

**Program Evaluation Summary
Mental Health Counseling Program
Department of Psychology
Western Washington University
Fall, 2012**

The faculty in the graduate counseling programs at Western Washington University are very interested in obtaining program evaluation information from students, graduates and individuals in cooperating agencies (employers and supervisors) that can be incorporated into our annual program review and curriculum development. The following report is a summary of the information gathered between June of 2008 and June of 2012. It is based upon information obtained from the following groups.

- An extensive program evaluation completed anonymously each June by graduating students from the Mental Health Counseling program (2010-12).
- A survey of program graduates from 2009-11.
- A survey of employers for graduates from the years 2009-11.
- A survey of internship supervisors for the years 2010-12.

Annual Program Evaluation

All graduating students are invited to complete an anonymous written program evaluation that addresses essential program elements and characteristics. Included in this evaluation is an opportunity for the student to rate his/her preparation according to the curriculum standards specified by our accreditation organization, The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Thirteen of the 15 students who graduated from 2010-2012 completed the survey. Graduating student evaluations of the program have been remarkably consistent over the last three years, with students indicating a very high level of satisfaction with the program. For example, in the section *General Program Characteristics*, students give the program high marks (ratings of “good to excellent”) for the quality of the curriculum in general; academic/professional knowledge gained; development of professional counseling skills; practicum and internship experience and supervision; the teaching effectiveness, professionalism, advisement and accessibility of the faculty; and the resources and facilities in the department.

In the section *Curriculum Areas in the Program*, students were again very positive. Regarding *Professional Orientation & Ethical Practice*, the majority of students rated their preparation as “good to excellent” for seven of ten program elements, including history and philosophy of the counseling profession; professional role and function; self care strategies; counseling supervision models and practice; advocacy processes on behalf of the profession and clients; and ethical and legal considerations in the profession. Knowledge of professional organizations and credentialing were rated as “satisfactory” or “good to excellent” by all but one graduate. Four graduates in 13 rated the curriculum as unsatisfactory regarding counselor role in response to emergency management and crisis.

In the area *Social and Cultural Diversity*, five of six program elements were rated as “good to excellent” by the majority of respondents including multicultural and pluralistic trends in society; attitudes, beliefs, understandings and acculturative experiences; theories of multicultural counseling; counselor role in cultural self-awareness and promoting social justice; and counselor role in eliminating bias and prejudice. The element individual, couple, family group and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations was rated as “good to excellent,” or “satisfactory” by all but one graduate.

Student ratings for the curriculum area, *Human Growth and Development*, were also generally positive. Eleven of 12 graduates rated the area understanding psychopathology and factors that affect normal and abnormal behavior as “good to excellent” while nine of 12 gave a similar rating to the area facilitating optimal development over the lifespan. Theories of individual and family development as well as theories of learning and personality development were rated as “good to excellent” by more than half of respondents. The remaining four curriculum areas demonstrated more variability. Three of 12 grads rated training as “unsatisfactory” in the areas of effect of crises on persons of all ages; theories and models of resilience; and understanding exceptional abilities and strategies for differentiated interventions. Six of 12 grads provided ratings of “unsatisfactory” regarding theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors.

Graduates are extremely pleased with the quality of training in the curriculum area *Career Development*. All 12 respondents rated the area career information systems as “good to excellent” while more than half gave similar ratings to the areas career development theories; relationships between work, family and other life roles; career and educational planning; assessment instruments related to career planning; and career counseling techniques. Career development program planning was rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by 11 of 12 respondents.

Students were very positive in their ratings of the curriculum area *Helping Relationships*. More than half of all respondents assigned ratings of “good to excellent,” to all of the curriculum elements including orientation to wellness and prevention; counseling theories; understanding of family and other systems theories and models; consultation; and crisis intervention and suicide prevention models. Furthermore, two areas, counselor characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes and essential interviewing and counseling skills were rated as “good to excellent” by every respondent.

Graduates were similarly positive regarding their preparation in the curriculum area, *Group Work*. Four of five areas were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by every respondent including principles of group dynamics; group leadership approaches; group counseling methods; and direct group experiences. Ten of eleven respondents provided rating of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” for the area theories of group counseling.

Two additional curriculum areas, *Assessment* and *Research and Program Evaluation*, received consistently high marks from graduating students across all three years. The majority of students applied the highest rating, “good to excellent” to every element of the *Assessment* curriculum area, including historical perspectives; basic concepts of standardized and nonstandardized testing; statistical concepts; reliability; validity; social and cultural factors related to assessment; and ethical strategies for use of assessment instruments. For the curriculum area, *Research and Program Evaluation*, the majority of students also assigned ratings of “good to excellent” to all curriculum elements including importance of research in the counseling profession; research methods; statistical methods; needs assessment and program evaluation; use of research to inform evidence-based practice; and ethical and culturally relevant strategies for using and reporting research.

Graduating students were also invited to provide ratings for 60 *Specialized Knowledge/Skill areas*, divided into six major categories, (1)*Foundations of Mental Health Counseling*; (2)*Counseling, Prevention and Intervention*; (3)*Diversity & Advocacy*; (4)*Assessment*; (5)*Research & Evaluation*; and (6)*Diagnosis*. More than half of all respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” for ten of the program standards in the category, *Foundations of Mental Health Counseling*. Students are especially pleased with their training in ethical and legal standards in that all 12 graduates provided the highest rating on this element. Two of the twelve standards did show a little more variability. With regard to the standard, understands the impact of crises and other trauma-causing events, six graduates provided a rating of “good to excellent” while four provided a rating of “satisfactory” and two rated this standard as “unsatisfactory”. Finally the ratings for the standard regarding the operation of emergency management systems, five graduates provided a rating of “good to excellent” while three provided a rating of “satisfactory” and four graduates rated the training in this area as “unsatisfactory.”

For the specialty area, *Counseling, Prevention and Intervention*, graduate ratings were especially positive. Eight of 18 standards were rated as “good to excellent” by at least ten of the twelve respondents. Only three standards were rated as unsatisfactory by more than one graduate. These standards included knows the disease concept in addiction (three “unsatisfactory” ratings); principles of crisis intervention during disasters and trauma events (two “unsatisfactory” ratings); and appropriate strategies for working with clients with addiction (two “unsatisfactory” ratings).

Graduates also provided high ratings for the nine standards in the specialty area, *Diversity and Advocacy*. More than half of the respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” on every standard. Furthermore, eleven of twelve graduates rated their training on two standards (understands how living in a multicultural society affects clients and understands the effects of racism, discrimination and privilege on clients) as “good to excellent.”

With regard to the specialized knowledge/skill area *Assessment*, student ratings were again positive. Seven of the eight standards were rated as “good to excellent” by

more than half of the graduates. In particular it should be noted that preparation regarding three of the standards were rated as “good to excellent” by ten of the twelve graduates. These standards included knows the principles and models of assessment, case conceptualization, and theories of human development leading to diagnoses and treatment plans; understands various models and approaches to clinical evaluation including mental status examinations and personality assessments; and selects appropriate comprehensive assessment interventions. Four of twelve students did rate training as “unsatisfactory” regarding identification of standard screening assessments for substance use and addictions, while eight graduates rated the standard as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory.”

In the specialized knowledge/skill area *Research & Evaluation*, student ratings were again very positive. All twelve graduates assigned the highest rating to the standard, understands how to critically evaluate research relevant to mental health counseling. The other five standards in this category were given the highest ratings by at least two thirds of respondents.

In the specialized knowledge/skill area *Diagnosis*, six of seven standards were rated at “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by at least 10 of twelve graduates. Graduates were particularly positive about their preparation to make use of diagnostic tools such as the DSM to describe the symptoms and clinical presentation of clients. One standard, knows the impact of co-occurring substance use disorders on medical and psychological disorders, was rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by eight of twelve graduates and “unsatisfactory” by four.

When asked to comment on general strengths of the Mental Health Counseling Program, the following consistent themes emerged:

- the quality and availability of the core counseling faculty
- the program emphasis on counseling skill development and diversity issues
- the small program and class size; cohort model
- the structure of practicum including extensive supervision
- internship support and supervision
- depth of content in the curriculum including research, ethical practice, and assessment
- department facilities including the counseling training clinic
- openness of the faculty to suggestions and recommendations for program development

When invited to make suggestions for program improvement, graduates suggested the following:

- Move multicultural/diversity training to early stage in program and incorporate into more classes
- Include more content on family counseling techniques as well as substance abuse and co-occurring disorders

- Modify social psychology class and move developmental psychology to earlier in program
- Bring back the couples counseling practicum

Graduates of the program from 2011 and 2012 were also invited to comment on the importance of CACREP program accreditation in their choice to enter the mental health counseling program at WWU. Of the seven students who answered this question, two reported it was very important and five reported they would not have come to WWU if it hadn't been accredited.

Graduate Survey

Information for this survey was obtained from program graduates who had completed 1-3 years of post master's work experience. Seventeen of 18 graduates from 2009 through 2011 completed the survey. In response to the question about work setting, eleven are working as counselors in mental health settings, one is working as a case manager in a mental health center, one graduate is in private practice, one serves as a tribal wellness program manager, another works as a case manager in an integrated medical setting, one is currently unemployed after a period of employment in mental health, and one grad is a "stay at home mom". Thirteen report that they hold a license as a mental health counselor, one holds the Chemical Dependency Professional certificate, two hold certificates as Child Mental Health Specialists, and eight are Nationally Certified Counselors. In terms of professional affiliations, eight are members of ACA and five are members of either AMHCA or WAMHCA.

We find it informative to compare the survey results of graduates as they complete the program with the responses of graduates who have obtained experience in the field. In ratings of general program characteristics, experienced graduates were, if anything, even more positive than those of the graduating students. Of the nineteen questions, only one student in seventeen assigned a single rating of "unsatisfactory" to any standard. Furthermore, that item, procedures used to evaluate student performance in the program, was rated as "good to excellent" by thirteen of the 17 respondents. Fifteen of the 19 items were rated as "good to excellent" by at least 12 of 17 respondents. It should also be noted that the item, professionalism of the faculty, was rated as "good to excellent" by all 17 respondents. Clearly graduates are very satisfied with all aspects of the program.

Ratings for the *Core Curriculum* were also very positive and clearly reflected the consistent finding that the program provides excellent preparation in counseling skill development. The standards in the curriculum areas, *Helping Relationships* and *Group Work* were highly rated by a large majority of respondents. In particular, the standard, orientation to wellness and prevention as desired counseling goals, was rated as "good to excellent" by all 17 respondents. Respondents were also very positive in their ratings of the competencies in the Core Curriculum areas *Assessment* and *Research & Program Evaluation*, with at least 14 of 17 providing ratings of "good to excellent" on 11 of 13 standards. Consistent with the emphasis on multicultural counseling within our program,

curricular elements within the area *Social and Cultural Diversity* were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by 16 of 17 respondents. With regard to *Human Growth and Development* and *Career Development*, nine of 15 standards were rated as “good to excellent” by more than half of the respondents. The two standards with the most variability in these areas included effects of crisis and trauma-causing events and theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors. In the Core Curriculum area, *Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice*, over half of all respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” for eight of the ten standards. The two standards with more variable ratings were professional role and relationships with other providers and counselor role in a crisis or trauma-causing event. While still rated as at least “satisfactory” by 13 of the 17 respondents, there were a small number of “unsatisfactory” ratings. This is consistent with the ratings of graduates reported earlier. Two themes emerged as relative weaknesses in the curriculum that are consistent with the ratings of the recent program graduates, issues related to providing service in response to crises or trauma-causing events and issues related to substance abuse and addiction, particularly in situations where the issue represents a co-occurring condition.

Graduating students were also invited to provide ratings for 24 *Specialized Skills and Practices for Professional Mental Health Counseling* as outlined in the 2009 CACREP Standards. Twenty-two of the 24 standards were rated as “good to excellent” by a majority of the respondents. The two standards with more variable ratings were both related to client issues involving addiction and co-occurring disorders.

When asked to comment on program strengths, graduates identified the following:

- Counseling skills practicum model and supervision quality (mentioned by 75% of graduates)
- Quality and accessibility of the counseling faculty
- Comprehensive curriculum with particular strengths in assessment and evaluation procedures
- Focus on evidence-based practice
- Cohort model and program size
- Depth of academic preparation across all areas of the curriculum

When asked for suggestions to improve the program, graduates proposed the following:

- Continue to explore ways to incorporate more multicultural awareness throughout the curriculum.
- Include content on addictions and co-occurring disorders as well as trauma and crisis counseling
- Extend practicum for additional term
- Bring back the family practicum experience and expand group counseling
- Reexamine both developmental psychology and social courses for relevance to mental health counseling

Employer Evaluation

Four of nine employers responded to a survey concerning our graduates' performance as mental health counselors. Ratings were completed using a scale that included the following categories: "good to excellent," "satisfactory," "unsatisfactory," and "not able to evaluate." Thirty-three items were rated that represented performance on both the core and specialty standards. Thirty-one of the 33 items was rated as "satisfactory" or "good to excellent" by at least three of the four respondents. For the two items when this was not the case, the respondent chose the rating "not able to evaluate" indicating a lack of knowledge of the employee's competence rather than lack of knowledge or skill. While the number of respondents was small, it is indeed gratifying to receive such positive feedback from employers. When asked to comment on the strengths of the program, these employers emphasized the preparation of WWU graduates to engage in entry level clinical work including their excellent case conceptualization skills. Furthermore, WWU graduates are appreciated for their recognition of the importance of ongoing supervision and training.

Internship Supervisor Evaluation

Eight of twelve (67%) internship supervisors from the years 2010-12 responded to an anonymous survey conducted in June of 2012 concerning the preparation of WWU mental health counseling students. As a faculty we are particularly interested in the perspective of internship supervisors as they are in a position to observe the skill of our students at end of their campus practicum experience. Supervisors were invited to provide ratings for the 33 items included in the Employer Survey, using the same ratings categories. Much like program graduates and employers, internship supervisors give the program very high marks. In the few cases where an individual item was not rated as "good to excellent" or "satisfactory" by all eight respondents, it was because the person had selected "unable to evaluate." Simply put, supervisors are uniform in their praise of the program.

Program strengths identified by supervisors include:

- Excellent foundation in counseling fundamentals
- Comprehensive training and high quality students
- Excellent supervision
- Highly competent core counseling faculty
- Solid grounding in ethical/legal principles

Supervisors made the following comments as suggestions:

- Give students more practice
- More training in the use of the DSM

Program Modifications in Response to Feedback from Students, Graduates, Faculty, Supervisors and Employers

It is also important to review the summary report from 2009 to determine the effect of program modifications. Three areas were identified as relative weaknesses in the program in that review. These included curriculum content on psychopharmacology, and more experience with the diagnostic process as well as added opportunities to gain experience with advanced techniques in counseling. All three of these curricular elements were rated as “satisfactory” or good to excellent by program graduates and employers. One supervisor did indicate that program students could benefit from more experience with diagnosis and the DSM.

Summary Comments

Taken as a whole, there is considerable uniformity across groups in the content of the program evaluation information obtained for the years 2009-12. Graduating students, program graduates with at least one year of experience in the field, internship supervisors, and employers view the program very positively. Particular strengths of the program include the quality and professionalism of the faculty, the structure of the counseling practicum, the internship experience, and the depth of the curriculum in both the core and specialty areas. There were also a few recommendations for program improvement that recurred across groups. These include expansions of the curriculum to include (1) more information on addiction processes and co-occurring conditions and (2) counseling interventions (including emergency management) in response to crisis and trauma situations. Students have also requested more integration of multicultural awareness into classes and an earlier program emphasis on the topic. Students have also requested modifications that would make social and developmental psychology more directly relevant to counseling.

The faculty will meet soon to address these issues. We have already taken action regarding the multicultural awareness concern. We had a meeting last spring with graduating students to hear their concerns and recommendations. In response we plan to provide special multicultural awareness training for counseling faculty and 1st year students at the beginning of practicum in winter quarter. The experience will be facilitated by Dr. Jeff King, a member of the counseling faculty and expert on multicultural issues. The outcome of this experience will be used to guide further program development.