

Annual Program Report for Programs in Counselor Education

September 1, 2021

Introduction

The Department of Counselor Education compiles this report annually on our programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and School Counseling from data and processes which occur ongoing throughout the previous year. The report is a summary of evaluations conducted throughout the year primarily to insure and demonstrate program effectiveness.

In March, 2020, we were forced to drastically alter our complete “way of being” in response to Covid. We anticipated returning to “normal” in the following Fall (2020) or certainly, by Spring 2021. Neither would come to be. As we are all too well aware, our return to a covid-free university lingered with many restrictions into Spring and Summer 2021 and, while we are slowly returning to some semblance of normal, we are teaching and attending classes 6 feet away from each other and in masks. As of the writing of this report, several weeks into Fall 2021, we have yet to open our clinic doors to clients and continue to serve those we can reach via HIPAA compliant Zoom meetings. We have had many challenges to overcome, the Department of Counselor Education (soon to be Department of Counseling) has some successes to report.

We submitted our CACREP self-study in early summer 2021 and have received initial feedback from the accrediting agency. Generally speaking, the feedback recognized our systemic effort and successes in maintaining high standards. On several specific issues, we were asked to provide clarification in an addendum. That task is underway now. The faculty and stakeholders involved in the completion of the self-study are confident that we will satisfy the reviewers and we anticipate a site visit sometime in the Spring 2022 semester.

Following are a few highlights from the past year.

First, the department name change we initiated in 2020-2021 was approved by the University of Louisiana System and is on a consent agenda for consideration by the Board of Regents. We anticipate the name becoming official by Spring 2022. Please recall that we are moving from “Department of Counselor Education” in the “College of Education” to “Department of Counseling in the “College of Education and Human Development.” The name change will modernize our department and college name and speak more clearly to our respective missions.

In last year’s report we noted that Dr. Doug Blair was retained by the department as Visiting Assistant Professor. After his year in visiting status, we hired Dr. Anita Pool who presently serves as Visiting Assistant Professor. We have been assured that we will be able to fill the tenure track Assistant Professor job with a national search beginning in Fall 2021.

The Curriculum

No significant changes to the curriculum were made over the past year. Only minor changes to when the courses will be offered were made to maximize efficiency in course delivery.. One

potential trend we may see emerging (it is too early to be sure) is that interest in Professional School Counseling has seemed to wane just as interest in a dual certification seems to have risen. The School Counseling concentration was recently raised to 60 hours and the dual certification is a 72 credit-hour program. While numbers are small and decisions based on the observation are premature, we anticipate that the outcomes of student surveys at the end of the year will provide insight.

Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEI) remain consistently positive across courses and instructors. Students have consistently expressed their belief that the courses are relevant and meet or exceed expectations. This is not a departure from previous years and we remain encouraged that this measure of quality is strong and consistent. Initially, we were concerned that transitioning from an all face-to-face program to an online program would have detrimental effects on course evaluations. While some comments and certainly anecdotal reports indicate some frustration and preference to face-to-face, our students seem to be understanding of the precautions we made to assure their safety from covid and their evaluations of our instruction or our courses did not reflect dissatisfaction. Students did express some concern for their successful completion of internships and practica. Several students' graduation dates were pushed back by a semester because they were not able to acquire the required hours in the telehealth format. We are happy to report that, while this remains a concern, students and faculty alike have adjusted to the new demands of telehealth and we have become more efficient in delivering services in this manner.

The comprehensive examination given to all students is a measure of student competencies and is standardized for counseling students across the country. Please recall that our program uses the CPCE which assesses knowledge in the 8 core areas covered in all CACREP accredited programs. As has been our practice, we evaluate program students by comparing them with students across the country who must take the CPCE as an exit exam. Also, as has been our practice, we, as a group, have done very well! Over 3 semesters (Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Summer 2021) 33 students have taken the test with an 94% first-time pass rate. This number represents the most student that have ever tested in an academic year and reflects a low number last year due to students adjusting their plans due to covid. Also of note, as has become our custom, we have once again earned a 100% pass rate on the PRAXIS II for School Counselors.

Each year the faculty reviews the requirements for licensing in Louisiana as a Licensed Professional Counselor and certification in Louisiana as a Professional School Counselor with the intent of modifying our curriculum to respond to the evolving licensing and certification demands. No changes were called for nor made this reporting period.

Program Objectives/Outcomes

The curriculum is reviewed annually to assure alignment with CACREP Standards. Last year we studied the prospect of using the College of Education system for program evaluation. We had intended to implement "Watermark" in Fall 2019 but, simply put: Covid remains a significant obstacle as we continue to adjust from being a 100% face-to-face program to trying to maintain ours and CACREP's high standards in a largely alternative format. While courses are now completely aligned with the new CACREP Standards, we are not yet utilizing Watermark as our

program evaluation format. Initial meetings with the College of Education Assessment Director and Coordinators have been encouraging and we plan to begin the transition in January 2022, regardless of covid status.

Student grades continue to be overwhelmingly good across all courses. An overall GPA across all classes and the past 3 semesters yields a cumulative program GPA over 3.5. Our students continue to prove that they are capable and motivated. Their success is also a testament to the rigorous admission process which over the past year saw 66 applications (down only slightly from previous years), 30 acceptances, and 24 enrollments to our program.

As noted in previous reports, we continue to look at the CPCE scores as evidence of student success and accomplishment of program objectives. The scores showed over the past year that no systematic weaknesses existed in the curriculum and in as much as the CPCE addresses CACREP standards, our students were meeting and exceeding those standards. In a move necessitated by changes in CPCE administration practices (now online), and the availability of normative data in manner that allows us to reliably calculate a passing score in time to clear students for graduation, we have amended our criteria for passing the CPCE. Previously, our cutoff score was defined as one-half of a standard deviation below the national mean. In reviewing nearly 20 years of CPCE scores, it was determined that we could establish a passing score of 80 with a low likelihood of passing someone who did not meet the previous criteria or failing to pass someone who did. Consequently, the passing score on the CPCE for tests taken in Fall 2021 and forward will require a score of 80 to earn a “pass.”

We are also happy to continue what has become a regular occurrence in that exit interviews with students indicate they believed they were prepared by the instruction and experiences they had while enrolled in our program. Likewise, interviews and surveys conducted with site supervisors indicate that our students perform well and demonstrate knowledge and competencies expected or exceeding expectations. We have yet to determine longer term effects of the changes we made to respond to covid, but we are hopeful that we have/will “weather the storm” with little lingering effects.

Current Students

We have noted previously that students were achieving high marks in their courses and that they were performing well on standardized measures. This is our history and even with the ongoing covid crisis, the past year was no exception. We believe much of their success is due to the hard work of the faculty in teaching to the standards, but also to the level of selectivity of the program. This past year (AY 2019-2020), as noted previously, the department received 66 applications and admitted 30 students. Of the 30 admitted, 24 enrolled for Fall 2021. All applicants to the program submitted a record of their undergraduate work, scores on the GRE, an account of work and volunteer experience, a personal statement, and participate in a series of rigorous interviews in the selection process. We customarily attract many top-level students to apply to our program and 2021 proved to be no exception.

Several years ago we updated the instrument used to evaluate students after their first semester, upon application to practicum, and upon application to internship. We continue to use the

Professional Performance Review and we are pleased with the process and with the results. No systematic weaknesses were identified, and indeed, no specific deficits were identified among students who had completed their first semester and were enrolled for their second semester. Likewise, no issues warranting intervention were identified among those entering practicum or internship.

Faculty

Faculty are evaluated by the students every semester. We are pleased to report that COUE faculty were rated as high or higher than the College average across all courses for Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Summer 2021. This has become a pattern of which the faculty are proud of and committed to perpetuating.

Faculty are also evaluated by the Department Head, Dean, and Provost. Evaluation of merit is based on performance in Research, Teaching, and Service. The scale for the evaluation is on a continuum from 1-5 with 1 being “unsatisfactory” and 5 being “exceeds expectations”. All faculty and the department head earned scores greater than 4 for the last evaluation period.

Conclusion

We hope this report has outlined some of the things we are doing in the Department of Counselor Education. We encourage you to review our website frequently for updates and annual statistics on enrollment and graduation.

The faculty wishes to convey our collective gratitude to our students who prove year-in and year-out that the future of counseling is bright. We also wish to thank the Dean of the College of Education and the Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs of the University for their continued support of our program.

If I can answer any questions or provide more information, please email Dr. Esters, Department Head, at esters@louisiana.edu or call at 337-482-5261.