

Annual Program Report for Programs in Counselor Education

September 1, 2020

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.

It is difficult to start this report without first addressing Covid-19 and our response as a program. What a long, strange trip, it's been! In March, we were forced to drastically alter our complete "way of being" in response to Covid. The safety protocols we initiated in March and continue this semester, while difficult to implement, seem to be going well. As a residential program with very little online instruction, we had to reconfigure most classes to an online delivery format. Further, given that we operate a counseling clinic, we had to also reconfigure how we deliver counseling services to the many clients that have come to expect our services. From assuring that the few classes we met face to face were in compliance by masking and distancing, to moving all clinic operations to telehealth, the challenges were many. The Department secured HIPAA compliant Zoom accounts and arranged for telehealth training for the entire faculty and student body. We converted all but 2 classes to strictly online formats, and conducted all department business via Zoom from March to present-day. While "Zoom Fatigue" is a real and present issue for the faculty, students, student-clinicians, and staff, we are persevering and, like everyone we know, are looking forward to getting back into our classrooms and clinic in January, 2021. Internships and practica have been difficult and the lack of client availability has slowed some progress, but we are committed to getting this right, maintaining standards, and we cut no corners. Many of us have been affected by covid either personally or through family and friends. We are all looking forward to getting back to "business as usual" as soon as we can!

Following are a few highlights from the past year.

First, we initiated a department name change which we hope will be approved by the Louisiana Board of Regents for Spring 2022. With our current department title (Department of Counselor Education) we have experienced some confusion among state licensing boards where alums have applied for licensing. Our diplomas and transcripts did not accurately describe the Clinical Mental Health degree as such, and the term, "Education" in our department name and on transcripts was the source of that confusion. We hope that our new department name, "Department of Counseling" and the clear notation of either "Clinical Mental Health Counseling," or "Professional School Counseling" will clear up any potential confusion in the future.

As we noted in last year's report, the Department was the recipient of a generous gift from Better Options Initiative, a local non-profit organization formed to study and effect change in the identification, treatment, and outcomes of high conflict divorce. In Fall 2019 we hosted our first BOI Seminar. The featured speakers were former BOI Executive Director, Dr. Eric Greene and

internationally recognized researcher and author on Parental Alienation, Dr. William Bernet. The event was a success with over 50 participants from the university and local professional communities. At the culmination of the first seminar, we announced plans for the Spring seminar, which unfortunately, was not to be, due to Covid-19. We considered holding the second seminar as a teleconference, but Covid and timing conspired to present too many obstacles so we canceled the Spring seminar. At the time of this report, we are planning to hold the seminar in October as a teleconference.

In last year's report we noted that Dr. Katherine Hermann-Turner was granted tenure and promotion. This year, we report that Dr. Hermann-Turner has decided to pursue other career opportunities in Tennessee. We will miss her, but we wish her well at her new job. We have hired Dr. Doug Blair as Visiting Assistant Professor to replace her and plan to begin a search for the tenure-track position as soon as possible. Dr. Blair brings more than 30 years' experience as a counselor and counselor educator to our department and we are fortunate to have him join us on short notice.

The Curriculum

Perhaps the most significant change to the curriculum is the move from 48 credit-hours to 60 credit-hours for the degree in School Counseling which became official this year. It is too early to determine if the increase will have an effect on applications, but we remain alert to the possibility.

Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEI) have been 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.

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 2 semesters (Fall 2019 and Spring 2020) 16 students have taken the test with an 100% first-time pass rate. No summer comprehensive tests were administered due to Covid. Also of note, several years ago we implemented taking the PRAXIS II for School Counselors as a requirement for that program. As in the past, this year we have a 100% pass rate on that exam.

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 marked the middle of our CACREP accreditation period and we are making small changes to reflect changes in the standards. Primary to that effort was our study of using the College of Education system for program evaluation. We had intended to implement “Watermark” in Fall 2019 but, simply put: Covid got in the way. Needless to say, we will be moving to that program evaluation software as soon as we are able to resume normal functioning. Our courses are now completely aligned with the new CACREP Standards.

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 72 applications, 32 acceptances, and 27 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.

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.

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) 32 students were admitted to the program as compared to 28 the previous year. The department received 84 applications and admitted 32 students. Of the 32 admitted, 24 enrolled for Fall 2020. 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 attracted many top-level students in 2020 and look forward to their matriculation and eventual emergence as counseling professionals.

Two years ago we updated the instrument used to evaluate students after their first semester, upon application to practicum, and upon application to internship. This is the fourth year we have used 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 2019, Spring 2020, and Summer 2020. This has become a pattern of which the faculty are proud 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.