Annual Report

2015-2016

Department Psychology and Counseling

Master of Science in Counseling
Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling Program Emphases

School of Education
Northern State University (NSU)

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### Faculty
(Master of Science – Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling Emphases)

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<td>Karyl Meister, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>Ahmet Can, PhD</td>
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### Staff

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<td>Jennifer Heib</td>
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### Adjunct Faculty

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<tr>
<td>Christy Schuett, M.S.</td>
<td>Adjunct Faculty</td>
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Highlights 2015-2016

Programs – Graduate course offerings in guidance and counseling were first offered by NSU in 1957. Course offerings in counseling expanded throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s in response to growing student demand. The guidance and counseling program became formally recognized by the South Dakota Board of Regents during the early 1980’s and was housed within the College of Education. Currently, the counseling program represents the largest graduate degree program at NSU.

Both graduate counseling tracks allow students to meet academic and practice standards required for licensure or certification in South Dakota. During the past year, several significant changes to the graduate program curriculum have been accomplished to better prepare graduates to obtain professional credentialing in counseling. A program advisory board that consists of professional counselors, community members, program graduates, and other interested stakeholders has been organized. Both the Graduate Counseling Student Handbook and also, the Field Placement Handbook have been revised and updated. A counseling program D2L site has been created to enhance students’ access to information related with the program or the counseling profession. Procedures for comprehensive program assessment and evaluation have been revised and expanded to include assessment of field placement site supervisors and graduates. The clinical skills laboratory used for experiential training has been updated with new technology and additional space. Procedures utilized during the comprehensive oral defense have been revised and improved. Students now have the opportunity to complete the National Counseling Examination (NCE) on campus. Preparations are underway to submit an application for accreditation to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) during the next annual report cycle.

Faculty – Highlights include the appointment of Dr. Kelly Duncan to SOE Dean and program coordinator; the addition of one new faculty member, Dr. Ahmet Can; and appointment of Dr. Karyl Meister to Field Experiences Coordinator.

Students – To date, approximately 260 students have completed the program; the majority of whom have been Caucasian females (76%). Upon acceptance into the program, many students choose to complete both the Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling tracks. Students accepted into the program typically possess an undergraduate degree in psychology (35%), sociology (13%), or education (8%). During the 2015-2016 report cycle, 17 total students graduated, 1 SC in December 2015, 3 CMH Summer 2016, 2 CMH and 11 SC in May 2016. The majority of program graduates are currently employed in the counseling field. Typical employers of counseling program graduates include the Aberdeen Public School System, Northeastern
Mental Health, Rehabilitation Services Administration., South Dakota Developmental Center., The Mayo Clinic, Lutheran Social Services, Hazelden Mental Health Services, and AmeriCorps. Currently, 17 students are in good standing in the counseling program. Historically, the most popular counseling program track among students has been the clinical mental health track. Among students accepted into the CMH track, a minority have indicated plans to enter the field of substance abuse counseling. Another trend among current counseling students is to pursue dual-tracks in CMH and SC. Several students have also requested permission to specialize in areas of counseling that do not reflect current program emphasis areas including gerontology, end of life, rehabilitation, and marriage and family counseling. The increased incidence of these requests suggests that the program is drawing a greater diversity of students.

Program

The Graduate Program Curriculum –
Due to a combination of historically varying enrollment numbers for certain core courses (pre-practicum, practicum), faculty concerns related with developmentally appropriate course sequencing and FTE faculty to student ratios and also, uncertainty expressed by students regarding course availability, the graduate program curriculum underwent a significant redesign during the previous report cycle. The most significant modifications included the establishment of procedures to ensure that courses will be offered on a more predictable and consistent basis in the future. Specifically, the program transitioned to a cohort model in Fall 2015, both to achieve a more consistent pattern of enrollment across courses and to better meet institutional and accreditation standards regarding FTE faculty to student ratios. Additionally, the implementation of a cohort-based model significantly enhances the ability of faculty to track students through the program, to provide effective academic advising to students, and to ensure that enrollment numbers remain consistent from year to year. During the development process, the newly designed cohort-based course rotation was closely evaluated to determine potential impact on the plan of study and anticipated graduation dates for all currently enrolled students. Applications for admission into the program are reviewed during the Spring and Summer terms with student cohorts starting during the Fall term.

Counseling Program Advisory Board –
The counseling program advisory board consists of counseling practitioners who have supervised students during practicum or internship, administrators of community mental health counseling services, school counselors or principals, and program graduates. During the fall 2015 semester members of the advisory board, program faculty and staff, and the Dean of the College of Education met in the NSU Student Center to discuss issues related with the program accreditation, program assessment, field placements, and lastly, future meeting times/dates.
Graduate Counseling Student Handbook & Field Placement Handbook –
Both the Graduate Counseling Student Handbook and also, the Practicum Field Placement Handbook are updated annually.

Counseling Program D2L Site –
A Counseling Program sandbox was created in D2L in Fall 2014. The site is accessible to all currently enrolled students within the program, faculty members, and appropriate staff. The primary purpose for the site is to provide students with enhanced access to important program related documents, information, or announcements.

Counseling Program Assessment -
A comprehensive program assessment plan currently being finalized. The assessment plan provides a means by which indicators of program quality can be objectively assessed at multiple levels including: the currently enrolled individual student level; class level; community level. For example, at the level of individual students, faculty began conducting semi-annual evaluations of all students during the Fall 2014 semester. The newly developed semi-annual evaluation is intended to provide students with feedback regarding their standing within the program in terms of cumulative and term GPA, course work being within the six year time frame, and whether dispositions are within the expected range. Additionally, students in all clinical based courses (pre-practicum, practicum, internship, group counseling, multicultural counseling, and professional orientation/ethics) complete formal dispositional performance evaluations both at mid-term and again towards the end of the semester. Lastly, graduating students are evaluated both with the Oral Defense/Portfolio Display and the CPCE. Other assessments conducted that will be included in future comprehensive assessment plans include site supervisor feedback regarding students’ readiness for graduation, their skill levels coming into practicum and at the end of internship, employers’ views on graduates’ abilities to seamlessly start counseling in either a school or agency setting, and graduates’ evaluation of the program after completing all requirements for graduation.

The counseling curriculum represents another important indicator of quality addressed by the program assessment plan. Specifically, student knowledge and skill learning objectives, based on CACREP standards, have been mapped to each course in the curriculum. Each counseling course syllabus has been updated to include a section that clearly describes the content area addressed in the course, associated knowledge and skill objectives, methods of instruction, and student performance evaluation criteria and procedures. Student learning is evaluated within the context of the specific objectives for each class.
In addition, procedures to collect program evaluation information both from graduates, field placement Site Supervisors, and Employers began during the Fall 2014 semester. Alumni surveys were developed during the Fall 2014 semester and address seven domains of program quality, as well as graduate demographics including employment, professional roles, and functions. The survey also provides information that describes graduates’ perceptions about additional training needs. Surveys designed to assess the attitudes of field placement site supervisors regarding program quality, student (supervisee) competency and professionalism, and interactions with the program field placement coordinator were provided to site supervisors at the start of the Spring 2015 term. Employer surveys asking for feedback regarding graduates’ abilities to meet the challenges of the career world, their direct and observable skill levels, and their abilities to work seamlessly in a team environment were sent out in Spring of 2015.

The Clinical Skills Laboratory –
Renovation of the counseling clinical skills laboratory, located in Gerber Hall, was completed during the Spring 2015 term. The lab will provide sufficient space to conduct clinical supervision sessions and multiple counseling sessions simultaneously. The lab consists of four dedicated counseling rooms, each equipped with high quality audio/video equipment to record counseling or supervision sessions. The lab was outfitted with four new computers, each pass-word protected, to maintain students’ recorded counseling sessions. Currently, the clinical skills laboratory is used exclusively for pre-practicum; however, the lab may also be used both for the practicum and group counseling courses beginning Fall 2015.

The Comprehensive Oral Defense –
Several procedures for the Oral Defense have been revised. Beginning with the Spring 2014 term, the defense format was revised to more clearly address students’ level of competency regarding the eight (8) common CACREP knowledge objectives. Starting with the 2015 graduates, a recommendation that their site supervisor be the third committee member for the oral defense process was implemented. This change allows for three committee members who know the student’s clinical skills to be the ones determining their competency for graduation rather than two members who know the student’s clinical skills and one who does not know the student at all. If the site supervisor is unavailable for whatever reason, a neutral third member will be chosen from faculty at NSU.

Students will also present their portfolio during their oral defense. The portfolio is a comprehensive view of the courses the student took throughout the program, as evidenced by their course syllabi, samples of their best written work, and evidence of their involvement in
advocacy activities. Additionally, students who successfully pass the oral defense are now asked to complete the Graduate Program Evaluation as an exit assessment.

National Counseling Examination (NCE) – During the Spring 2014 semester, the program became an approved testing site for the National Counseling Examination. The exam was offered for the first time on the NSU campus in April, 2015. The NCE is voluntary for qualified graduates of the NSU counseling program or other qualified individuals who are seeking national certification or state licensure. Currently, approximately 12 NSU counseling students will be eligible to take the exam in April. The CPCE exam, currently used as the required comprehensive examination in the program, closely parallels the NCE in structure and content.

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – The CACREP application was submitted in the fall of 2016. Significant tasks accomplished during the current report cycle include: revised student handbooks with included remediation policy and mission statement; development of the cohort-based course rotation; development of a comprehensive assessment plan and quality/outcome measures; organization of program advisory board; development of accreditation standards crosswalk document; drafted self-study and submission of self-study.