Please read through this report, all the way to the end! We are grateful for the various forms of input and reflection that offered by all concerned, and look forward to continued communication with our many alumni, colleagues, administrators, supervisors, and current students.

Continuous program evaluation is a valued activity in the Department of Counselor Education. Quality review of various aspects of our two MA Degree Tracks through various stakeholders informs faculty regarding policy, communication concerns, curricular requirements, admissions and diversity recruitment, and professional development needs.

The Department of Counselor Education formally and regularly seeks data from several key sources: a) graduates, b) current students, c) site supervisors, and d) employers. Data are collected via quantitative and qualitative survey methods, and findings are summarized for faculty review. The department engages in continuous program modification with a focus on converging data. Our department is small and thus consistent data from several sources is of particular value. Once completed, survey data and related program modifications are published on our website and made available to current and former students, supervisors, prospective students, employers and university officials as appropriate.

This review first summarizes survey findings mentioned above. In a concluding section, program modifications already made and those presently under consideration will be described.

Former Student Survey (2008 & 2011) Summary:

Total number of respondents: 26

90% of graduates were employed fulltime in their training field.
10% were not currently employed due to family-related choices

The reported annual salary was $36,470 (2008) and $35,000 (2011)

Summary: Overall, graduates were highly satisfied with their graduate educations. Former students praised the accessibility and close connections with faculty including excellent quality teaching. Post-graduate employment opportunities were reported as a strength. Graduates reported feeling proud about their professional knowledge and skills. Many academic areas were praised. Former students reported areas that could be improved including: Career development and research, expansion or reorganization of family systems training, enhanced crisis intervention and suicide prevention training, needs assessment and the use of research in program evaluation and modification, working with parents in the school setting, strategies for influencing public policy,
culturally appropriate modifications of counseling interventions and school counseling program evaluation, design and management.

Current Student Survey Summary (2011):

Total number of respondents: 27/30
On a 3 point scale with “1” indicating Dissatisfied and “3” indicating Satisfied, the range was 2.25 to 3.00 for the admissions process and advising, indicating that most students were satisfied with both. Faculty advising and feedback were areas of strength, as was support for student professional goals, while the intensity of the admissions oral interview process was rated a 2.25.

Practicum and Internship experiences were rated 2.25 to 3.00. Some students were concerned about obtaining placement and preparation for clinical experiences.

Academic experiences were rated between 1.6 and 3.00. Areas highly rated (2.67-3.0) were individual counseling skills, counseling theories, professional identity, current professional issues, consultation, human growth and development, appraisal, diagnosis, clinical interviewing, ethics, school counseling program development, counseling children and youth in the schools, supervision of counseling, research and program evaluation, career counseling, and advocacy.

Areas that received the lowest scores (1.6-2.25) were: addictions counseling, school leadership, crisis management, research and program evaluation, psychopharmacotherapeutics for counselors, working with trauma and diagnosis.

Note: The astute reader will note that the same areas are listed as strengths and as weaknesses. The student survey allowed for disaggregation of the data revealing that the lowest scores (1.6 and 1.7) came from first year students who had not yet enrolled in courses covering these areas. Two versions of the student survey, 1st and 2nd year, should be provided in the future. It may be best to administer the survey during Spring Semester so that 1st year students have more experience with their particular track and curriculum.

Summary: Overall current students rate their training program very positively. For the purpose of continuous improvement and program development, the following areas have been identified as needing faculty attention: enhanced preparation and assistance with practicum and internship experiences, improving the addictions counseling training, adding more about school leadership, teaching more about crisis management, making research and program evaluation more counseling-specific, adding structure to psychopharmacotherapeutics for counselors, adding to our teaching and training in working with trauma and treatment-planning relative to specific diagnoses. In most cases, one or two students mentioned each area. Converging data is needed from other departmental surveys to explore these concerns more comprehensively.
Employer Survey 2011

Total number of respondents: 12 (CMHC = 7, School = 5)

No respondent indicated dissatisfaction with Department of Counselor Education graduate job performance. Employers rated graduates highly (“extraordinarily satisfied”) in the following areas: individual counseling skills (CMHC and School), large group guidance (School), Ethical behavior (CMCH and School), awareness of diverse student needs (School), student advocacy (School), appropriate use of supervision (CMHC). The following areas received primarily “just fine” ratings from employers, though some respondents rated graduates as extraordinary: Program development and use of research to inform work (CMHC). Other areas were equally rated as “extraordinarily satisfied” or “just fine.”

The CACREP Core areas were primarily highly rated (more ratings of “3” than “2”) in the following: Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice, (exceptionally high), Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Helping Relationships, and Group Work. Two areas received lower scores, though only from Clinical Mental Health Employers: Career Counseling and Research and Program Evaluation.

There were numerous positive comments provided by respondents. A sample is “you provide a well balanced Program that produces very good graduates,” “you encourage self-reflection and how they effect others,” “your faculty has great expertise,” very well prepared in all areas,” and “she (graduate) is doing outstanding work and is a quick learner.” Areas that employers indicated as where Program “could be doing better” included “define role of counselor in classroom . . . teachers want to have time they can count on for classroom Programs,” counselors should “connect with daily work at Missoula County Public Schools.” Comments from CMHC employers seemed more closely related to their possible role as supervisors of current students: “Better coordination between training sites and the Program,” “Better methods to deal with students who are struggling or having challenging situations,” and “When you see areas in students’ lives that need to be addressed, find ways to bring it to their attention that doesn’t cause great distress.”

Summary: Though the number of respondents is small, overall employers indicate a high level of satisfaction with both School and Clinical Mental Health Counseling preparation. Based on the employer survey, CMHC employers would like to see enhanced graduate skills in Program development and evaluation, the use of research to inform work and Career Counseling. Narrative comments (provided in the preceding paragraph) require faculty discussion. It appears that School Counseling graduates in one respondent’s view, need to monitor communication with teachers and enhance connections with the School District as a whole.
Supervisor Survey 2011

Total number of respondents: 11 (CMHC = 6, School = 5)

All of the school counseling supervisors rated all aspects of student performance and faculty communication as a “2” or “3” indicating beginning proficiency or mastery. This indicates that the limited number of school counseling supervisors at this training are basically satisfied with intern performances and faculty communication.

The CMHC supervisors produced a different pattern of responses. Specifically, two respondents endorsed negative ratings (e.g., skills lacking/improvement needed) on the following items:

- Intern establishes a case formulation using a theoretical stance.
- Intern sets collaborative treatment goals.
- Intern uses community resources and referral.
- Intern assists in communication between supervisor and department faculty.
- Faculty communication with me has been helpful and timely.
- I have a clear understanding of my supervisory role in relationship to student preparation.

There were only two qualitative responses to this questionnaire, both of which expressed positive feedback about the supervisory training and expressed an interest in additional events in the future.

Summary: Though the number of respondents is small, overall school counseling supervisors appear pleased with the U of MT interns and with faculty communication. In contrast, there appears to be room for improvement within the CMHC domain. These results indicate that we should consider two actions: (a) offer trainings to supervisors more frequently; and (b) become more explicit and proactive in our communications with CMHC supervisors.

Department of Counselor Education Program Changes between 2009 and 2012

While we have set-aside times to deliberate over findings from surveys and other sources of input, faculty review and discussion of program evaluation-driven changes are also a continuous process. Discussions, plans, decisions, and changes are considered both in weekly, two-hour faculty meetings and in specific curriculum and policy-planning meetings during the academic year. Numerous changes to the graduate curriculum and policies have occurred over the past three years. Some of these changes were based on faculty discussion of various areas, based on the faculty’s participation in professional counseling activities and research, including the newer CACREP 2009 standards. Others were based on survey results and informal student, supervisor, and employer comments on the Program.
During the past three years the Program has made the following improvements and changes:

2009-2010

- We adjusted our clinical hours required for CMHC Track to 700 to reflect the new standard. This created more space for electives for CMHC track students. We began watching for good electives and looked to develop some ourselves.

- Based on direct student observations and discussion among faculty, we determined the current oral comprehensive examination performances had deteriorated and consequently began developing a more objective process.

2010-2011

- We offered an Evidenced-Based Treatments course in response to student feedback, concerns, and contemporary trends in counseling.

- From former student feedback, we realized our curriculum needed to include more direct pre-practicum, skill-based instruction. We altered the Fundamentals Course to be more skill-based, while still addressing counselor identity. We changed the curriculum and added more emphasis on ethics readings.

- We realized, because of our prolonged search, that we needed an adjunct faculty person who could at least temporarily carry some of the important School Counselor course load. One of our faculty agreed to a reduced load (went to .8) to create finances to allow for an adjunct to be hired as a temporary solution.

- We realized that Practicum instruction should reflect the workload-rating assigned to it by CACREP and changed the practicum credits to 3.

- We assessed how students were doing with the Intimate Relationships practicum experience and added a training specifically for working with this area.

- We realized our research course was not fully addressing our student’s particular needs and worked with the instructors to include more of counseling examples, materials, and SLOs.

2011-2012

- We noted that our supervisors had little formal, local opportunities for supervisor training, so we created a training and offered it, providing continuing education credits to those who attended; we also decided to continue with an annual supervisor training.
• We again offered the training to prepare directly for working with the undergraduate Intimate Relationships course.

• Based on student feedback and student performance, we determined the Fundamentals Course was overloaded and developed a 1-credit Professional Identity course.

• Although we conduct extensive pre-admissions screening of our graduate students, we discerned the need for a more formal student skills assessment process before students begin practicum, and thus introduced our Level I oral exam (which combines skills taught in Counseling Fundamentals and Counseling Theories courses and is given at the end of the first fall semester).

• We determined that as our Intimate Relations Lab continued to grow, it would require increased supervision dedicated to that population and our students directly expressed a desire for more hands-on supervision. Consequently, we sought funding, and were able to hire a ½ time clinical experiences faculty member to organize and supervise our on campus clinical experiences and to enhance grant-writing opportunities.

• We enhanced the comprehensive exam process to include skill demonstration in an oral exam format in addition to written knowledge.

• We added 685 as an ongoing doctoral seminar, providing supervision for doctoral students.

• We successfully completed a search that resulted in hiring a faculty with school counseling experience and expertise.

• We communicated with key colleagues about CACREP Accreditation and the courses they teach for us, including modest adjustments to the Addictions course and the Psychopharmatherapeutics course.

• We advocated to increase our department support to receive an additional TA and .75 Administrative Personnel. This doubled our doctoral TAship numbers, and increased our office support from .44 to .75.

• We began connecting doctoral students to master's students for additional supervision needs. By all reports, this has been very well received.

Areas currently under review / consideration by department faculty:

• Adding a research course to the curriculum when funding is available, but in the interim, working with colleagues in related departments who are willing to add relevant
materials, learning activities, and who are also willing to engage in our Student Learning Outcome measurements.

- Discussion of enhancement of the Family Systems area (perhaps a second level course or exchanging the existing course out of the summer line up and into the academic year).

- Exploring alumni and employer concerns regarding the Career Counseling course.

- Admissions recruiting for student diversity and increased School Counseling applications. We have begun reaching out, attending Tribal College Career meetings, and recruiting nontraditional applicants for the school counseling track.

- Increase frequency of educational opportunities to supervisors and become more explicit and proactive in communication with CMHC supervisors.

- Discussion and potential development of increased use of technology associated with counselor training and the delivery of counseling services.

Thanks!

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 chat over a good meal!