

Executive Summary Report on Survey Findings and Recommendations

During the 2015-2016 academic year, as part of its CACREP Systematic Program Evaluation Report, the University of Houston Victoria Counselor Education program conducted an evaluation of students and courses at the Victoria and Sugar Land campuses. Two groups of stakeholders were sent online surveys: recent graduates and employers of our recent graduates. Each group was asked to respond to a different, yet similar, survey. With respect to content, the survey forms were designed to address questions that relate to the program generally and to the curriculum in particular: (a) the amount and quality of preparation in counseling skill areas; (b) the structure and delivery of the curriculum; (c) program advising and support; (d) the quality and efficiency of the practicum and internship experiences; and (e) program modifications needed to better meet the needs of various stakeholders as well as requirements of Texas state licensing and CACREP accrediting bodies.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate on scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) their levels of satisfaction with the counselor education program in the areas being evaluated. Both survey forms also included an open invitation to provide feedback on the major strengths and weaknesses and any suggested changes to courses/curriculum/learning experiences in the Counselor Education program. Return rates for both stakeholder surveys were mixed, ranging from nine (recent graduates) to seven (employers and/or supervisors of recent graduates). With that limitation in mind, we are limiting the present discussion to a reporting of findings generated from the Likert type items that appear in the two different survey forms. Despite the small return rates, some trends in the data appear to be developing and warrant discussion.

For a number of years, the University of Houston Victoria Counselor Education program has been collecting data on student performance from practicum and internship site supervisors. Practicum and Internship site supervisors are requested to complete this evaluation each semester they are a site supervisor for a Counselor Education student. The survey contains six Likert scale questions evaluating the student and, therefore the program's training, on a scale of 0 (not observed) to 6 (far exceeds acceptable standards). In addition to the six survey questions, site supervisors are requested to include any insights or suggestions for improving the Counselor Education program.

In relation to student assessment and program review, several measures are used including National Counselor Exam pass rates for students seeking to become Licensed Professional Counselors in Texas, TExES School Counselor exam pass rates for students seeking to become Certified School Counselors in Texas, the UHV Master's Comprehensive Exam pass rates, and the program's continuous curricular review.

Findings: Survey of Recent Graduates

For the 2015-2016 academic year, surveys were returned by nine recent graduates of the Counselor Education program. Upon graduation, recent graduates were working in mental health positions including LPC-Intern status (28.5%), clinical mental health counseling (57%), and school counseling (14%). With respect to overall satisfaction for the amount and quality of preparation throughout the academic experience, recent graduates reported good to excellent ($M = 4.67$) training. The graduates' greatest satisfaction with the preparation they had received centered on ethical and legal training ($M = 5$), group theory and practice ($M = 4.89$), student participation in professional organization involvement ($M = 4.89$), and general counseling and skill development ($M = 4.89$). With respect to the program's ability to prepare the graduates for work in their current position, 89% reported the preparation being excellent. Additionally, students thought the level of faculty advisement and consultation was excellent (89%).

The qualitative feedback provided by the recent graduates in relation to the program strengths and weaknesses also provides insight into their perception of their training experiences. Of the nine program graduate's responses, four noted the support, feedback, and advisement by faculty was beneficial to their growth. Four other students mentioned specific coursework and knowledge gleaned from their courses were important and necessary to their current work as a clinician. Graduates specifically mentioned group training experiences, practicum supervision, and skill and theory modeling as strengths of the program. Program graduates feedback regarding the program's areas of growth centered on a need for more coursework related to addictions, DSM-5 training and practice. Several changes and modifications were suggested by the recent graduates. These included: (a) more coursework or training embedded within the overall curriculum, (b) a stronger emphasis on diagnosing, (c) an APA writing prep course or workshop to "teach techniques of writing" along with a NCE preparation or study session, and (d) the creation of a counseling lab to allow students more opportunities to practice their skills and theory.

In summary, program graduates generally provided positive evaluations and feedback regarding the amount and quality of preparation provided by the counseling program. Graduates found the coursework in ethics, group counseling, theory, and general counseling skill and practice especially beneficial. However, the graduates' evaluations point to room for improvement in several areas such as refinement in addictions and DSM coursework along with the provision of supplemental training workshops on writing development and licensure exam preparation.

Findings: Survey of Employers of Recent Graduates

Employers of recent graduates as a group traditionally have the smallest return rate of all groups ($n = 7$). Despite the small sample size, some trends in the data warrant mention. Supervisors and employers of the counseling program's graduates typically seek out graduates who are able to become LPCs (86%), LPC-Interns (71.5%), LCDCs (14%), or Certified School Counselors (14%). On a scale of 0 (disagree completely) to 4 (agree completely), employers rated the Counselor Education graduates highly in all core content areas except research and assessment skills where three employers rated the

graduates as neutral. The supervisors and employers rated graduates the highest in the areas of reliability and collaboration (100%), performing necessary duties and roles of a counselor (86%), demonstrating sound ethical behaviors (86%), and effectively integrating knowledge and theory into practice (86%). Some supervisors and employers noted, qualitatively, the strengths and areas of growth for the program. This feedback included overwhelmingly positive feedback and support for the program. Some sample comments and suggestions include:

I have no complaints - some of the skills in building rapport and conceptualizing come with time and practice.

Your program is robust and I believe it provides an excellent foundation for a professional counselor.

Findings: Survey of Practicum and Internship Site Supervisors

A total of 64 surveys were returned by practicum and internship site supervisors. These supervisors encompassed school counseling and community/clinical mental health counseling settings. Overall, site supervisors rated student preparation by the program highly (87%). Site supervisors also reported student's ability to build rapport with clients and engage in ethical decision making were strong (89.5%), as was the support provided by UHV faculty and staff (86%). The areas that were the weakest, per the site supervisors, were the student's theoretical knowledge (85%) and student's overall clinical abilities (83%). Compared to the previous academic year site supervisor surveys, overall support provided by UHV faculty to site supervisors increased.

Findings: NCE, TExES, and Comprehensive Exam Pass Rates

Of the candidates ($n = 5$) who sat for the TExES School Counselor Examination between October 2015 and July 2016, 100% earned a passing score on each of the three domains: understanding students; planning and implementing the developmental guidance and counseling program; and collaboration, consultation, and professionalism. Of those taking the NCE from the February 2015 administration to the June 2015 administration, 88% ($n = 29$ of 34) of the self-identified UHV graduates who sat for the NCE passed the exam on their first attempt. At the time of this report, the Texas Department of State Health Services had not provided 2016 NCE exam data.

All Master's degree seeking students in the UHV School of Education are required to pass a comprehensive examination consisting of a multiple choice exam of 70 questions set forth by the program. During the 2015-2016 academic year, 21 students sat for the Master's Comprehensive Exam. Of the 21 students sitting for the Comprehensive Exam, 17 (81%) passed on their first attempt. Students who do not pass on the first attempt may retake their comprehensive examination beginning in the semester immediately following their first failed attempt. Students may take their comprehensive examination up to 3 times before being required to take additional coursework. The four remaining students passed the Comprehensive Exam on their second attempt and did not need a third.

Findings: Curriculum Review

In order to remain compliant with CACREP accreditation standards, the UHV Counselor Education faculty review student learning outcomes (SLOs) on an annual basis. The process of reviewing the student learning outcomes aids the faculty in developing a continual and systematic process of student and program assessment. The Student Learning Outcomes are tied to the 12 Counselor Education program goals. Each SLO has at least two points of measurement which are evaluated on a regular basis.

The following four program objectives were evaluated May 2015: (a) program graduates will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of helping relationships; (b) program graduates will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of group work; (c) program students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of assessment; (d) and program graduates will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of research and program evaluation.

In regards to objective 1 for 2015-2016, students were assessed on their knowledge of helping relationships through scores on the Master's Comprehensive Exam Helping Relationships subtest scores, Helping Relationships questions on the *Counseling Competencies Scale* (as scored by site-supervisor, faculty, and student self-evaluation), and scores on the signature Technique's course assignment (Role Play Session #3). All students met the designated cut-off scores for the *Counselor Competency Scale-Revised* questions (100%) and on their signature class assignment (90%). Students did not meet the Helping Relationships cut off scores. Course changes and program growth for this area will be discussed below.

In regards to objective 2 for 2015-2016, students were assessed on their knowledge of group counseling through scores on the Master's Comprehensive Exam group counseling subtest scores and scores on the signature group counseling class assignment (Group Proposal). Only 42% of students taking the Master's Comprehensive Exam passed the group counseling subtest (cut-off of 80%). Ninety percent of students scored over 80% on the group counseling signature class assignment. Areas of program growth in this area are discussed below.

In regards to objective 3 for 2015-2016, students were assessed on their knowledge of assessment through scores on the Master's Comprehensive Exam assessment subtest scores and scores on the signature assessment class assignment. Only 20% of students exceeded the cut-off score (80%) on the assessment subtest of the Master's Comprehensive Exam. The Counselor Competency Scale was replaced with the Counselor Competency Scale-Revised during this academic year. Therefore, students were not provided a CCS-R score for assessment usage as relevant assessment questions were removed during the scale revision. A majority of students did not meet the 80% cut-off score on the assessment signature class assignment. Areas of program growth in this area are discussed below.

In regards to objective 4 for 2015-2016, students were assessed on their knowledge of research and program evaluation through scores on the Master's Comprehensive Exam research and program evaluation subset scores along with scores on the signature research and program evaluation class

assignment. Both cut-off scores were set at 80%. Students did not meet the cutoff scores in this outcome measurement area. Areas of program growth in this area are discussed below.

Key Recommendations for Improvement and Program Modifications

During the program and curriculum review for the 2015-2016 academic year, several key modifications were instituted due to the information and feedback the program gathered from the major stakeholders (students, site supervisors, and employers). The improvements and modifications centered on changes in core coursework (Techniques, Group Counseling, Assessment, and Research and Program Evaluation) and the format of course offerings. Changes and improvements included:

- ❖ Updating and revising the Assessment and Research courses.
- ❖ Offering the Research and Program Evaluation course in both an online and face to face format to meet student requests for a face to face research course and ensure students understand key concepts.
- ❖ Replacement of the Master's Comprehensive Exam with the Counselor Preparation and Comprehensive Exam administered through the National Board for Certified Counselors.
- ❖ Replacement of the Counselor Competency Scale with the Counselor Competency Scale-Revised.

Since implementing these changes and improvements we have noticed program graduates, site supervisors, and employers responded favorably to the curriculum and examination changes. The research and program evaluation course continues to be offered in both a face to face and online format to provide students with a traditional class setting as this class has, historically, received poor student feedback and general worry about the course content. Pass rates for the TExES School Counselor Exam and the National Counselor Exam (NCE) continue to remain stable. Site supervisors and employers report that the program adequately prepares students for counseling positions in school, clinical, and integrated behavioral health settings.

Major modifications were needed in the area of assessment and research curriculum with an emphasis on practical applications of counseling instruments and key statistical concepts for use in both school and clinical settings. We have addressed these deficiencies through a thorough review and update of assignments, activities, readings, and assessments in each of these two courses. In addition, we have updated the assessment textbook so as to provide the most comprehensive and up to date information. In regards to the concerns about the research class scores on the comprehensive exam and NCE, we have implemented a face to face course offering.

In regards to the Comprehensive Exam pass rates, faculty will begin using the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam in place of the master's comprehensive exam to provide faculty and students with a clear picture student knowledge related to important counseling concepts and foundations. The program continues to offer students the option of taking the NCE on campus during their last semester of coursework. Each semester, roughly 8-10 students sit for the licensing exam.

With respect to structure and delivery of the curriculum, graduates, current students, and supervisors are equally positive in their evaluations. Program faculty are regarded as competent, committed, and caring. They, along with adjunct faculty, are seen as excellent instructors, supervisors, and role models. Site supervisors report satisfaction with the move to the 60 hour CMHC program. Here too, however, there is room for improvement. Faculty will continue to evaluate course delivery to ensure all students' learning needs are met and faculty are consistent in their delivery of core competencies and learning objectives. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the faculty plan to provide free, annual CEU workshops for site supervisors as a way to provide additional supervision training and appreciation for their support and continued work with our counseling students.