



2017 Portland MA Counseling Program Report Reviewing 2016 Data

Master of Arts in Counseling Program in Clinical Mental Health

Introduction – The purpose of the Western Seminary Master of Arts in Counseling Program is to prepare practitioners of personal integrity who will provide effective, ethical, culturally inclusive, professional counseling from a Christian worldview. To ensure fulfillment of our mission, we maintain an annual assessment of outcome data, consistently making modifications to ensure growth in the efficacy of the educational experience for our students. Some indicators are gathered routinely through grading of assignments, student reviews, annual surveys, and clinical evaluations. Annually, this data is reviewed by faculty and administrators as impetus toward positive direction in the program. Bi-annually, a full assessment is conducted and data is reviewed by an expert Advisory Board to complement faculty input. A full assessment was conducted early in 2016 and will again be conducted in 2018. What follows is information gleaned from our partial assessment of the calendar year of 2016. Faculty members Hannah Acquaye, Ph.D., Laurie Bloomquist, Ph.D., Kay Bruce, Psy.D., Ken Logan, Psy.D., and Norm Thiesen, Ph.D. met on March 1, 2017 to review assessment outcomes and make recommendations.

Direct evidence of student learning and performance was obtained from 16 primary sources of assessment:

1. Case Study Assessment (CNS 505 Psychopathology);
2. Application project demonstrating an understanding of life transitional stages. (CNS 507 Human Life Span Development);
3. Specialty Group presentation (CNS 512 Group Counseling);

4. Career assessment plan. (CNS 518 Career and Lifestyle Development);
5. Research and evaluation of therapeutic effectiveness (CNS 519 Treatment Planning and Outcome Assessment Strategies);
6. Targeted questions on CNS 525 final exam (CNS 525 Tests & Measurements);
7. Dual diagnosis case write-up (CNS 529 Counseling Addictions);
8. Case study with treatment plan and crisis intervention strategy (CNS 558 Emergency Preparedness: Crisis Intervention, Trauma, and Loss);
9. Map family genogram (CNS 503 Family Systems);
10. Personal reflection paper (CNS 506 Legal & Ethical Issues);
11. Professional orientation paper (CNS 520 Professional Orientation);
12. Social & Cultural Research Paper (CNS 513 Social & Cultural Foundations);
13. Practicum and Internship Field Experience (CNS 531-539) is assessed using the CNSF024 Intern Performance Evaluation form;
14. Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE);
15. National Counselor Exam (NCE); and
16. Professional Assessment of Candidates (PAC) Review by Faculty.

Indirect evidence of student learning and performance was primarily evaluated by a course evaluations and a student program evaluation. We currently have 66 students in the Portland MA Counseling program after having graduated 15 students over three semesters beginning in fall, 2016.

M.A. in Counseling Program Purpose, Objectives, and Vocational Intent

The **purpose** of the M.A./Counseling Program is to prepare practitioners of personal integrity who will provide effective, ethical, culturally inclusive, professional counseling from a Christian worldview.

The counseling program endeavors to prepare students of integrity who demonstrate:

- 1. Spiritual maturity** by applying biblical truth to life and ministry resulting in gospel-centered spiritual growth and transformation. (GCPO a., character)
- 2. Theological discernment** by employing advanced theological thinking that integrates a gospel-centered world-view with biblical and social science studies. (GCPO b., conviction)

3. Interpersonal skills and emotional health by demonstrating social and emotional awareness, respect for others, inclusivity in diversity, effectiveness in teamwork, intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness, and the ability to care for self. (GCPO c., character)

4. Counseling skills by evidencing theoretical knowledge, application of theory, and clinical competence. Additionally, students will demonstrate an ability to build an effective culturally inclusive therapeutic alliance with clients utilizing a breadth of clinical skills and technique consistent with current clinical research evidence. (GCPO d., competence)

5. Professional practice by applying their training to internship tasks, integrating supervisory input into clinical work, reflecting on multicultural and contextual issues, engaging cooperatively in the supervision relationship, and behaving in accordance with the ethical standards of the profession. (GCPO e., competence)

These goals inform the outcomes that guide the program and serve as the basis for the assessment process and are tied to institutional outcomes. Course learning objectives, the Professional Assessment of Candidates ratings, faculty and supervisor intern evaluations, and Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards are mapped to Global Program Outcomes as well as indirect surveys to measure the efficacy of the educational process.

Summary of Observations and Proposed Action

Global Counseling Program Outcomes – Primary objectives for the program as a whole were rated very highly by faculty, site supervisors, and students. Spiritual maturity and Theological Discernment outcome measures ranged from 95-99.8%, indicating the spiritual, theological, and integration training appears to be very strong. One method for faculty evaluation of Global Counseling Program outcomes is by means of the Professional Assessment of Candidates (PAC) review. Twice per year the core counseling faculty members meet to review student progress. Each student is named and evaluated individually, taking into consideration feedback from faculty (both core and adjunct), academic grades, site supervisor evaluations, case conference evaluations, student self-evaluations, and any input from the Office of Student Development. The PAC review is a holistic assessment of each individual student based upon both direct and indirect sources of information. All Global Counseling Program Outcomes were assessed to have been met at a 95-100% level giving strong validation of outcome achievement. Though not as strong, the Interpersonal Skills, Counseling Skills, and Professional Practice ratings ranged from 86-99%. These will be explored at a more in-depth level under other assessment categories.

Supervisor evaluations – Students perform clinical mental health services in community clinics and agencies around the Portland/Vancouver area, with some as far as Eugene to the south, Seattle to the north, and The Dalles to the east. Five semesters of clinical experience are required as a part of the program, including one semester of practicum and four semesters of internship. Licensed professionals from the community serve as clinical site supervisors. Each of the five semesters, the clinical site supervisor submits an evaluation of the student's clinical counseling performance. The categories for assessment are the same as the campus supervisor evaluations with an added section regarding site related competence, which includes many Clinical Mental Health Counseling standards. The students complete a self-evaluation using the same form and the three are averaged together with the exception of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling standards that are more limited to the site supervisors' evaluation.

In the case conference classes on campus, each semester students present two case history write-ups, a video/audio recording of a session with that client, and a transcript of said session to play for a small group of up to seven peers

and a counseling faculty member who serves as case conference supervisor. Students give verbal and written feedback to the student presenting and the faculty member provides a formal evaluation of the student's counseling skills both in assessing each presentation but also as a comprehensive assessment at the end of each semester using the form CNSF024 Intern Performance Evaluation. The combined evaluations from site supervisors and the case conference supervisors yielded a rating of 94.8% for Professional Practice and 86.2% for Counseling Skills. This appears to reflect a professional and ethical approach to practice by students and room for continued growth in counseling skill level. The specific areas for skill development are better discerned in some of the CACREP clinical mental health competency outcomes.

CACREP Clinical Mental Health Counseling Standards – Of the above-named work samples and observations a clear majority reflected data that meets or exceeds the 80% threshold established as a cut-off; the only to fall below 80% were related to career development. It seems evident that our upgraded syllabi, improved course content, and clearer assignment instructions have effectively produced stronger results on many clinical mental health counseling standards. In this section we will look at program strengths, relative weaknesses, and include proposed action steps toward continued growth and improvement.

In scrutinizing the lower outcome ratings based upon the CNS 518 Career Assessment Plan, two primary concerns emerged: the instructor is concerned with the large number of theories which must be learned in a short amount of time within the intensive format of the course and measurement of outcomes has not included the many students who complete the course in an online format. Suggested action steps include creating upgraded video recordings to more effectively review the various theories, acquire samples of career counseling video recordings (which has already been accomplished this year with the acquisition of the psychotherapy.net collection), and include the online students in the assessment process (which has also already been instituted this current semester.) Further, an additional faculty member is now assisting in the revision of this course to add additional perspective and teaching method.

The Social & Cultural Research Paper required in CNS 513 Social & Cultural Foundations assesses many Clinical Mental Health Counseling standards with regard to multicultural diversity and advocacy. With one exception, outcome measures for this assignment were all 84% and above, indicating good coverage of content and understanding on the part of students. This is an area in education and practice that merits prolonged and focused attention. Anecdotally it was noted that faculty and students alike desire to see more of this topic included in all courses, not simply in the course where it is assessed. This will be a suggestion for ongoing discussion and creativity. Actions steps include a greater collaboration among faculty members in revising this particular class, but also the addition of cultural assessment in the case history write-ups for client presentations in all case conference classes and the final integrative paper. This is intended to foster more discussion in many classes about the inclusion of cultural factors in all clinical activity.

Data collected with regard to the new CNS 520 Professional Orientation course reflected positive outcomes, ranging from 81-87%. It should be noted that some students were included in the evaluation that have not yet had the course. It would be anticipated that ratings may improve as more students complete the course as a part of their required curriculum.

Training in treatment planning has been an area of relative weakness that we have identified in recent years, leading to the creation of the CNS 519 Treatment Planning course. Outcomes in this evaluation ranged from 80-83.5%. Suggestions for further enhancement in this area included inviting a knowledgeable presenter to create a video recording training for students (this has now been created and will be utilized in the upcoming academic year.) Further faculty are encouraged to make it an increased point of discussion in case conference classes.

An additional key focus of discussion in this review of assessment data was around the difficulty for students of identifying with and practicing within a given theory. This deficiency was highlighted more in evaluation comments than in numerical data. Potential action points include the creation of elective courses that concentrate on particular theories, obtaining more video recording demonstrations of working from particular theories (which has now been partially accomplished with the acquisition of the psychotherapy.net collection), and more intentional mentoring by faculty with students in theoretical application.

National Counseling Examinations – Students complete the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) which is required before graduation. Our MA Counseling program has used this national exam as an exit exam for our graduates since 2003 and consistently produces a mean score above the national mean for other schools who also use it as an exit exam. Over the three administrations during the 2016 calendar year, Western Seminary means were 93.12, 96, and 95.75 while the national exit means were 86.16, 85.67, and 87.13 respectively. This provides direct evidence of the quality of academic preparation of our students when compared to other graduate counseling programs who use this exam as an exit exam.

Indirect Measures

Student program evaluations – Each spring semester students are asked to complete a program evaluation survey. Questions on this survey vary from academic experience, to licensure preparation, supervision, diagnosing and treatment planning, as well as spiritual considerations and critical thinking. We had an adequate response of 43 students. Only five items were rated in the 80-90% range, all others were above 90%, with the lowest score being that of off-campus site supervision. Our students were very positive about their experience in the program and many made very encouraging comments. The rating of the program overall was at 95%.

Program Achievements/Accomplishments

Global Counseling Program Outcomes – Data derived from both direct and indirect evidence resulting in a range from 86-99% provides strong demonstration of efficacy in the achievement of educational and developmental goals as developed by the counseling program in congruence with the school's mission and values. Integration of a biblical worldview with application to life, ministry, and clinical service appears to be a strength of the program based upon assessment of course learning outcomes and PAC review data as well as student evaluation. PAC review data, and student program evaluations also confirm an emphasis on advanced theological thinking particularly with regard to an integrated approach to counseling. The CNS 506 paper, PAC review data, and student program evaluations all give good support to outcomes regarding interpersonal skill, self-care, self-awareness, and social and emotional awareness. Students surveyed about the overall quality of the program rate yielded a score of 95%, indicating a very positive view among students about their educational experience.

Though still above our passing threshold of 80%, the lowest of the Global Counseling Program Outcome scores was 86% obtained from site supervisors who were evaluating Clinical Skills of students when treating clients in the community. Further definition of relative strengths and weaknesses with regard to Clinical Skills may be obtained by the more detailed analysis using the CACREP Clinical Mental Health Standards. All areas of clinical knowledge and skill were rated at above 90% with the exception of some indicators regarding career assessment, cultural diversity, professional orientation, and treatment planning. An additional area for increased attention is student awareness of counseling theoretical approaches and methods of application.

Strengths – Students reflect satisfaction of their experience in the program and effectively demonstrate astuteness in regard to biblical and theological integration, acquisition of significant academic knowledge, and clinical skill. The program is consistent in its maintenance of assessment processes, evaluation of resulting data, and swift implementation of suggested corrections, as evidenced by several modifications that have already been implemented within months of data review.

Items for Improvement –

Students may benefit from increased knowledge of the various theoretical approaches to career counseling. Proposed action steps include:

- creating upgraded video recordings to more effectively review the various theories (to be created in 2018);
- acquire samples of career counseling video recordings (which has already been partially accomplished this year with the acquisition of the psychotherapy.net collection);
- include the online students in the assessment process (already instituted this current semester);
- an additional faculty member to assist in the revision of this course to add additional perspective (already in progress.)

Greater training regarding the integration of multicultural diversity across the curriculum is desired. Proposed action steps include:

- the addition of cultural assessment in the case history write-up format (already detailed in the student handbook for the 2017-2018 academic year);
- stipulation of a section with regard to cultural assessment to be required in the final integrative paper (already detailed in the student handbook for the 2017-2018 academic year);
- encourage faculty to facilitate frequent discussion in the classroom regard multi-cultural inclusivity

Scores with regard to treatment planning have improved with the implementation of the new required course CNS 519 Treatment Planning. To foster continued development, additional actions steps are identified:

- invitation to a knowledgeable presenter for the purpose of creating a video recording training for students (this has now been created and will be utilized in the upcoming academic year 2017-2018);
- faculty are encouraged to make it an increased point of discussion in case conference classes.

Comments by supervisors and students indicate that students could be better prepared to be fluent in a particular theoretical approach to counseling and consistent in application of such theory in practice with clients. Proposed action steps include:

- the creation of elective courses that concentrate on particular theories (Narrative therapy was recently taught and Brief Integrative therapy will be taught in summer, 2018);
- the procurement of video demonstrations of theory in practice (which has now been partially accomplished with the acquisition of the psychotherapy.net collection);
- faculty members are encouraged to give increased time and attention to the development of theory in practice for students.

Concluding Summary

Implications of this program assessment suggest that there are many areas of strength as demonstrated in our global counseling program outcomes and CACREP Clinical Mental Health Counseling standards. Students of the program reflect positive evaluations of their educational experience. Performance artifacts and observational evaluations also reflect well on the preparedness of our students. The program seems to be effective in preparing practitioners of personal integrity who will provide effective, ethical, culturally inclusive, professional counseling from a Christian worldview. We have identified areas for continued growth particularly within the area of clinical skills. We have already begun implementation of many enhancements that are specifically targeted to career assessment, multicultural training across the curriculum, treatment planning, and theoretical fluency, based upon our assessment data. As a reflection of our desire to see client resiliency, wellness, strength, and continued growth, we wish to model these values in our approach to program assessment and development anticipating future positive characteristics in the form of competent students and graduates.