

The University of Montana Department of Counselor Education 2017 Program Evaluation Report

The Department of Counselor Education at the University of Montana is committed to continuous program evaluation and improvement. This document is the 2017 program evaluation report for our CACREP-accredited MA Degree programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) and School Counseling (SC). A variety of data were collected to inform this program evaluation report. Data sources include: (a) the 2016-2017 current student eSurvey; (b) the former student employment eSurvey; (c) course evaluations and other sources of student feedback/data; and (d) informal information obtained from current and former students.

This report includes two main sections. First, we summarize survey data we obtained from current and former students over the past year. Second, we draw conclusions from the data and describe program modifications already made and those presently under consideration.

Program Assessment Data

This year our program assessments focused on current and former students. The data obtained are reported below.

Current Student Survey: Satisfaction and Feedback

During the 2016-2017 academic year, current students were surveyed via an anonymous electronic Qualtrics questionnaire. There were 31 questionnaire items. Overall, 17 CMHC and 11 SC students responded to the survey for a 66.6% response rate (28 respondents of 42 M.A. student headcount in Spring, 2017). Three other students (2 from Global Youth Development and 1 Ph.D. student) also completed the survey. In most cases, these three students did not rate specific internship and practicum items. However, on items pertaining to advising, faculty support, and course content, we were not able to disaggregate the three non-CACREP student ratings from the 28 Counselor Education students. Consequently, some of the following results include those three students (total $n = 31$). Responses to relevant questionnaire items are summarized below.

Q4 - What is your evaluation of your advising experience?

Most students rated their advising experiences as "Excellent" or "Good" (68%). Only two students (6%) rated advising as poor.

Q5 - The faculty support my professional career goals.

Most students rated faculty as supportive (87%). Three students (10%) were neutral whether faculty supported their professional goals. One student was strongly dissatisfied.

Q6 - The faculty provide me with important feedback on my counseling skill development.

Most students “Strongly” agreed or “Somewhat” agreed with this item (87%). A significant minority (20%) “Somewhat” disagreed or “Strongly” disagreed with this statement.

Q7 - The faculty provide me with important feedback on my academic progress.

Most students (84%) rated faculty high on this item. There were 10% who endorsed “Somewhat disagree.”

Q8 - The faculty are sensitive to cultural, gender, and sexuality issues.

The majority (87%) of students rated the faculty high on this item, with 55% giving a “Strongly Agree” rating.

Q9 - The faculty are sensitive to issues related to spirituality and religion.

Although 48% of the students “Strongly Agree” with this statement, there was more scatter on this item, with 16% endorsing “Somewhat Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.”

Q10 - The faculty encourage or inspire me to participate in professional learning activities outside of our academic program.

Most students (87%) rated the faculty as positive in this area, with only one student (3%) providing a negative rating of “Somewhat disagree.”

Q11 - List the professional activities you've engaged in outside of course or academic requirements (e.g., attending a conference, attending a continuing education workshop).

Most students (58%) reported attending conferences or workshops beyond the DCE course requirements.

Q12 - The faculty are competent in their areas of teaching.

Nearly all students rated faculty as “Extremely Competent” (68%) or “Somewhat Competent” (29%). One student offered a neutral rating on this item.

Q13 - My practicum experience helped me further develop my counseling skills.

Nearly all students strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement (90%).

Q14 - I am satisfied with the quality of my practicum supervision.

Approximately 69% of the students were extremely or somewhat satisfied with their practicum supervision. However, a significant minority (17%) were “Somewhat Dissatisfied.” One student was “Extremely Dissatisfied”

Q15 - I am satisfied with the amount of my practicum supervision.

Although most students (76%) were extremely or somewhat satisfied with the quantity of their practicum supervision, 17% were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied.

Q16 - I am satisfied with my internship experience.

Nearly all students rating this item (n = 18) were either extremely or somewhat satisfied with their internship experience. Only one student (5.5%) was “Extremely dissatisfied.”

Q17 - I am satisfied with the quality of my internship supervision.

Most students were satisfied with their internship supervision (88%). Only 2 students (11.11%) were “Somewhat dissatisfied.”

Q18 - I am satisfied with the amount of my internship supervision.

Most students (72%) were satisfied with the amount of their internship supervision. Only 2 students (11%) were “Extremely dissatisfied.”

Several questionnaire items were specifically geared to assess student satisfaction with core counselor education course content. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Student Satisfaction with Core Course Content

Course Content	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
Ethics	73.33%	16.67%	6.67%	3.33%	0.00%
Professional Identity	43.33%	40.00%	13.33%	3.33%	0.00%
Social and Cultural Diversity	32.26%	35.48%	19.35%	12.90%	0.00%
Human Growth and Development	9.68%	54.84%	22.58%	12.90%	0.00%
Career Development	15.38%	65.38%	3.85%	11.54%	3.85%
Counseling Theories and	61.29%	32.26%	6.45%	0.00%	0.00%

Helping Relationships					
Group Counseling and Group Work	31.03%	27.59%	17.24%	10.34%	13.79%
Assessment and Testing	39.13%	34.78%	13.04%	13.04%	0.00%
Research and Program Evaluation	48.15%	22.22%	18.52%	7.41%	3.70%

Employment Status of Program Graduates

One of our primary program objectives is to prepare professional counselors for employment in schools, mental health agencies, and in other professional capacities. This past year we surveyed program graduates via email and electronic posting on our departmental Facebook page. The purpose of the survey was to identify the current employment status of our CMHC and SC graduates.

We received responses from 35 CMHC and 33 SC graduates (total $n = 68$). The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Former Student Employment Status Survey

CMHC

SC

1. Agency – Executive Director	Doctoral Student – S.H.
2. Agency – Youth and Family Outpatient Therapist	Doctoral Student – K.M.
3. Agency – Youth Homes – Outpatient Therapist	Doctoral Student – K.L.
4. Agency – Lead Clinical Supervisor	Elementary SC – Dubai
5. Agency – Outpatient Therapist – MSO	Elementary SC – Helena
6. CSCT – MSO	Elementary SC – Lewistown
7. CSCT – MSO	Elementary SC – Bozeman
8. CSCT – MSO	Elementary SC – Idaho
9. CSCT – MSO	Elementary SC – MSO
10. CSCT – MSO	Elementary SC – Rattlesnake
11. CSCT – MSO	HS SC – MSO – Sentinel
12. CSCT – MSO	HS SC – Frenchtown
13. Doctoral Student – Grief Specialist – MSO	HS SC – Hamilton
14. Doctoral Student – Independent Practice	HS SC – MSO – Willard
15. Doctoral Student – International Internship	HS SC – MSO – Big Sky
16. Doctoral Student – Native Children’s Trauma Center	HS SC – Livingston
17. Independent Consulting Practice – Owner & President	HS SC – MSO – Hellgate
18. Independent Practice – Hamilton	HS SC – MSO – Big Sky
19. Independent Practice – Kalispell	HS SC – MSO – Hellgate

20. Independent Practice – Kalispell	Middle SC – Corvallis
21. Independent Practice – MSO	Middle SC – MSO
22. Independent Practice – Owner, Yoga and Massage	Middle SC – Glacier
23. Medical Center – CEO	Middle SC – MSO – Washington
24. Medical Center – Staff Counselor	Middle SC – MSO – C.S. Porter
25. Private Business – Not MH-Related	Middle SC – Stevensville
26. Residential Treatment – Clinical Program Therapist	Middle SC – MSO
27. Student – Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner	Middle SC – Hamilton
28. U.S. Military – Counselor/Consultant	Middle SC – MSO – Washington
29. University – Career Services	Middle SC – Frenchtown
30. University – Counseling Center – E.H.	Professor – Turkey
31. University – Counseling Center – J.M.	University – Career Services
32. University – Counseling Center – M.D.	University – Advisor
33. University – Counseling Center – S.E.	University – Career Services
34. University – Counseling Center – T.H.	
35. VA – Substance Abuse Counselor	

Percentage Analysis

20% (7) = CSCT (School-Based MH Counselor)
 17% (6) = University Counselor
 17% (6) = Independent Practice
 14% (5) = Agency
 14% (5) = Doctoral or Graduate Students
 6% (2) = U.S. Military/Veteran
 6% (2) = Medical Center
 3% (1) = Residential Treatment
 3% (1) = Unrelated to Counseling/Wellness

30% (10) Middle School Counselors
 27% (9) High School Counselors
 21% (7) Elementary School Counselors
 9% (3) = University-Based
 9% (3) = Doctoral Students
 3% (1) = Professor

Other Student Assessment Data: Learning Outcomes, NCE Scores, and Course Evaluations

Student learning outcomes (SLO) are faculty ratings of student academic performance. These ratings, although important, have an implicit vulnerability to rater bias. This is because they involve faculty rating student performance within their own classes. Obviously, faculty want students to perform well in their classes and so there’s always the possibility for grade inflation, as well as SLO inflation.

We begin with this caveat primarily because our SLO data are substantially positive. On every rating of every SLO, the mean rating is 2.0 (satisfactory) or higher (we use a 3 point rating scale where 1 = unsatisfactory; 2 = satisfactory; and 3 = excellent). These ratings include all SLO ratings of CMHC and SC specialty standards. Further, the differences between individual SLO scores do not appear to be statistically different or clinically meaningful. Therefore, we offer only a general report that the SLO data collected indicate that students are adequately learning the CACREP core and specialty standards content.

Other data collected for this program report support this interpretation. Specifically, our CMHC students take the NBCC's NCE toward the end of their final semester in our program. In the most recent results that NBCC provided, our University of Montana Counselor Education students scored higher than the national mean for CACREP-Accredited programs on every NCE subscale. Even more impressive is the fact that our students scored nearly 1.0 standard deviations higher than the overall national mean for CACREP-Accredited programs.

Consistent with the NCE test results, one of the highest item ratings on the current student survey was on their perception of faculty competence. These ratings also affirm that students are generally satisfied with faculty competence. Additionally, although not every student is satisfied with the course content from core CACREP areas, only a small minority of students are dissatisfied—even with courses focusing on appraisal, careers, and research. We think the strong conclusion is that nearly all of our students are learning, growing, feeling supported, obtaining employment, and generally satisfied with their educational experiences.

Course evaluations include quantitative and qualitative ratings from students. The quantitative data are generally consistent with the survey results reported previously. That is, courses focusing on research, appraisal, and careers obtain slightly lower ratings than courses focused directly on counseling skill development. For appraisal and careers (both taught in the Summer), student feedback included recommendations to change the structure from five-week intensive courses to 10-week courses.

Qualitative data from course evaluations provided us with specific information to help guide program changes. In particular, data from 2015-2016 indicated dissatisfaction with the research textbook and data from 2016-2017 indicated dissatisfaction with the developmental counseling textbook.

Additional Assessment Information

We have a relatively small program and students have plenty of opportunity for direct access to faculty. This access happens face-to-face and spontaneously, through email exchanges, on course evaluations, during advising meetings, and during organized faculty-student social events. Although gathering formal data through standardized procedures is important, we also value the informal information that students, supervisors, and other stakeholders provide us during our daily contacts with them. Obviously, this information is more subjective, but we often use it to affirm or disconfirm data gathered through standardized procedures.

Perhaps due to our continued program growth, for the past two years we have heard from many students that more contact with faculty would be desirable. This is despite the fact that most students rate faculty as supportive. To address this issue, we developed faculty-student "Touchstone meetings." Unfortunately, students rarely attended these meetings and so our efforts to increase contact between faculty and students were unsuccessful.

Qualitative data were also obtained that included complaints from current students about the behavior of other current students. Some students were specific about what they viewed as “inappropriate” comments from other specific students. There were similar and repeated reports that several disgruntled students would occasionally grow excessively negative in their comments about the professors, classes, and program. Due to these concerns, dealing more effectively with student social and in-class behaviors is incorporated into the final section of this report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally student ratings of advising, faculty support, faculty competence, and practicum/internship experiences were positive. Based on data collected, two or three students seemed to be reporting a negative and unsatisfying experience. Obviously, it is impossible to please all students, but understanding the nature of their dissatisfaction is important. Specific strategies for understanding and addressing the important minority of students who voice dissatisfaction are included in the final section of this report.

Overall, student satisfaction with course content is high. However, as has often been the case in the history of our program, students tend to give course content related to appraisal, careers, and research lower ratings. Our best guess is that student satisfaction with these content areas are probably lower throughout the U.S., mostly because most students entering counseling programs are highly interested in learning the more practical aspects of direct counseling.

Former students who responded to the graduate survey were 100% employed. In the CMHC group, only one respondent (3%) was employed outside of the counseling/wellness area. All SC students were employed in school or school-like settings.

A cursory analysis of these data indicate that our graduates are successful in finding employment across a wide range of settings and working with diverse clinical or school populations. Our interpretation of this, although somewhat biased, is that our graduates can pursue their particular interests and dreams. One possible exception is the finding that 20% of our CMHC graduates are employed as School-Based Mental Health Counselors. Based on our knowledge of the local employment situation, many of our graduates who take these positions didn't necessarily set out to become school-based mental health professionals. However, in our local area, one of the most accessible “first jobs” for mental health counseling graduates is within agencies as school-based mental health professionals. Undoubtedly, some, but not all, of the 20% of our graduates who choose to become school-based mental health counselors likely do so because it allows them to gain employment in mental health, while staying within the Missoula area.

The outcome of this survey of our graduates was very positive. Our program graduates are nearly always employed in mental health or school counseling settings. A significant minority have chosen to continue their education. Overall, the conclusion is most of our

students are able to pursue their dreams and ambitions following graduation from our programs. They are contributing to schools and communities in ongoing and substantial ways. In this survey, because it was not time for our formal employment survey, we did not assess specific variables related to employment satisfaction or salary information. However, we will do so in the next assessment cycle.

Recent Changes and Changes under Discussion

As a consequence of qualitative data from course evaluations, faculty made textbook changes in the research (Spring, 2017) and developmental (Fall, 2017) courses. The 2016-2017 feedback on the new research text was positive. The feedback on the new developmental text is pending.

Additionally, students recommended a 10-week course structure for Appraisal and Career counseling. The good news is that Appraisal was changed for Summer, 2017, and the course feedback was positive. Unfortunately, due to summer credit load distribution, we were unable to change the Career course structure. Given the density and practical aspects of the Career course, the faculty has been discussing when and how we can restructure it into a longer course format.

Recommendations for Change

Despite the fact that most of the evaluation data strongly affirm the effectiveness of our Counselor Education programs, there are still areas for improvement, growth, and development. These include:

- **Closer screening, selection, and monitoring of adjunct instructors.** Core faculty do nearly all of the teaching in our department. However, on occasion, adjunct faculty teach courses for sabbatical replacement or faculty release time. Course evaluations for these courses were more negative than courses taught by core faculty. A policy that requires closer screening, selection, and monitoring of adjunct instructors will be added to our Faculty Handbook.
- **Explore potential gaps in the process of providing feedback on counseling skill development.** Based on faculty discussion of this issue, it may be that some students want more clear and direct feedback about their counseling skill development AFTER they complete their fundamentals and practicum courses. The faculty has plans to discuss this issue and gather more qualitative information from students about how to address this need that a significant minority of students identified.
- **Restructure the Student-Faculty Touchstone meetings and communicate more effectively regarding student classroom and social behavior.** Most students rated faculty as supportive, but there is a consistent hum of communication from students indicating they would like more contact with faculty. Unfortunately, our efforts to establish Touchstone meetings with students and faculty were unsuccessful. Across

several meetings, there were never more than one or two students present, and sometimes no students attended. To address this, we are planning to ask for student volunteers to serve on a committee to organize student-faculty contacts. By placing this responsibility in the hands of students, it relieves faculty from guessing (and being wrong) about the sorts of “extra” contacts that might be meaningful. The faculty are open to working with this student committee to identify and implement additional faculty contact with students. Additionally, faculty will work with this committee and within classes to encourage students to provide one another with feedback on the appropriateness of classroom behavior/comments. Finally, the faculty will incorporate clearer ground rules into course syllabi and initial course meetings.

- **Adding curricular content as possible.** Students identified several content areas that they would like added to the curriculum. Unfortunately, the current faculty teaching loads is at maximum and no funds are available to add adjunct teaching of elective courses. Nevertheless, we believe responding to student interest in these specific areas is important. Consequently, led by Department Chair Dr. Veronica Johnson, the faculty will continue to offer a fall and spring semester workshop series for elective credit. However, because student interests are constantly shifting, we will also incorporate student input into our selecting workshop content.

Gratitude

To all our faithful students, graduates, employers, and supervisors who fill out surveys, answer our queries, and help us continuously ask ourselves “How can we do this better?” we say THANKS!!! We are always interested in what you might have to say. Our emails are available on this website, and we are happy to have visits, phone calls, or even the occasional in-vivo conversation!