Program Evaluation Summary
School Counselor 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 ongoing 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 all graduating students from the School Counselor 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). Sixteen of the eighteen students who graduated from 2010-2012 completed the survey. Graduating student evaluations of the program have been remarkably consistent over the last four 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 supervision by core faculty, the professionalism 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, 15 of 16 students rated their preparation as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” for all ten program elements, including history and philosophy of the counseling profession; professional role and function; counselor role in response to emergency management and crisis; self care strategies; counseling supervision models and practice; professional organizations and credentialing; advocacy processes on behalf of the profession and clients. Students were especially positive regarding their preparation in the area, ethical and legal considerations in the profession.
In the area *Social and Cultural Diversity*, every program element including multicultural and pluralistic trends in society; attitudes, beliefs, understandings and acculturative experiences; theories of multicultural counseling; individual, couple, family group and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations; counselor role in cultural self-awareness and promoting social justice; and counselor role in eliminating bias and prejudice was rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by 15 of the 16 respondents.

Student ratings for the curriculum area, *Human Growth and Development*, were somewhat more variable, although still positive. All eight standards were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by at least 13 of 16 grads. Curricular elements receiving the highest ratings (at least half of respondents providing ratings of “good to excellent”) included personality development and understandings about neurobiological behavior; understanding exceptional abilities and strategies for differentiated interventions; developmental crises, disability, and psychopathology; and theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors.

Graduates are extremely pleased with the quality of training in the curriculum area *Career Development*. Six of seven elements were rated as “good to excellent” by more than half of the respondents including the areas career development theories; information resources and career information systems; interrelationships of work, family and other life roles including multicultural issues; career and educational planning, assessment instruments and techniques and career counseling processes. The remaining element, career development program planning, was rated as at least “satisfactory” by 14 of 16 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 all 16 respondents.

Graduates were similarly positive regarding their preparation in the curriculum area, *Group Work*. Four of five areas were rated as “good to excellent” by at least 13 of 16 respondents including principles of group dynamics; group leadership approaches; group counseling methods; and direct group experiences. Fifteen of 16 respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” for the area theories of group counseling.

Two additional curriculum areas, *Assessment* and *Research and Program Evaluation*, received outstanding ratings from graduating students across all three years. At least 14 of 16 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, at least 12 of the 16 students 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. There was not a single rating of “unsatisfactory” assigned to any element in either of these two curriculum areas.

Graduating students were also invited to provide ratings for 68 Specialized Curricular Experiences for School Counseling, divided into eight major categories, (1) Foundations of School Counseling, (2) Counseling, Prevention & Intervention, (3) Diversity and Advocacy, (4) Assessment, (5) Research & Evaluation, (6) Academic Development, (7) Collaboration & Consultation, and (8) Leadership. Fifteen graduating students completed the ratings in these sections. In the area Foundations of School Counseling, the majority of students assigned ratings of “good to excellent” to every element in the category including history and philosophy in school counseling; ethical and legal considerations; role, function and professional identity; professional organizations; current models of school counseling programs; effects of development, health, language, ability and multicultural issues on student learning; operation of the school emergency management system; ability to apply and adhere to ethical and legal standards; and the ability to model and advocate for an appropriate school counselor identity and program.

Ten of eleven elements in the specialized knowledge/skill category, Counseling, Prevention and Intervention, were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory by all respondents. Five elements received particularly strong ratings (at least 13 of 15 respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent”) including knows how to design, manage and evaluate programs to enhance success of students; understands group dynamics to enable students to overcome barriers to learning; demonstrates self awareness and sensitivity needed to related to diverse student populations; provides individual and group counseling to enhance student development; and recognizes his/her limitations as a school counselor.

Eight elements were assessed in the category Diversity and Advocacy. Ten of 15 students provided ratings of “good to excellent” for seven of the eight elements including understands the cultural issues surrounding diversity and equity for student learning; identified barriers that impede student development; understands multicultural counseling issues and their effects on student achievement; demonstrates multicultural competencies; advocates for student development; advocates for school programs and services that enhance a positive school climate for all students; and engages parents and families to promote the development of students. The remaining element, understands how educational practices can be adapted and modified to be culturally congruent for students and their families, was rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by 14 of 15 students.
The specialized knowledge/skill Assessment was rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by all 15 respondents, including understands the effects of multiple factors that may affect academic functioning; knows the signs and symptoms of substance abuse in students; identifies needs assessments for student development; assesses students’ strengths and needs; selects appropriate assessment strategies; analyzes assessment information to make valid inferences; makes appropriate referrals; and assesses barriers that impede student development.

Students were similarly positive in their ratings of the specialized knowledge/skill category Research & Evaluation. All 15 provided ratings of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” for the seven elements including, understands how to critically evaluate counseling research relevant to school counseling; knows models of program evaluation; knows basic strategies for evaluating counseling outcomes; knows current methods of using date to inform accountability; understand the outcome research data and best practices in the school counseling literature; applies relevant research findings; and develops measurable outcomes for school counseling programs.

Ratings of the competencies in the specialized knowledge/skill area Academic Development were also positive. All 15 students provided a rating of “good to excellent” for the element, understands the relationship of the school counseling program to the academic mission of the school. The remaining five elements were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by 14 of 15 respondents including understands the principles and practices designed to close the achievement gap and promote success; understands curriculum design and classroom management for delivering classroom guidance; conducts programs to enhance academic development; implements strategies to prepare students for postsecondary opportunities; and implements instructional strategies that draw on pedagogical content to promote student achievement.

There was somewhat more variability in the ratings for elements within the category, Collaboration & Consultation. All 12 elements were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by at least 13 of 15 respondents. Elements with the most positive ratings included understands how student learning is enhanced by family-school collaboration; knows strategies to promote effective teamwork; knows how to build effective working teams; understands systems theory and processes of consultation in school settings; works with families to address problems that affect student success; locates resources in the community to improve student success; and consults with school staff and community to improve student success. Two elements that may need more emphasis in the training program include community collaboration models for crisis/disaster preparedness and response and information on peer programming interventions.

Ratings for the final category, Leadership, were again very positive. At least 12 of the 15 respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” for every element including knows the principles of effective leadership, knows leadership strategies to enhance the school learning environment; knows how to design and evaluate a comprehensive program; understands the important role of the school counselor as a change agent;
understands the counselor’s role in student assistance programs, participates in the design and management of a comprehensive program, and plans and presents educational programs for use with parents and teachers.

When asked to comment on general strengths of the program, multiple graduating students mentioned the following:

- the quality and availability of the core counseling faculty
- the program emphasis on counseling skill development
- 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
- department facilities including the counseling training clinic

When asked for suggestions for program improvement, many graduating students shared ideas, but there was little consistency in student comments across all three years, unlike the ratings regarding curriculum elements. Therefore it makes more sense to examine the comments by graduation year rather than as one group. Students who graduated in 2010 made suggestions that focused on the relationship with the school environment. Comments included more experience with teaching prior to internship, techniques for classroom management, and more focus on bringing schools and communities together. Such comments were not made by graduates in 2011 or 2012 suggesting that curriculum modifications addressed these concerns. Graduates from 2011 focused on a desire for more multicultural experiences and better integration of the concept across the curriculum. As these same graduates provided high ratings for the curriculum elements focused on multicultural competencies in both the core and specialty standards, it appears these suggestions are not so much an expression of dissatisfaction as a request for even more opportunities. Finally graduates in 2012 suggested greater coordination between classroom assignments in the 2nd year and internship experiences as is done with Dr. Graham’s assessment classes.

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 school counseling program at WWU. Of the ten students who answered this question, one reported that accreditation was not a factor in his/her decision, two reported it was somewhat important, six reported it was very important, and one 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. Twelve of 18 graduates from 2009-2011 completed the survey. In response to the question about current employment, seven reported that they are employed as school counselors. Of the remaining five, three are employed in mental health settings, one is working as an academic advisor in higher
education and one is in a paraprofessional position, presumably in a school setting. Ten of twelve graduates have been certified as school counselors. Three are working toward the required supervision hours to become licensed mental health counselors. Four graduates have been credentialed by NBCC as Nationally Certified Counselors. Nine respondents report that they are members of ASCA, a state counselor association, or both.

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 continue to view the program positively. Of 19 elements, 14 were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by every respondent. Particularly positive ratings were assigned to the elements, curriculum quality; academic knowledge gained; practicum experiences including supervision; teaching effectiveness and professionalism of the core faculty; curricular resources; availability of faculty as mentors; and support for the development of a counselor identity. Clearly graduates remain satisfied with all aspects of the program.

Ratings for the Core Curriculum were also very positive and clearly reflected the 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 10 respondents. Respondents were also very positive in their ratings of the competencies in the Core Curriculum areas Assessment and Research & Program Evaluation, in that all ten respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” on all 13 standards. Students were especially positive in their ratings of the elements, concepts of standardized and nonstandardized testing and statistical concepts including scales of measurement.

All elements in the category, Social & Cultural Diversity, were rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory,” consistent with previous findings and our program emphasis. The same was true for the ratings of the eight elements in the category, Career Development. With regard to Human Growth and Development, there was somewhat more variability in the ratings although at least eight of ten respondents rated the curricular elements as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory”. Two graduates from the class of 2009 rated the element, theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors as “unsatisfactory.” It was the next year that students began to take a class on addictions as part of their regular study. Subsequent graduates indicated rated this knowledge/skill area as satisfactory. In the Core Curriculum area, Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice, all respondents provided ratings of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” for seven of the ten standards. Graduates were particularly positive about their knowledge with regard to two elements, history of the counseling profession and ethical standards.

Graduating students were also invited to provide ratings for 28 Specialized Skills and Practices for Professional School Counseling as outlined in the 2009 CACREP
Standards. Twenty-two of the 28 standards were rated as “good to excellent” by a majority of the respondents.

When asked to comment on program strengths, graduates identified several characteristics. The majority of respondents focused on one or more of the following:

- Counseling skills practicum model
- Quality and accessibility of the counseling faculty
- Cohort model and program size
- Full year internship in the schools

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

- More collaboration with Woodring college
- Extend preparation on general education topics such as classroom teaching and management
- More content on assessing needs in different cultures
- More discussion regarding challenges of working within the school system

Overall, there was remarkable consistency in the feedback received from program graduates, particularly with regard to perceived program strengths.

Employer Evaluations

Five of seven employers of program graduates responded to a survey concerning the graduates’ performance as school counselors. Ratings were completed using a scale that included the following categories: “good to excellent” “satisfactory,” “unsatisfactory” and “not applicable.” The employers who responded to the survey are clearly very satisfied with the preparation of WWU graduates. Whether rating the graduate knowledge on the eight core areas or the graduate’s competence on 29 specialized skills for school counseling, there was not a single “unsatisfactory” rating in any category. Elements rated as “good to excellent” by all five employers included understanding social and cultural diversity; helping relationships; demonstrates multicultural competencies; advocates for learning opportunities for students; and consults with stakeholders to promote student success. In a response to an invitation to comment upon the training program at WWU, we received the following:

“Excellent training around the use of assessment tools, designing interventions to address and treat areas of concern. Person-centered approach.”

“1:1 counseling skills”

“Provide more practice for classroom instruction.”

Internship Supervisor Evaluation
Ten of 14 (70%) internship supervisors from the years 2010-2012 responded to an anonymous survey conducted in June of 2012 concerning the preparation of WWU school counseling students. Much like program graduates and employers, internship supervisors give the program very high marks. In ratings of the Core Curriculum a majority of supervisors rated seven of the eight areas as “good to excellent.” Supervisors identified the following curriculum strengths: professional orientation to counseling and ethical practice; helping relationships; group work; assessment; and research and program evaluation.

When asked to rate student preparation in Specialized Knowledge and Skills, supervisors were again very positive. Nineteen of 29 elements were rated as “good to excellent” by a majority of the supervisors. The ten remaining elements all received ratings of “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by nine of ten respondents.

In response to the opportunity to comment on program strengths, supervisors made the following observations.

- Strong preparation of students in counseling skills
- Strong leadership for program at WWU
- Excellent preparation in comprehensive school counseling programs
- Strong program focus on role of the school counseling
- Multicultural perspective of program

Supervisors made the following comments as suggestions:

- More school-specific information on career development
- More classroom experience before start of internship
- More information on special education and classroom management

Program Modifications in Response to Feedback from Students, Graduates, Faculty, and other Stakeholders

It is also important to review the summary report from 2009 to determine the effect of program modifications in the last three years. Three areas were identified as relative weaknesses in the program in that review. These included: the use of technology in counseling, processes for securing funding for program expansion in a developmental program, and knowledge of special education policies and processes. The quality of instruction regarding all three was rated as at least “satisfactory” by program graduates, experienced graduates and employers in the current review. However, one supervisor did indicate that knowledge of special education policies and processes remains a relative weakness. This will be addressed by the faculty in the next curriculum review.

Another important modification to the program has been the addition of a class on addiction to the curriculum. Since doing so, program students have rated their preparation as “satisfactory” or “good to excellent.”
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 emerged. Students are requesting more targeted content regarding counseling responses to crisis and trauma-causing events as well as information on peer interventions. Some respondents identify a need for more school based experiences prior to internship, including preparation for classroom guidance activities. Finally, students have requested more integration of multicultural awareness into classes and an earlier program emphasis on the topic. Again, it should be noted that all curricular elements related to multicultural awareness and competence were consistently rated as “good to excellent” or “satisfactory” by all respondents. In addition, employers and internship supervisors consider this to be a particular strength of the program. It appears that the multicultural content and perspective within the program have increased the sensitivity of students to the complexity and importance of this area. We consider it important to respond and 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 a special multicultural awareness training for counseling faculty and 1st year students at the beginning of practicum in winter quarter. The outcome of this experience will be used to guide further program development.