Graduate Programs in Counseling

PROGRAM EVALUATION: Report to Stakeholders Spring 2019

Recognizing the importance of and need for efforts toward continual improvement, the Graduate Counseling Program at Caldwell University engages in a systematic and ongoing evaluation of our mission, goals, and outcomes of student learning and professional progress. Elements of the assessment process include: enrollment and graduation rates, and student learning outcomes. Additionally, feedback is sought from faculty, program graduates, site supervisors and employers of program graduates. This report, which is shared annually, focuses primarily on the findings for the academic year 2017-2018.

1. Update regarding new technology for use in clinical supervision:

The Graduate Counseling Program received a variety of technological equipment and updates over the 2017-2018 academic period. iPads, Chromebooks, and department laptops were purchased for students to use both inside the classroom and externally for clinical supervision purposes. Funding has also been secured for an upgrade to the Werner Hall computer lab, where students with have access to laptops and a classroom setup designed for moving easily between independent work and a group format.

Training Lab: A training laboratory equipped with audio and video technology was created for individual and group counseling practice activities in the 2011-2012 academic year. The lab was updated in 2017 with new technology to better enable students and faculty to observe practice counseling sessions in order to specifically assess strengths and areas of needed growth. Since the incorporation of this technology, both students and faculty report increased student self-awareness and ability to self-critique.

2. Clinical Coordinators:

Currently the Graduate Counseling Program has a coordinator for each of the 3 specialty concentration areas of: Clinical Mental Health, School Counseling, and Art Therapy. Each program area also has a Clinical Coordinator, which was previously separated from the Program Coordinators’ prior responsibilities. These designated Clinical Coordinators, focus on the field experiences of Clinical Mental Health Counseling students, School Counseling students, and Art Therapy students during their practicum and internship. The Clinical Coordinator has a job description that includes the functions that are required by CACREP, including the vetting of new site supervisors, bi-weekly contact, and on site visits annually with active site supervisors. Additionally, the Clinical Coordinators hold practicum/internship orientations for students, and assist the student in selecting, interviewing and accepting a placement for clinical work. The Clinical Coordinator’s role also includes working with sites to complete affiliation agreements between the site and the university, and maintaining contact with the site to assist in communication about the students’ progress. The clinical coordinator works closely with the faculty teaching the practicum and internship courses over the course of the semester. Data for the program improvement related to practicum and internship is collected by Clinical Coordinators.
3. Learning outcomes:

Conclusions regarding student learning outcomes are reached by assessing various aspects of the Graduate Counseling program. Core courses include Signature Assignments, which link certain course objectives to their achievement; the Comprehensive Exam challenges students near the end of the program to apply their knowledge to the treatment of a case; and the national exam (NCE) provide outcomes which can be compared to national results.

The Graduate Counseling Program faculty use the results from formative (annual) and summative (bi-annual) data analysis. The information is then used to guide recommendations for modification to the overall program, course offerings, teaching, assessment methods, and policies.

Results of the data analysis and program modifications are included in our Annual Outcomes Report, posted on the Graduate Programs in Counseling website:
(https://www.caldwell.edu/graduate/academic-department/cps).

Consistently, results indicate that the majority of our students continue to be successful in outcome measures, as indicated by the data for the National Counselors Examination (NCE), Signature Assignments and Comprehensive Examinations.

The National Counselors Examination (NCE) results continue to indicate that our students are adequately prepared with knowledge in the eight core areas of Counselor Education curriculum, as outlined by New Jersey licensing standards and the CACREP accreditation standard. During the 2017-2018 academic year the NCE was given two times on the Caldwell campus. Each of the students graduating in 2017-2018 successfully passed a Comprehensive Examination. In addition, 95% of all graduating students in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Programs have passed the National Counselor Examination.

Signature Assignment aggregate data indicates that the process should be considered for further standardization. A system for collecting and analyzing the data was discussed in late 2018, and a plan has been implemented to further standardize the process. Another previously identified issue indicated that the variance in student outcome scores may be accounted for by the individual faculty members approach to scoring the assignment. Signature Assignment instructions/expectations have been revised on an ongoing basis for the past two academic years, and have yielded better results, based on the clarity of the instructions.

Comprehensive Exam results were also targeted in the 2017-2018 academic year. The faculty had a goal of improving comprehensive exam results, specifically having more students pass with distinction. In order to achieve this goal the faculty implemented an orientation to the exam and are going to analyze the data to see if score have increased from previous years when the orientation was not offered.
4. Program Evaluation & Feedback:

Faculty, site supervisors, and employers of graduates are surveyed both formally and informally regarding their experiences with Caldwell students and alumni. In past, an online survey was developed for gathering information from supervisors, but use of the online tool was discontinued due to the poor rate of responses.

Faculty had previously suggested research and formal writing as an area for focused improvement. As a result, increased short research assignments are integrated into several courses and Program Faculty indicate that they are monitoring changes in student performance on the written portion of the comprehensive exam (as noted above).

Site Supervisors and Employers have historically reported that students demonstrate a high level of counseling competence. Evaluation results from 2017-2018 continue to show a high level of satisfaction with our students ability to take on the roles and responsibilities of a counselor during their practicum/internship. A 5-point scale is utilized by each site supervisor to assess their designated intern (in the specialty areas of mental health, school counseling, or art therapy) at the end of each semester. Areas of assessment include clinical skills, professional behaviors, and professional dispositions. Across each of the three graduate counseling programs, results consistently show a high level of satisfaction with the level of preparedness our counselors demonstrate.

Direct feedback from field supervisors at the Practicum and Internship sites suggests that students are well prepared to enter the profession of counselor, school counselor, and/or art therapist upon completion of the MA in Counseling at Caldwell University. When asked for recommendations for program improvement, the field supervisors noted that the specific demands associated with school counselors’ varied roles and the diagnostic challenges of mental health counselors to be areas in which students sometimes struggle.

5. In Summary:

Having graduated 35 students in the 2017-2018 academic year, we recognize that the success of these young professionals is in part due to your support of them and of the Graduate Counseling Program. Your reception of this report is only one illustration of our awareness of your role in our achievements. The main purpose of program assessment is that of program monitoring, its fidelity to our Mission and Goals, and to achieve ongoing program development. Our ongoing efforts toward those ends will be especially directed toward the 164 enrolled students whom we welcomed this past August for the start of the fall 2018 semester. We invite you, after having reviewed this very brief report, to respond with questions, recommendations, or other feedback to any of Program Coordinators or to any Faculty member.