Student Learning Outcome Report

2018-2019

We have been tracking students’ individual and aggregate performance on a number of learning goals, across multiple points in the curriculum, using a number of different measures. We have three “gates” at which we assess each student individually: first semester advisement; advancement to practicum; and advancement to final project. In this report we provide information and data from our most recent assessments, as well as an explanation of our focus going forward (improvement actions).

Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice (2018-2019 academic year)

Assessable outcomes (our focus within this broader SLO):

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:

To follow up and “close the loop” on the data from 2016-2017, we have reassessed using the same exam, and also added a written component from another course on one aspect of professional identity and ethics (self-care).

We directly assess students' knowledge with a multiple choice exam in Coun 526 (the Ethics course) and from a single item from a signature paper in Coun 584 (Advanced practicum) regarding self-care. We indirectly assess students' knowledge with three different surveys: graduating students; employers of our graduated students; and alumni.

Criteria for Success:

For the first 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. For the second direct measure (the self-care item from the signature assignment), students’ scores should average a 3 or above.

In the first indirect measure (the graduating student survey), we use Question 13 of whether the department assisted students in their objectives, and specifically the first item called “Professional Identity.” In order to meet expectation we look for 80% 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 look for we look for 80% to rate our students as “above average” or “excellent” behavior, and for 100% to be at least “average.”
In the third indirect measure (the alumni survey), we use “How well did the program adequately prepare you to pass the law and ethics exam?” (Q12). We look for 75% to report passing the licensing exam the first time they took it (this is the mean of all associates in CA across both licenses). We also used “How well did the program prepare you to understand your identity as a counselor and MFT?” (Q14). We look for 80% to respond “moderately well” or above in order to meet expectations.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

For the first direct measure, two Coun 526 (Ethics) classes were given the multiple choice exam towards the end of the fall 2018 semester, and one was given it in summer 2019. The mean grades for the classes were: 96%, 81%, and 80% (total average = 86%). This met our expectation over 80% or above, and was an improvement over the 2016-17 data of 73%. Individually, there was an improvement over the 2016-17 data as well (22% versus 38% did not meet the minimum desired score). However, we want each student to obtain 80% or higher, and so this goal was not met.
For the second direct measure, students were required to write a segment of their comprehensive paper for the advanced practicum course on self-care. A random sample of 7 unidentified signature assignment papers from the fall 2018 Coun 584 (Advanced Practicum) course were evaluated by three full-time faculty. Papers were individually evaluated and then the group discussed each paper until consensus on the scoring was achieved. All 7 papers obtained a score of 3 or higher, meeting expectations. We were encouraged that 4 out of 7 scored in the “exceeds expectations” range, indicating that students are understanding the connection between self-care and ethical practice with clients.

In the first indirect measure (the graduating student survey), data were obtained from graduating students through an online survey at the end of fall 2018 and spring 2019. All 18 of the fall graduates responded to the survey and 100% reported that the department had “met” its objectives in assisting students with their understanding of professional identity. All 49 of the spring graduates responded to the survey and 100% reported that the department had “met” its objectives in assisting students with their understanding of professional identity. This more than meets our expectations, and indicates a strong level of satisfaction among graduates.
In the second indirect measure (the employer survey), approximately 52 employers were sent an online survey, and 19 (37%) responded. Regarding employers’ perceptions of our graduates' ethical behavior, 100% indicated “average” or above, which meets our primary goal. Ideally, we would like 80% or more to be rated “above average” or “excellent,” and we came close at 78.95%. We need a higher response rate to have a fuller picture, but this suggests that our students are respected in the field and that their ethical behavior is at least adequate.

In the third indirect measure (the alumni survey), approximately 500 alumni were sent an online survey, and 205 responded. We used Q12 about passing the law and ethics licensing exam. Out of the 208 who responded to the question, 141 reported having taken it. Of those 141, 88% reported having passed the first time (and this surpasses the state average of 75% and meets expectations). An additional 11% reported passing after two or more attempts, and
1 person reported they had not yet been able to pass. On Q14 about the program preparing them to understand their identities as counselors, 99% reported “moderately well” or above, meeting expectations. These data suggest our students are doing well; however, it is a select sample of students who chose to respond.

Improvement Actions

Faculty has continued to discuss and refine what we want to see from students in regards to ethical knowledge and behavior, and professional identity. The introductory course (Coun 500) professors have included more preparation for incoming students regarding these issues, and the ethics course professors have revised their teaching. The ethics exam was revised in summer 2019, following an analysis of mistakes, and in an attempt to ensure the questions are understood. Although on average students are meeting the minimum criteria on the ethics exam, we want every student to meet this minimum and will be discussing once again how we are teaching these concepts, and how we are reinforcing them throughout the curriculum. Including an essay item on self-care is another element of ethical behavior, and we were pleased that students appeared to understand the importance of it. Going forward, we will have data on the self-care question from the signature assignment for every student in the advanced practicum course (Coun 584). Although our survey results were very positive, we still need a better response rate from employers in order to understand more about our graduates’ ethical knowledge and conduct. We also obtain ratings from site supervisors on students’ knowledge and skills regarding legal and ethical issues and are in the process of working with college IT personnel to create digital forms so that these data can be more easily accessed for both individual assessment and aggregate data analysis.

Research and Professional Writing (2018-2019 academic year) (We have slightly revised the rubric for criteria; it encompasses everything we had but shortens it to 4 items within the SLO)
Assessable outcomes (our focus within this broader SLO):

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:

To follow up and “close the loop” on the data from 2017-2018, we have expanded our assessment to include both a beginning course (first semester in the program) signature assignment, and a capstone (last semester in the program) signature assignment.

We have directly assessed students’ ability to demonstrate the necessary research and writing skills, first through an assessment of beginning skills in a signature assignment given in their first semester of the program (Coun 500), and then through a signature assignment, a capstone project completed in the last semester of their degree (Coun 597). Both assignments require a literature review and writing skills regarding a topic of their own choosing. The capstone project in Coun 597 requires more skill and an original research study. It includes Introduction (Literature Review), 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 three different surveys: graduating students, employers of our graduated students, and alumni.

Criteria for Success

For the direct measure (the signature assignments in both Coun 500 and Coun 597), 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 category 13 (“Department Objectives”), specifically Q9: “Research and Program Evaluation.” In order to meet expectation we look for 80% 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 look for 100% of employers to answer “average” or above regarding our graduates’ writing in order to meet expectations.

For the third indirect measure (the alumni survey), we used Q18: How well did the program prepare you to conduct research and demonstrate the ability to think critically and solve problems? And Q19: How well did the program prepare you to write effectively? The survey
questions were changed since the last time we administered it in order to better reflect our current learning goals. We looked for 80% of alumni to rate each question “moderately well” or above in order to meet expectations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Direct measure for the beginning skills in Coun 500: We did this in two stages, in two classes from fall 2018 and in one class from spring 2019.

In fall 2018, the literature portions of twelve signature papers (approximately 20%) were randomly chosen from both Coun 500 classes (which included the entire incoming class). A committee of three full-time faculty (the two professors who teach Coun 500 and the assessment coordinator) met to discuss the scoring according to the rubric developed, which for this purpose included only two of the four Research and Professional Writing items, in order to focus on writing skills alone, and come to consensus regarding quality of writing in our students. We had wide consensus that each student sampled had met the minimum criteria (a 3 or above out of a possible 6) on the two items assessed, and we spent more time reaching consensus on quality of writing beyond minimal competency and what we expect from students. During this process we also refined what we wanted to see in this paper overall, including the literature review. The average score for E.3 (Demonstrates writing that is concise and organized, as well as correct in terms of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure) was 4.25 and for E.4 (Demonstrates original writing that is correct according to APA style (e.g., structurally and mechanically, including correct citations and references) it was 4.41.

In spring 2019, we had a new incoming class from our separate cohort program (through extended education). Building on the work done in the fall, the professor of the course evaluated every student on three items of the Research and Professional Writing Rubric (E.3 and E.4, as in the fall classes, and E.2, regarding a beginning literature review). Two students
received incompletes, and the rest (n = 24) all received the minimum required score (3) or higher on each item. The average score for E.2 was 4.8. The average score for E.3 was 4.3. The average score for E.4 was 4.3.

Direct measure for the advanced skills in Coun 597: four signature papers (a little over 20%) were randomly chosen from both Coun 597 classes in fall 2018. A committee of three full-time faculty conducted the assessment. Two scored two papers each independently, and the assessment coordinator scored all four papers. The three evaluators were the same ones from 2016 – 2017 and had previously worked together on consensus around expectations. There was 100% agreement between the assessment coordinator evaluations and the professor evaluations regarding whether students were “at expectations” or “exceeds expectations” (no one was evaluated as “below expectations”). The only differences in scoring were within categories; given this, the scores were averaged. Following that, an average across items was derived: E.1 (5.13); E.2 (4.75); E.3 (4.88); and E.4 (5). All were above the minimum score of 3. Students’ average scores had improved across all four items (see a comparison table between 2016-17 and 2018-19), suggesting that students’ writing has improved, possibly due to the efforts by all professors across the curriculum to emphasize this needed area of growth.
In the first indirect measure (the graduating student survey), data were obtained from graduating students through an online survey at the end of fall 2018 and spring 2019. All 18 of the fall graduates responded to the survey and 100% reported that the department had “met” its objectives in assisting students with their ability to think critically and evaluate research. All 49 of the spring graduates responded to the survey and 97.96% reported that the department had “met” this objective. This more than meets our expectations.

In the second indirect measure (the employer survey), approximately 52 employers were sent an online survey, and 19 (37%) responded. 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” and above, which meets our expectations (“Average” 44.44%, “Above Average” 27.78%, and “Excellent” 27.78%). These data are similar to what we found in 2016-2017 (the excellent rating was slightly lower at 24% and the above average rating was slightly higher at 32%, and the average was nearly the same at 44%). While we are pleased that there were no below standard scores in either year, 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.
In the third indirect measure (the alumni survey), approximately 500 alumni were sent an online survey, and 205 responded. In response to the question “How well did the program prepare you to conduct research and demonstrate the ability to think critically and solve problems?” (Q18), 90% responded “moderately well” or above (slightly well 4.88%; moderately well 24.88%; very well 41.95%; extremely well 28.29%); none responded “not well at all.” This meets expectations. In response to the question “How well did the program prepare you to write effectively?” Q19, 96.59% responded “moderately well” or above (slightly well 2.44%; moderately well 19.51%; very well 40.49%; extremely well 36.59%), and .98% responded “not well at all.” This meets expectations. Our criteria were met and the majority of alumni rated the items very well and extremely well.

Improvement Actions
The entire faculty has been working to bring up the quality of our students’ writing, and we believe our efforts are slowly paying off. Our beginning Coun 500 class places great emphasis on writing and research, and students are provided opportunities to obtain help and attend additional workshops (e.g., in APA style). We are not only emphasizing writing in every class, but we are now assessing it during the first and last semesters. In addition to sampling for data, we will be tracking individual students across both courses. We will assess research and writing skills in every Coun 500 and 597 class every year by having the course professors rate these signature assignments on our assessment rubric for each student, which will allow us to see both individual development and aggregate data. An advisor and/or the entire faculty will examine each student’s writing scores at gate points during the student’s progression through the program. We will continue to sample data periodically (on a rotating basis with other SLOs) and conduct outside team consensus scoring, so that we continue this methodology and ensure that the scoring of individual students remains consistent.

**Group Counseling and Group Work (2018-2019 academic year)**

**Assessable outcomes: (our focus within this broader SLO):**

Students will be able to: demonstrate knowledge of the dynamics of group process and development, and characteristics and functions of effective group leaders, as well as awareness of their own behavior in groups.

**Methods and Measures:**

A committee of four faculty who regularly teach the group course developed a signature assignment and rubric for evaluating students’ knowledge in the group class (Coun 528). The signature assignment is a reflection paper entitled “My Behavior in Groups,” in which students must analyze their own behavior in the course’s experiential group, and demonstrate knowledge of group therapeutic factors, types of group behaviors, leadership qualities, and cultural factors.

**Criteria for Success**

Students should receive a score of 3 or higher on each of the three elements of the rubric, and this score meets expectations.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In summer 2019, the professors for two group classes evaluated each student: all 21 students obtained scores of 3 or higher on each element, meeting the desired minimum. In aggregate, students did slightly better demonstrating knowledge of the “dynamics associated with group process and development” (Mean = 5), than on “group membership and self-awareness” (Mean = 4.8), and “characteristics and functions of group leaders” (Mean = 4.7).
Improvement Actions

Faculty will evaluate the effectiveness of the new rubric in the coming year. We have also added a group skills component to the practicum site supervisor evaluation and will begin assessing that for each student in practicum in fall 2019.

Clinical Skills, Case Conceptualization, Treatment Planning, and Diversity Awareness (2018-2019 academic year)

We use multiple methods to assess these four related SLOs: professors’ evaluations at the end of the first semester in the program (Coun 511; Pre-Practicum), professors’ evaluations at the end of both practicum courses (Coun 530 and 584), site supervisors’ evaluations at the end of both practicum courses, and a signature assignment in the advanced practicum course (Coun 584) (as well as indirect measures using anonymous surveys). Although we have always collected these data on each student, we are in the process of developing new ways to track them so that they are more accessible to faculty where we examine each student’s progress. This year, we focused on the professors’ and site supervisors’ evaluations (rather than the signature assignment) from a segment of the data in order to pilot our system. We are not able to obtain a comprehensive computer program and so are working with excel files for some and with paper copies for others (we are working with college IT personnel to develop digital forms for at least some).

Methods and Measures:

We use a short professor evaluation of clinical skills form in the Coun 511 (Pre-Practicum) course, and a longer version of this form (which includes case conceptualization, treatment planning, and diversity awareness) in Coun 530 and Coun 584 (the practicum courses in which students are seeing clients). Site supervisors also submit an end-of-semester form that assesses students on these aspects.

Criteria for Success:

Students should receive a “global evaluation” of at least “Yes, meets minimal expectations” and a rating of “meets expectations” on a majority of items on the professor evaluation form. Scoring “at expectations” for Coun 511 (Pre-practicum) is 1-2; for Coun 530 (Beginning Practicum) it is 3-4; and for Coun 584 (Advanced Practicum) it is 5-6. Students should receive at least a “meets minimum standard” on each element of the site supervisor form.

Data Collection and Analysis

Beginning clinical skills were assessed through the professor evaluation in all Coun 511 (Pre-Practicum) classes from fall 2018 and spring 2019. Clinical Skills, Case conceptualization, Treatment Planning, and Diversity Awareness were assessed through professor evaluations in Coun 530 (Beginning Practicum) in fall, and through professor evaluation and site supervisor
evaluation in Coun 584 (Advanced Practicum) in spring. **Note: Given the pilot nature of these data and our beginning to track with excel, there are some missing data which we plan to integrate as soon as possible (we do not anticipate this small amount to change the overall picture).

For clinical skills in Coun 511 (Pre-Practicum) across fall and spring (87 students total): 3 students (about 3%) did not meet the global evaluation of “minimal standards” and remediation efforts were implemented; 4 (about 4%) met “minimal” standards only and were provided feedback on improvements needed; and the remaining students (92%) received “meets or exceeds expectations.” Aggregate scores across each skill were all within range (between 1 and 2). Among the skills assessed, students tended to do very well with beginning skills such as content reflections (average = 1.85) and non-verbal skills (1.90), and had more difficulty with reflecting feelings (1.58) and using silence (1.64).

For Coun 530 (Beginning Practicum) in fall: all 21 students obtained a global rating of “meets or exceeds expectations” across Clinical Skills, Case conceptualization, Treatment Planning, and Diversity Awareness. Aggregate scores across clinical skills were all within range (between 3 and 4) and students tended to do well demonstrating empathy (average = 3.68) and struggled more with identifying themes (3.36). Aggregate scores across case conceptualization and treatment planning skills were all within range (between 3 and 4); however the averages of each element were all at 3.0 or just slightly higher, indicating that students need help in this area. Aggregate scores across Diversity Awareness were all within range (between 3 and 4), and each element was 3.5 or above, indicating that this is a strength in students.
For Coun 584 (Advanced Practicum) in spring: of the 21 students continuing from fall Coun 530, we received data for 15. They all obtained a global rating of “meets or exceeds expectations” across Clinical Skills, Case conceptualization, Treatment Planning, and Diversity Awareness. Aggregate scores across clinical skills were all within range (between 5 and 6) but all elements other than “reflecting content” were below 5.5, and “identification of themes” fell below the desired 5-6 range (4.92). Aggregate scores across case conceptualization and treatment planning skills were all within range (between 5 and 6); however the averages of each element were below 5.5, indicating that students are improving but still need help in this area. Aggregate scores across Diversity Awareness were all within range (between 5 and 6), although each element was below 5.5, suggesting that although students are doing well in this area, they may be struggling to meet the increased demands of the advanced course.

Scoring of clinical knowledge and skills across all three practicums is in the desired range and direction, beginning in the 1-2 range in Pre-practicum and progressing to the 5-6 range in Advanced practicum.
Site supervisor ratings were also examined for Coun 584 in spring and all met at least the minimal standard on each element. Nearly all of the 15 students assessed obtained a rating of 5 (4 – 5 “meets standard”) or 6 (“exceeds standard) on each element, with an occasional 4; one student obtained a score of 3 across a number of elements (2 – 3 “meets minimal standard”).

**Improvement Actions**

Students’ clinical skills appear to be on track for their developmental level, and we are intervening early on in the Pre-Practicum (Coun 511) course in order to help students who are not demonstrating adequate skills. Case conceptualization and treatment planning is an area we need to strengthen. We have been working on strengthening teaching in two earlier courses that address aspects of conceptualization and treatment planning: Coun 522 (Diagnosis and Treatment Planning) and Coun 520 (Theories), and have had several faculty discussions regarding what we want to see students demonstrate in the practicum course as a whole and in the signature assignment in particular. This is a work-in-progress. Going forward, each practicum professor will provide ratings on the signature assignment for each student.

**Dispositions and Professionalism**

**Assessable outcomes:**

Students will demonstrate fitness for the field through four broad categories within Dispositions and Professionalism: (1) effective and professional communication and collaboration; (2) emotional maturity, self-awareness, and counselor presence; (3) dependability, reliability, ethical behavior; and (4) respect for diversity and openness to other world views.
Methods and Measures:

The faculty developed a form to be used for all students when they take Coun 511 (Pre-Practicum), Coun 530 (Beginning Practicum), and Coun 584 (Advanced Practicum). Additionally, all faculty are encouraged to fill out the form for any student in any class in which they have some concern or believe the student needs improvement. The form consists of the four broad categories listed above, which can be receive a rating of “concern,” “needs improvement,” or “no concern.” Additionally, multiple items exist for each of the four categories and each can receive the same ratings.

Criteria for Success

All students are expected to receive ratings of “no concern” on all categories and items.

Data Collection and Analysis

All but three students were rated as “no concern” for the academic year.

Improvement Actions

Faculty are working to better educate students on expectations and to develop consistency across faculty. The professors who teach the introductory course the first semester of the program have been working to provide students with more information and socialization into the program and the field. We developed a rather detailed form so that full-time and part-time faculty and students could see a range of behaviors listed explicitly and this appears to be helping all of us understand the expectations.

Conclusion and Future Steps

We are continuing to expand our scope of assessment, as we work through some of the technological challenges in managing a large and growing data set. We will be adding assessment of testing/assessment, career, and human development soon. We continue to revise our methods of teaching and what we want students to gain, depending on what we see is needed from the data.