



# 2019 Portland MA Counseling Program Report Reviewing 2018 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. We conducted a review of assessment outcomes early in 2019. What follows is information gleaned from our assessment of the calendar year of 2018. Faculty members Hannah Acquaye, Ph.D., Laurie Bloomquist, Ph.D., Kay Bruce, Psy.D., Ken Logan, Psy.D., Norm Thiesen, Ph.D, and Bryan Warren, M.A. met on March 13, 2019 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. Treatment planning (CNS 519 Treatment Planning);
6. Research and evaluation of therapeutic effectiveness (CNS 524 Research);
7. Dual diagnosis case write-up (CNS 529 Counseling Addictions);
8. Case study with treatment plan and crisis intervention strategy (CNS 557 & 558 Emergency Preparedness: Crisis Intervention, Trauma, and Loss);
9. Map family genogram (CNS 503 Family Systems);
10. Professional orientation paper (CNS 520 Professional Orientation);
11. Steps to licensure paper and personal reflection paper (CNS 506 Legal & Ethical Issues);
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 80 students in the Portland MA Counseling program after having graduated 15 students over three semesters beginning in fall, 2017.

### **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 were 99.48% (on four items) and 98.51% (on eight items) respectively, indicating the spiritual, theological, and integration training continues to be very strong. Ratings for Interpersonal Skills averaged 96.03% across 11 measures. Counseling Skills, though the lowest of the global outcome data, averaged 94.33% across 19 measures which still indicates strong performance by our students. Professional Practice across 12 measures reflect very high scores averaging 98.69%. 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 and their professional disposition based upon both direct and indirect sources of information. From the PAC Reviews, all Global Counseling Program Outcomes were assessed to have been met at a 94-100% level giving strong validation of outcome achievement. Various components of these skills 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 case conference supervisors ranged from 82% to 97% with the lowest scores in knowledge of community resources and the highest scores on adherence to ethical standards and excellence in professional practice. Across years, students consistently reflect a professional and ethical approach to practice. 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 observation, a clear majority reflected data that meets or exceeds the 80% threshold established as a cut-off. The only outcomes to fall below 80% were related to understanding various styles of group leadership, assessing stage of chemical dependency, knowing available community resources, greater understanding of record-keeping, improved understanding of family systems theory, awareness of advisor, and quality of site supervision. 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. Additionally, however, our results still point to areas of needed upgrade. In this section, we will look at program strengths, relative weaknesses, and include proposed action steps toward continued growth and improvement.

CNS 505 Psychopathology utilizes a mastery with repetition approach to diagnostically evaluating case vignettes ensuring goal accomplishment. Likewise, data from the CNS 507 life stage application project reflects full goal achievement. In CNS 512 Group Counseling, data highlighted knowledge of various styles of group leadership as being a relative weakness. Faculty members suggested that an additional reading in this regard might strengthen the content of the course. CNS 518 Career & Lifestyle seemed to have improved ratings over previous years. Some suggestions for continued improvement include more research from peer-reviewed journal articles and an assignment requiring an interview with a career counselor. CNS 519 Treatment Planning also reflected improved ratings over last year. This course is folded into CNS 503 Advanced Theory & Techniques course in the new curriculum.

The CNS 524 Research course resulted in adequate outcomes on all measures. Faculty have suggested a mini-research proposal be added to the course in the future. All measures were also adequate with regard to the dual diagnosis assignment in CNS 529 Counseling Addictions, with one exception. Faculty recommended that the case write-up instructions include documentation of diagnosis and historic use to strengthen student skill in assessing stage of dependency.

Emergency preparedness classes CNS 557 and CNS 558 appear to be effective in outcome achievement in addition to CNS 503 Family Systems and CNS 520 Professional Orientation that included a study of a program in the community. Evaluation data regarding record-keeping in the CNS 506 Legal & Ethical Issues class was weak at 79%. All other outcomes related to this course were adequate to strong. Faculty acknowledged that record-keeping is more appropriately addressed in the treatment planning portion of the curriculum and should be measured there. Students seem to have a good understanding of how a clinician might engage in healthy self care. Direct evidence scores related to multicultural considerations were very strong ranging from 92 to 97%.

**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. Western counseling students typically produce a mean score above the national mean for other schools who also use it as an exit exam. This year was an exception. Over the three administrations during the 2018 calendar year, Western Seminary means were 92.1, 85.7, and 70 where N=1 while the national exit mean was 87.13. The scores were somewhat skewed by an outlier test-taker who repeated the test three times. Over two 2018 administrations, 19 students took the National Counselor Exam with 17 passing on their first attempt, yielding a pass rate of 89%. The Western mean score in the spring was 114.44 compared to the national mean of 113.47 and the Western mean score in the fall was 108.50 compared to the national mean of 104.87.

## **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 39 students. Only five items produced ratings below 90%, all others were 90% to 99%, with one of the lowest scores being that of off-campus site supervision. We will discuss this with supervisors at the next supervisor training. The lowest program evaluation score was at 67% indicating student did not recall receiving information about their advisor. This is always included in their acceptance letter, but this finding may indicate advisors need to make more effort to connect with advisees. Overall, in most other categories, our students were very positive about their experience in the program and many made very encouraging comments.

**Student course evaluations** – An aggregate average of student evaluations in specific courses ranged from 61% to 100%. The lowest score was in CNS 508 Introduction to Integration. All other courses rated at over 80%, most from 90-100%. Overall, students seem to be pleased with the content and instructional methods in their classes.

## **Program Achievements/Accomplishments**

**Global Counseling Program Outcomes** – Data derived from both direct and indirect evidence resulting in a range from 94.33-99.81% 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 yielded a score of 92%, indicating a positive view among students about their educational experience. There did not appear to be an area of particular weakness among the global program outcomes.

**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. Global Program Outcomes were all well above benchmarks. Supervisors rate student performance as high in adherence to ethical standards and excellence in professional practice. The program is consistent in its maintenance of assessment processes, evaluation of resulting data, and swift implementation of suggested corrections, as evidenced by modifications that have already been implemented and subsequent re-assessment.

## Items for Improvement –

1. Students may benefit from increased knowledge of the various theoretical approaches to group leadership and facilitation. Proposed action steps include:

- Including additional reading regarding various styles of group facilitation
- Incorporate videos depicting a variety of group leadership approaches

2. Students may demonstrate increased accuracy in assessing stage of chemical dependency with a change in case format write-up instructions to include documentation of dual diagnosis and historic use. We have added instructions to a revised version of the case history format for 2019-2020.

3. Ratings by supervisors and students indicate that students could be better prepared in knowledge of community resources and skill in intake assessment.

- the revised case history format also emphasizes a section reviewing available community resources
- the CN515 Testing and Assessment course will add content in intake assessment specifically

4. The spring training for site supervisors will include a discussion of using a developmental approach to student training and evaluation.

## 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 areas of group facilitation, knowledge of community resources, site supervisor training, intake assessment, and accuracy around diagnosis of chemical dependency. We have already modified the case history write-up format to target community resources and knowledge of chemical dependency history and use. As a reflection of our desire to see client resiliency, wellness, strength, and continued growth, we desire continued improvement in our educational curriculum and will maintain our program assessment and development anticipating future positive characteristics in the form of competent students and graduates. Our restructured 2019-2020 curriculum will expand courses to three credits that may allow more flexibility in adding some of our targeted components.