



DEPARTMENTAL PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING 2004-2005 ACADEMIC YEAR

Department: Counseling

Program: Master of Arts in Counseling

Mission Statement

The M.A. Program in Counseling reflects our commitment to provide training of professional counselors for work in a variety of settings. The program is appropriate for those who wish to become counselors in a range of community agencies, such as mental health centers, rehabilitation offices, addiction treatment clinics, and family service organizations. The Master of Arts is also appropriate for those planning careers in college counseling and student development services and for those who wish to become counselors in elementary, middle, junior high, or high schools. Our emphasis is on practitioner skills training within a broad theoretical foundation and exposure to the empirical bases of the profession.

The Department of Counseling is also committed to seeking and valuing diversity in students and staff. Diversity, used here in a very broad sense, includes the variety of cultures, backgrounds, values, and experiences found among faculty and students; it also includes the diversity of our professional ways of practice, our ways of learning, and our personal and professional goals. In training, the M.A. Program curriculum works to integrate diversity awareness and appreciation into all course offerings, with the goal of encouraging students to explore and appreciate diversity in all situations. We are committed to training multiculturally competent counselors.

Student Learning Goals & Objectives (What are our program's goals and objectives? What will students be able to think, know, do or feel because of a given educational experience?)

Students are expected to : (a) acquire knowledge in eight areas of competency listed below at the level expected for an entry-level master's position in counseling; (b) demonstrate critical thinking skills through written assignments and oral presentations; (c) articulate an awareness of the needs of diverse populations and develop sensitivity and skills to meet these needs, (d) demonstrate counseling skills such as empathic listening, clarification, cognitive reframing, confrontation, and crisis intervention; (e) demonstrate

the ability to reflect upon one's values, beliefs, skills, and interventions, particularly in the context of a clinical supervisory relationship in which accepting and responding positively to feedback are expected; (f) conduct an independent research project, analyze the findings, and report the results in a manuscript; and (g) develop ethical decision-making skills demonstrated not only via knowledge (in the list below), but also in the process of counseling clients, conducting research, and various other counselor roles (such as advocate and consultant). The eight knowledge areas are: (a) Human Growth and Development (HGD), (b) Social and Cultural Foundations (SCF), (c) Helping Relationships (HR), (d) Group Work (GW), (e) Career and Lifestyle Development (CLD), (f) Appraisal (A), (g) Research and Program Evaluation (RPE), and (h) Professional Orientation & Ethics (PO).

As our assessment plan develops, goals will be broken down into objectives. For example:

Helping Relationships:

- Goal:** Students will learn skills to demonstrate effectiveness in providing counseling to a variety of mental health issues with clients from diverse populations.
- Objective:** Students will assume the counselor role in 10 or more videotaped role plays in COUN 510 (Counseling Methods).
- Objective:** Students will complete 40 hours of direct counseling in COUN 580 (Counseling Practicum).
- Objective:** Students will provide 100 hours of direct counseling service in the counseling internship (COUN 584, COUN 587, COUN 588, or COUN 589, depending on the student's counseling emphasis).
- Objective:** Students will actively participate in at least 10 hours of supervision at Practicum and at least 30 hours of supervision on Internship.
- Objective:** On the standard evaluation form (currently the ART Form), students will receive satisfactory ratings on Helping Relationship items from their supervisor at Practicum and from both their on-site supervisor and seminar supervisor at Internship.
- Objective:** Students will obtain a raw score of 10 or more on the Helping Relationships Section of the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE).

Educational Experiences

How will the goals and objectives be met? What program experiences (courses, seminars, research, etc.) help students achieve the desired outcomes?

Program goals and objectives are met through required classroom courses, elective courses such as research practicum, the completion of an independent study or thesis, and in the practicum and internship site experiences that accompany the classroom portion of COUN 580 and COUN 584/7/8/9. The eight knowledge areas are listed again below, with the primary courses in which learning in each area is expected to occur. Unless noted, courses are required by students in all four emphases:

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|-----|-------------------------------------|---|
| (a) | Human Growth and Development (HGD): | COUN 523 (S): Elementary School Counseling
COUN 524 (elective, S): Middle School Counseling
COUN 525 (S): Secondary School Counseling
COUN 530: Theories of Counseling, Personality, and Development |
|-----|-------------------------------------|---|

- (b) Social and Cultural Foundations (SCF):
 COUN 531: Psychology of Women, Gender, and Development
 COUN 565 (elective): Child and Adolescent Development
 COUN 565 (elective): Mid- and Older Adult Development
 COUN 531: Psychology of Women, Gender, and Development
 COUN 532: Multicultural Counseling
- (c) Helping Relationships (HR):
 COUN 510 Counseling Methods
 COUN 518: Group Theory and Process
 COUN 523 (S): Elementary School Counseling
 COUN 524 (elective, S): Middle School Counseling
 COUN 525 (S): Secondary School Counseling
 COUN 533: Couples and Family Counseling
 COUN 580: Counseling Practicum
 COUN 584/7/8/9: Counseling Internship
- (d) Group Work (GW):
 COUN 518: Group Theory and Process
 COUN 584/7/8/9: Counseling Internship
- (e) Career and Lifestyle Development (CLD):
 COUN 519: Career Counseling
 COUN 580: Counseling Practicum
 COUN 584/7/8/9: Counseling Internship
- (f) Appraisal (A):
 COUN 517 (emphases A, C, S): Psychological Testing
 COUN 514 (emphasis R): Rehabilitation Counseling: Assessment and Evaluation
 COUN 529 (emphasis A): Dynamics of Addiction
 COUN 580: Counseling Practicum
 COUN 584/7/8/9: Counseling Internship
 COUN 997/9: Independent Study/Thesis
- (g) Research and Program Evaluation (RPE):
 COUN 515: Research Methods
 COUN 516: Research Lab
 COUN 997/9: Independent Study/Thesis
- (h) Professional Orientation & Ethics (PO):
 COUN 501 (emphases A, C, S): Ethics in Counseling
 COUN 502 (emphases A, C): Professional Issues in Counseling
 COUN 506 (emphasis R): Rehabilitation Counseling: Foundations and Ethical Issues
 COUN 522: Management of School Counseling Programs
 COUN 580: Counseling Practicum
 COUN 584/7/8/9: Counseling Internship

Assessment Methods

What assessment methods will we use to collect data about what our students have learned?
 What are our criteria for success? How will we know the objectives have been met? What level of performance meets each objective?
 How will we interpret and evaluate the data?

I. An annual evaluation is conducted by the program faculty for every student at the end of the fall semester. Students are rated on the following scale: E = exceptional, S = satisfactory, U = unsatisfactory for the following six areas:

1. Academic Coursework
2. Practitioner Skills
3. Professional Activities
4. Professionalism
5. Writing Skills
6. Independent Study/Thesis Progress

The scale is also used for a final category: Overall Progress. As students who earn an “A” in a course may still not demonstrate exceptional skills in all areas assessed by the course, this evaluation allows us to comment on discrepancies between, for example, objective test performance and formal oral presentation skills, or between timeliness of assignment completion and quality of participation in classroom discussion. Other qualitative descriptions are offered that are consistent with expectations and feedback methods of supervisors in the field of counseling. Students who achieve ratings of “Satisfactory” in all areas are considered to be successfully progressing toward the degree.

II. Objective Assessment: National Standardized Test

As a graduation requirement, students in the Master of Arts in Counseling Program must attain passing scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), a nationally administered multiple choice test developed by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). Passing scores are determined at the local level by the Department of Counseling. We started administering the CPCE in the fall semester of 1997, shortly after the test’s inception, and based our passing scores according to national averages provided by NBCC. Now that we have been administering the CPCE two to three times per year for over seven years, enough local and national data have accrued for us to have established a cutoff score of 87 for the Total Score and 10 for each of the eight subscale scores, comprised of the following content areas: (a) Human Growth and Development (HGD), (b) Social and Cultural Foundations (SCF), (c) Helping Relationships (HR), (d) Group Work (GW), (e) Career and Lifestyle Development (CLD), (f) Appraisal (A), (g) Research and Program Evaluation (RPE), and (h) Professional Orientation & Ethics (PO).

Students who score below an 87 must retake the CPCE. Students who score below 10 on one or more subscales must write an essay of approximately 8-10 pages for each topic area in which they received a failing score. Each essay question is written by a faculty member and the essay is evaluated by the same faculty member. The student must receive a passing evaluation on each essay to pass the comprehensive examination. If the evaluator determines that the essay is unsatisfactory or of marginal quality, a second faculty

member evaluates the essay. If the second evaluator concurs with the first, the student must rewrite the essay. If the second evaluator determines that the essay is satisfactory, a third faculty member evaluates the essay for the final time. If the third evaluator determines that the essay passes, the student has passed; if the third evaluator determines that the essay is unsatisfactory or marginal, the student must write a new essay in response to an essay question on the same domain written by a faculty member.

We have analyzed the results of the local 116 protocols since the Program started using the CPCE in 1997 and compared them to the national results of 2236 protocols, which is the total number across six administrations during the same period. We refer to individual students' test results as protocols because our total sample of 116 represents 110 students, 107 of whom took the CPCE once, 4 who took it twice, and 1 who took it three times. National results may similarly reflect a small percentage of students who took the test repeatedly.

The mean Total Score for our students was 101.67 compared to an average national mean of 91.52¹ (see Table 1). As the standard deviation for the national sample averaged 12.64 across the six administrations sampled, the Total Score for our students is 0.80 standard deviations above the national average. The range of Total Scores for our students was 78 to 120, compared to a national range of 40 to 125, indicating that the lowest score for our students far exceed the lowest national score, whereas the top score for our students is close to the top score nationally.

Table 1

MA Student Summary Scores for the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), Fall 1997 – Spring 2005

	HGD	SCF	HR	GW	CLD	A	RPE	PO	Total
National Mean (N=2236)	11.89	10.67	12.54	13.12	10.67	11.03	9.82	11.80	91.52
Local Mean (N=116)	13.20	11.84	13.67	14.10	11.74	11.85	11.89	13.36	101.67
Difference in Standard Deviations	0.53	0.55	0.49	0.43	0.47	0.36	0.85	0.72	0.80

Key:

- HGD: Human Growth and Development
- SCF: Social and Cultural Foundations
- HR: Helping Relationships
- GW: Group Work
- CLD: Career and Lifestyle Development
- A: Appraisal
- RPE: Research and Program Evaluation
- PO: Professional Orientation & Ethics

Since we started using the CPCE in 1997, 102 of 110 students (92.7%) received a passing Total Score on the CPCE on the first attempt. Three did not attempt the CPCE again, four passed it on the second attempt and one passed it on the third attempt.

¹ The term “average national mean” rather than “national mean” is used because it was calculated as the mean of the mean of six national administrations and is not a true weighted mean (as sample sizes differed across the six administrations).

Of the 107 protocols, 67 (62.6%) passed without having to write any essays to show competency on weak areas of the test. There were 30 protocols (28.0%) for which one essay was required, 9 (8.4%) requiring two essays, and 1 (0.9%) requiring three essays. Most students write essays that are satisfactory to the first reviewer, demonstrating their learning in the content domain and thus expediting the completion of graduation requirements.

Looking now at the eight subscales of the CPCE, our students exceeded the national average on each. For Human Growth and Development (HGD), the mean score for our 116 protocols was 13.20, compared to a national average of 11.89. The national standard deviation across six administration periods was 2.45, such that UND students were performing at 0.53 standard deviations above the mean in the HGD area. Standard deviations will not be reported individually here for the remaining seven areas, but range from 0.36 (A) to 0.85 (RPE) above the national average (see Table 1). For Social and Cultural Foundations (SCF), the UND student mean was 11.84, compared to the national mean of 10.67. In the area of Helping Relationships (HR), the UND student mean of 13.67 exceeded the national mean of 12.54. In Group Work, the UND mean was 14.1, compared to 13.12 nationally. There was a smaller margin for Appraisal (A), with UND students nevertheless outperforming the national average: 11.85 compared to 11.03. The largest score difference was in Research and Program Evaluation, in which the UND mean of 11.89 surpassed the national mean of 9.82. Finally, in Professional Orientation and Ethics, the UND mean of 13.36 was solidly above the national average of 11.80.

The CPCE has served us as an excellent assessment of student learning for several reasons. First, the eight topic areas closely match our curriculum. Second, format of the test, including the eight areas subscales, match the National Counselor Examination (NCE) that is required in most U.S. states for counselor licensure; thus, the taking CPCE is excellent preparation for licensure in the field. Third, our students consistently score above the national average in the total score and in most of the eight topic areas (leading to cumulative results showing a clear UND edge over the national sample in all eight areas). Therefore, considering that most of our students enter the program with little field experience and GRE and MAT scores that are average or below average (i.e., prior knowledge of the discipline is modest and graduate level learning is not predicted to be high), we have evidence that what our students are learning from year to year is consistently more than in other counseling programs nationwide. In fact, UND scores are consistently above those of students in programs accredited by CACREP, an accreditation we plan to seek within the next five years. Finally, this consistency in scores suggests that changes in faculty and evolving changes in the curriculum have little effect on student learning of the eight areas targeted in the most commonly used counseling licensure examination.

- III. Evaluation of Counseling Skills and Clinical Written Work. Students complete a self-evaluation of clinical skills and are rated by their supervisor (GTA) in each clinical course, and by the site supervisor in COUN 584/7/8/9 (see Timeline for details). For the past several years, student learning in the area of counseling skills and documentation of clinical work has been assessed via the 32-item Anchored Ratings for Therapists (ART) form in the Counseling Practicum (COUN 580) and Internship in Counseling (COUN 584, 587, 588, and 589) classes. Recently the 31-item Self-Assessment of Basic Helping Skills (SBHS) has been used in Counseling Methods (COUN 510) and Counseling Practicum (COUN 580). To date, no instrument has been located or developed that we believe adequately assesses the broad range of skills that students are

expected to acquire during their three-course clinical sequence (Methods, Practicum, Internship). In September 2005 the faculty will review a proposal suggesting that the SBHS be used in Methods and Practicum while the ART be used in Practicum and Internship. The advantage to this proposal is that student learning could be assessed from Methods through Practicum via the SBHS and from Practicum through Internship via the ART. The disadvantage is the double-testing of students in Practicum. A trainee rating form still needs to be settled upon for our school counseling students, who do little of the 50-minute individual session work that most counselor rating forms emphasize. We expect to make significant progress in the area of counseling skills assessment during the 2005-2006 academic year.

- IV. Evaluation of Written Work: Research. The faculty are discussing preliminary ideas to evaluate completed independent studies and theses on an annual basis. In the primary idea under consideration, faculty would nominate outstanding projects, which would then be reviewed by a three-person team, including the student's advisor/thesis chair. A rubric would be developed to evaluate the different sections of the paper (typically introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion), plus other important qualities such as evidence of critical thinking, incorporation of cultural diversity, and adherence to the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual* (APA style). Ratings would be kept on file with the completed papers (students' names and other identifying data will be removed) as evidence of student learning and the top paper each year would receive an award that would be publicized to all faculty, students, and in the alumni newsletter.

Timeline

When will we collect data? How often?

- I. An annual evaluation is conducted by the program faculty for every student at the end of the fall semester.
- II. Students take the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) once they advance to degree candidacy.
- III. During COUN 510 and 580, clinical rating forms are collected from students and GTA at midterm and during the final two weeks of the semester. During COUN 584/7/8/9 data are collected from students, GTA, and site supervisor at the end of each semester of the two-semester internship.
- IV. We are proposing that, every September, program faculty briefly review the completed independent studies (IS) and theses for every student for whom they have been the chair, committee member, or advisor. Outstanding work will then merit a nomination for the IS/Thesis award. We expect that the team review of nominated works and award decision will be completed by October.

Responsibilities Use of Results and Process for Documentation & Decision-Making

Who will be responsible for collecting, interpreting and reporting the results?

How will the results of assessment be used?

Who needs to know the results?

How can we convince them that the goals and objectives have been met?

How can we improve our program and assessment process?

The M.A. Program Coordinator will be the primary person responsible for collecting, interpreting, and reporting the results of the CPCE and annual evaluations. The Program Coordinator will provide feedback to students on CPCE results and faculty advisors meet individually with students to review the annual evaluations. Instructors of our primary clinical courses (COUN 510 and 580, as well as the Field Placement Coordinator for 584/7/8/9) will be primarily responsible for collecting the SBHS and ART forms, interpreting the data, providing feedback to students, and reporting the results to the Program Coordinator. Aggregated CPCE results will be provided to instructors of courses, broken down by CPCE topic area as delineated in the Educational Experiences section of this report. All program faculty are present at the annual student evaluations and are therefore aware of the results. Individual SBHS and ART results are provided to the student, Program Coordinator, and Faculty Advisor. Faculty will already have the IS/Theses from which nominations for the outstanding study will be drawn. The Program Coordinator will distribute nominated works to review teams. Evaluations of the studies will be shared with all faculty. The award will be announced to all students, faculty, staff, college administration, and alumni.

Annual evaluation results are used to encourage students to maximize academic learning potential and, more importantly, develop the self-awareness and strategies to grow professionally beyond the classroom setting. CPCE results will be used by faculty to update and develop syllabi for current content and assignments that sufficiently attend to material required to pass the licensure exam. Clinical rating forms will be used to identify clinical strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan for continued skill development. IS/Thesis evaluation and award will be used as an incentive for students, a quality check for consistency among graduating students, and to help identify model manuscripts for current studies to use as they complete their own final research projects.

As we develop and implement this plan, we will periodically review it at faculty meetings, evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of different components, invite feedback from the Dean, Assistant Provost, and, when applicable, students, and modify program objectives as needed. We are likely to require some initial feedback before we can determine how to improve our program and assessment process beyond the proposals that have been outlined in this document.

Respectfully Submitted,

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