



# Mental Health Counseling Second Annual Program Assessment Report

October 1, 2014

This report is a brief summary of our on-going program evaluation efforts and is intended for current students, alumni, site supervisors and employers of alumni. Each group provided essential feedback that helped us better understand our successes and areas needing improvement. We thank you for your candid responses and many suggestions. We hope that this report will also be useful to applicants, faculty, staff, administrators, and the general public.

*The MHC Faculty*

## **The Assessment Process**

Each year we survey New Students, Graduating Students, Alumni, Site Supervisors, and Employers of our graduates. We analyze characteristics of applicants and results of the exit exam (CPCE). We also assess Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that measure essential counseling competencies for entry-level clinical mental health counselors. In the fall, MHC Faculty review this program assessment data to determine what we are doing well and where there are opportunities for improvement. We identify changes to make with curriculum, staffing, policy, and procedures and establish a timeline for the changes.

## **Important Changes from 2013-14**

- Because New and Current Students are now required to complete program assessment surveys, our response rate was 100% in 2013-2014.
- We discussed and decided to not use interviews in admissions because research suggests that interviews disadvantage lower-income applicants and those at a distance, rather than enhancing the admissions process. We added information to our website to explain why we don't use interviews and to invite applicants to visit us informally.
- We expanded mentoring of adjunct instructors and supervisors to increase their understanding of program goals and expectations.
- We emphasized the link between professional identity and membership in professional organizations; 96% of New Students joined ACA or AMHCA by end of Fall term.

## **Assessment Results 2014**

Applicants: In 2014 our applicant pool decreased to 56 completed applications; 3.6% identified as being members of a racial minority, which is also a decrease from last year. GRE and GPA are, on average, fairly consistent with previous years.

## **Program strengths**

Most new, graduating and former students highly value the following:

- Classroom environments, learning resources, and small class size
- Clear course syllabi, objectives, grading, and class process.
- Workload is challenging but fair.
- Internship and supervision

- The overall program structure
- Most would highly recommend the program to others.
- Alumni are employed (90% of respondents) in the counseling field.

### Concerns & Opportunities for improvement

Student, supervisor, alumni, and/or employer surveys identify the following issues:

#### Admissions process:

- Increase communication once admitted.
- Expedite Financial Aid awards.

#### Curriculum:

- Pre-practicum (COUN 502) - clarify time requirements, forms, and dual relationship issues.
- Theory (COUN 571) - more videos that demonstrate models.
- More on community resources, neuroscience, child and adolescent counseling.
- More Crisis skills (especially suicide assessment) and Safety issues (how to handle difficult client situations).
- Research class needs fine-tuning to make more relevant and engaging.
- More on Assessment, Diagnosis, Treatment Planning and implementing various models.
- More on collaboration with other professionals and referral skills.
- Emphasize mindfulness as central part of program.

#### Course process:

- Too many student presentations; some students prefer a seminar structure.
- Have fewer major assignments/class.
- Load too heavy near end; students feel increased stress and pressure.

#### Course schedule

- Move clinical courses earlier, e.g. Assessment before Treatment Planning.
- Psychopharmacology in summer or during year on regular days.
- Consistent scheduling for second year Internship (e.g. mornings).
- All MHC courses in Ed-Psych Bldg.

SLO results: We assessed 98% of 128 Student Learning Outcomes. Of those, 82% reached criteria – this means that all students achieved a passing grade on the assignment that measured the particular competency. When students did not meet criteria at the time of assessment, all but one succeeded within a short period of time after the end of the class. The SLOs indicate that we are effectively teaching the counseling competencies we intend to teach.

One advantage of the SLO process is that we get fairly immediate feedback on our learning goals. For example, in mid-year we learned that many students on Internship (COUN 510) did not receive live or recorded observation of their work. The Clinical Coordinator made a concerted effort to work with students and site supervisors to address this issue. We modified the *Practicum & Internship Handbook* to emphasize this requirement and provided training for Site Supervisors focused on the importance live or recorded observation of students' clinical work and overcoming the challenges of doing so in an agency. By year end all students met this learning objective.

Exit exam results: Our students continue to score well above the national average in all eight sub-areas and in overall total score of the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam (CPCE). Thus, our students demonstrate a strong basic fund of knowledge in the counseling field in comparison to a national sample of masters and doctoral level students.

### **Program Changes 2014-15**

Given the identified strengths and opportunities for improvement, we are continuing with or making the following changes:

#### Admissions:

- We will develop a Marketing Plan with the help of the Provost's Graduate Office.
- We will reach out to current undergraduates at SOU as well as student advisors regionally.
- We will update our program website.
- The Provost's Graduate Office admissions process is newly formed and still in development. We continue to work with them, the ESC, and Financial Aid Office to clarify processes, procedures, and timelines.
- We will make Lottery Scholarship Awards during the selection process for new students.
- The Program Coordinator began regular email contact with accepted applicants over the 2014 summer. We will expand our communication next year by developing a mentoring system between 2<sup>nd</sup> Year students and 1<sup>st</sup> Year (newly admitted) students.

#### Student Relations and Communication:

- During the New Student Orientation we will address student expectations, communication, tolerance for student diversity, and developing a professional attitude and identity.
- We have scheduled cohort meetings for every term with specific topics.
- Faculty will initiate meeting with their advisees each term.

#### Curriculum:

- Faculty will explore ways to make Research (COUN 542) content and process more engaging and clinically useful.
- We will expand crisis skill development, especially suicide assessment and management, into the first term of Internship (COUN 510). This will include role-plays and addressing agency-specific procedures for handling risk management.
- We will work with site supervisors on providing additional site-specific training and supervision on suicide and other risk management. Our site supervisor CEU training in spring will focus on this aspect of supervision.
- We have purchased access to 50 films to expand knowledge and skill development throughout the curriculum.
- Course Process: Student presentations and small group collaboration are part of how we encourage students' professional identities. We will expand our explanation of this pedagogy by incorporating it into student orientation, website, and mission statement.
- We will consider reorganizing class schedule to bring clinical content earlier in sequence.
- We will complete electronic archives of all COUN class syllabi and decide which syllabi should be posted to the MHC website.
- We will develop a procedure for validating our SLO assessment process.

## **Future Development of the Assessment Process**

- To improve alumni response rates we will add an incentive tied to survey completion.
- We will develop a procedure to review student work from Student Portfolios to further validate our SLO assessment process.

Dr. Josie Wilson (Emeritus Professor) holds the position of Assessment Coordinator through Fall 2015. Please address comments about our assessment efforts to her.

### **MHC Faculty & Staff 2013 – 2014**

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