

3. What do you hope to gain from your mentoring relationship?

_____ Answer questions about Regis' Graduate Counseling Program

_____ Answer questions about degree choice

_____ Answer questions about Regis certificate programs
(MFT, Child & Adolescent, Transformative)

_____ Someone to listen to me, someone to lean on

_____ Someone to help guide me through stages of the Regis' Graduate
Counseling Program

_____ Someone to tell me what to expect in the Regis' Graduate Counseling
Program

_____ Someone to help me plan for the future in the counseling profession

_____ Someone to give me information about practicum and internship

_____ Someone to give me resources that will help me as a student and
professional

_____ List any other hopes you have for your relationship with your mentor:

4. How would you like to be in contact with your mentor? (check all that apply)

_____ e-mail _____ telephone _____ meetings in person

5. How often would you like contact? _____ (i.e. weekly, monthly,
quarterly, checking in every now and then, only when the need arises?)