Assessment Report 2017

This report reflects data collected in spring 2016 (Research & Writing), fall 2016 (Professional Counselor Orientation & Ethical Practice, and spring 2017 (Clinical skills, Case Conceptualization & Treatment Planning, Diversity Awareness & Sensitivity).

**Clinical Skills, Case Conceptualization & Treatment Planning, Diversity Awareness**

Methods and Measures

To follow-up on the 2015-2016 data and "close the loop," we directly assess students’ ability to demonstrate the necessary clinical, case conceptualization, and diversity skills through a signature assignment given at the end of the Advanced Practicum course (Coun 584). The assignment includes a written transcript from a segment of a counseling session, along with a paper in which students write about their work with the client (e.g., assessment of the client, a treatment plan, a description of the treatment), and reflect on their own process and growth (e.g., countertransference, diversity issues, self-care, theoretical orientation). We did not use an indirect assessment on this round, as the survey is every other year and we are revising it.

Criteria for Success

For the signature assignment, the average score across students sampled is a 3 or higher for each item (i.e., each element of the Learning Goal), and this score meets expectations.

Data Collection

Four signature papers (approximately 20%) were randomly chosen from spring 2017’s advanced practicum classes.  A committee of three full-time faculty met multiple times to discuss the scoring, and worked until consensus was reached. (Note: We also include analysis that removes the 4th paper, as the 4th paper reflects work from a student who used an outdated paper assignment and their work does not reflect everything we are looking for.)

Clinical Skills

Assessable Outcome

Students will be able to: demonstrate awareness of the social and cultural influences on human behavior; demonstrate effective counseling skills; evaluate clients’ progress; recognize and mitigate countertransference; and conduct counseling with appropriate awareness of ethical and legal issues.

Data Analysis

In 2015, three out of the five SLOs within the broad category of “clinical skills” met the minimum score of 3 or higher, suggesting that students were adequately learning basic counseling skills, were able to monitor clients’ progress, and could recognize countertransference. In the 2017 reassessment, all three of those scores were lower, much to our surprise. The one regarding countertransference would have been higher if the fourth paper were not counted and the “effective counseling” one was similar enough to not cause alarm. However, “evaluating clients’ progress towards treatment goals” was significantly lower, regardless of the fourth paper. This will require further examination, as we have made efforts to implement treatment planning earlier in the curriculum and students should have received feedback on this very assignment in the earlier practicum course (which was a central element of our improvement strategy). This group of students would have had the same assignment the previous semester, so this leads us to believe we have to do more to make sure that all the faculty who teach practicum are providing adequate feedback in the earlier class so that they are better prepared going into this assignment. We will work harder on providing them material and training to do so.

In 2015, the item related to diversity was not up to standard (2.8).  Although the larger diversity SLO that we reassessed (not here in clinical skills) did improve, the one item for diversity that we assess within this clinical skills SLO was essentially the same (2.75, and 3.0 if the fourth paper were taken out). Students continue to struggle to demonstrate how diversity awareness is integrated into clinical skills.

In summary, the picture is mixed, but overall we did not reach our goals for improving student outcomes in clinical skills.

Conceptualization and Treatment Planning

Assessable Outcome

Students will demonstrate knowledge of counseling theories and apply them to case conceptualization. They will demonstrate the ability to appropriately use the DSM-5 (diagnostic manual of mental disorders), and to construct relevant treatment plans, including those for people with severe or co-occurring mental illness.

Data Analysis

In 2015, all three SLOs within the broad category of “Case Conceptualization & Treatment Planning” met the minimum score of 3 or higher, suggesting that students were adequately learning how to apply theory, utilize the common diagnostic system, and create treatment plans for clients, including those with severe illness. However, we were hoping to see improvement following the various measures we have taken.  In the reassessment, the item regarding theoretical orientation (D.1) was much lower, dropping from 3.6 to 3.0. Although this still meets minimal criteria, it is not optimal. The other two items (D.2 and D.3) were similar to the 2015 results but showed no improvement.  We added three more items to this SLO (D.4, D.5, D.6) and all of them averaged 3.25, just above the minimal requirement.

In summary, although students did show adequate skill in this area, even when including the fourth paper, we did not reach our goal of improving the learning outcomes.

Diversity Awareness and Sensitivity

Assessable Outcome

Students will be able to: demonstrate awareness of the major cultural influences on human behavior, how those intersect with the mental health of their clients, and how they influence their own perceptions and biases regarding clients.

 Data Analysis

In 2015, the two diversity items (B.1 and B.2) were below the minimum desired score of 3, suggesting that students were not adequately learning diversity basics and/or the directions for completing the paper were not clear enough. In the 2017 reassessment, B1 went up from 2.4 to 3.0 and B2 went up from 2.2 to 3.2, suggesting good improvement. The 2015 signature assignment had not allowed us to assess our other two items adequately (B.3 and B.4) and our revisions to the paper made some improvements in this area.  We are probably still not capturing B.3 well enough in the assignment, as this averaged under 3.0 even in otherwise good papers. It may be that identifying stereotypes (B.3) is better assessed in the cultural class, rather than in a clinically oriented paper. We were able to measure B.4 with the revised paper, as students could identify ways in which counselors advocate for clients (average was 3.75).

In summary, we do see good improvement in the learning outcomes for diversity awareness and are continuing to refine our teaching in this area throughout the curriculum. Although we still need to improve, we believe we have met our goals for this round of assessment (and will likely remove B.3 as the issues there seem to be a matter of assignment construction rather than student learning).

**Improvement Actions for Clinical, Case Conceptualization, and Diversity**

Students still showed adequate learning, but we were surprised, given our efforts, that there was not only not improvement, but a decline in performance. We are not sure if this is an issue of sampling or something else. The same three reviewers examined these papers and reached consensus. A first step is to educate all full and part-time faculty better on what we are looking for, and to emphasize that students must have comprehensive feedback on this assignment in the earlier practicum course. We will assess another sample of papers in spring 2018, which will give us more information about whether we need to reevaluate how we are assessing. We will also continue to work to enhance these skills in the earlier courses whether they are introduced.

**Research & Writing**

**(data from spring 2016)**

Assessable outcomes:

Students will be able to: critically analyze research methodology and the professional literature regarding a counseling topic; construct an original research project; and demonstrate professional writing skills in accordance with APA guidelines.

Methods and Measures:

We directly assess students’ ability to demonstrate the necessary research and writing skills through a signature assignment, a capstone project completed in the last semester of their degree. This is an original qualitative research project regarding an area of counseling of the student’s own choosing. The final paper includes Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion sections, and necessitates skills in analysis of research methodology and original data, in-depth knowledge of a counseling topic, and professional writing according to APA style standards.

We indirectly assess students’ knowledge with two different surveys, one for graduating students and one for employers of our graduated students.

Criteria for Success

For the direct measure (the signature assignment), the average score across students sampled should be a 3 or higher for each item (i.e., each element of the Learning Goal), and this score meets expectations.

In the first indirect measure (the graduating student survey), we use the ninth category from Question 12 and the department objectives called “Research and Program Evaluation.” In order to meet expectation we look for 90% or more of our students to respond with “Met” (versus “Not Met”). In the second indirect measure (the employer survey), we use Question 6 (“Compared to other Master’s degree counseling students that you have hired, CSUF students’ professional writing skills are…”). We do not have a blank survey to attach here, but you will see the entire survey in the results section. We look for 100% of employers to answer “average” or above regarding our graduates’ behavior in order to meet expectations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Direct measure: Six signature papers (approximately 20%) were randomly chosen from spring 2016’s Research Project (Coun 597) classes.  A committee of three full-time faculty met to discuss the scoring according to the rubric developed. Then they independently assessed each paper. (The committee was reduced to two faculty mid-way due to unexpected circumstances). We compared the ratings of the faculty across the first couple of papers and discussed differences we had before proceeding with the rest of the papers. The remaining two faculty independently assessed the remaining four papers. Although their scores were rarely exactly the same, in 94% (30 out of 32) of the scoring, they were within one score of each other (e.g., one at a “4” for the higher end of “meets expectations” and the other rater at a “5” for the lower end of “exceeds expectations”). So, although we can improve our interrater reliability, we had very high agreement as to whether or not a student had at least met expectations. In fact, all items of each SLO were rated “at expectation” (3) or above, with the exception of one score of 2. Averages of the ratings for each of the eight items within the SLO met the minimum score of 3 or higher, suggesting that students had learned to conduct an original research project and write about it in a professional manner. In fact, in 7 of the 8 items, the average score across papers was above 4 (at the higher end of “at expectations”). One item, “Critically analyzes research methodology and can critique the professional literature,” averaged at 3.8, still “at expectations” but lower that the other items assessed, suggesting that students may need more instruction in this area.

For the first indirect measure (graduating students survey), our training director administered the survey in paper-and-pencil form at the “exit sessions” in December and May, just prior to their graduation. Out of 55 students, 53 completed the survey. Graduating students responded to a question regarding whether the department “met the objectives of assisting students to do the following”: *Develop the ability to read, critique, evaluate, and contribute to professional research appraisal.* Out of 53 respondents, 52 answered “Met,” (almost 98%, which meets our objective). This suggests that students complete the program with a perception that they have been well trained with regard to writing and research skills.

For the second indirect measure (the employers survey), 25 out of roughly 50 employers responded to an online survey. Employers responded to the question: *Compared to other Master’s degree counseling students that you have hired, CSUF students’ professional writing skills are*….” A total of 100% responded with “Average” (44%), “Above Average” (32%), and “Excellent” (24%). While we are pleased that this does meet our standard, we would like to increase the rates of “above average” and “excellent.” We also need to increase the response rate in order to obtain better data.

Improvement Actions

The professors who teach the two research classes that culminate in this project meet every year to discuss their teaching and their impressions of how students are doing. We plan to meet to strategize better ways of teaching students to critically analyze research methodology. We are pleased with the indirect survey results but do want the scores to skew more towards “above average” and “excellent,” rather than so many in the “average” category. We will also work on improving the response rate from employers. We also will work with the entire faculty to continue to improve writing and analytic skills early in the program, so that not only are students well-prepared for the research courses, but so they are also writing well at their clinical sites.

**Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice**

**(data from fall 2016)**

Assessable outcomes:

Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of: (a) the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the counseling profession; (b) ethical and legal guidelines of the profession; and (c) professional counseling credentialing, certification, and licensure.

Methods and Measures:

We directly assess students’ knowledge with a multiple choice exam in Coun 526 (the Ethics course). We indirectly assess students’ knowledge with two different surveys, one for graduating students and one for employers of our graduated students.

Criteria for Success

In the direct measure (the ethics exam), we want to see an average score of 80% or better across students, but more specifically, every student should obtain 80% or higher in order for us to meet expectations. In the first indirect measure (the graduating student survey), we use the first category from Question 12 and the department objectives called “Professional Identity.” In order to meet expectation we look for 90% or more of our students to respond with “Met” (versus “Not Met”). In the second indirect measure (the employer survey), we use Question 3 (“Compared to other Master’s degree counseling students that you have hired, CSUF students’ ethical behaviors are…”). We do not have a blank survey to attach here, but you will see the entire survey in the results section. We look for 100% of employers to answer “average” or above regarding our graduates’ behavior.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the direct measure, two Coun 526 classes (a total of 32 students) were given the multiple choice exam towards the end of the semester. Out of 31 students (one was eliminated due to not participating adequately), 12 had met the minimum desired score of 80% or higher. The mean grade for one class was 72% and for the other it was 74%, averaging to 73%. Students tended to struggle with questions regarding scope of practice and difference between the MFT and LPC licenses. Our students’ knowledge of certain areas of ethical practice was not up to standard.

For the first indirect measure (graduating students survey), our training director administered the survey in paper-and-pencil form at the “exit sessions” in December and May, just prior to their graduation. Out of 55 students, 53 completed the survey. All 53 students responded with “Met” (versus “Not Met”) in response to the department meeting the objective (first one on Question 12) about assisting students in their professional identity and ethical practice. This suggests that students complete the program with a perception that they have been well trained with regard to the profession and ethical practice.

For the second indirect measure (the employers survey), 25 out of roughly 50 employers responded to an online survey. Employers responded to the question: *Compared to other Master’s degree counseling students that you have hired, CSUF students’ ethical behavior are*… A combination of 96% responded with “Average” (20%), “Above Average” (40%), and “Excellent” (36%). Four percent responded with “Poor.” Although the results are generally very positive, we are not meeting the standard because of the 4% “poor” rating. The overall results suggest that employers are satisfied and like to hire our students; however, we need to continue to work towards 100% positive responses regarding the ethical behavior of our graduates and we need a better response rate from our employers.

Improvement Actions

In spring 2017 the department Chair discussed the results of the ethics exam with the professors who teach Ethics. They discussed the need to attend more carefully to scope of practice issues. We also intend to discuss the issues with the entire faculty fall 2017 and may make changes to Coun 500, the course that introduces students to the field. Regarding the indirect assessments, although we were pleased with the results on the question from the graduate survey, we will be meeting to make sure that the survey question adequately reflects our intentions in the program and we may make some changes to the survey itself. Regarding the employee survey, although the results were highly positive, we never want to see a “poor” rating regarding our graduates’ ethical behavior and will work to obtain a higher response rate and determine if we can obtain more detail from employers regarding areas we need to emphasize more strongly.