The University of Montana Department of Counseling Annual M.A. and Ph.D. Program Evaluation Report

The Department of Counseling at the University of Montana is committed to program excellence. We believe systematic program evaluation—data collection, data analysis, and departmental decision-making in response to the data collected—is one (among many) factor that contributes to program excellence. This document is a summary of our 2020-2021 departmental program evaluation process, outcomes, and responses.

Summary of Program Evaluation Data Collected

Data come in many different forms. In this document, we include a summary of data from the following sources: (a) key performance indicators (KPIs), (b) faculty course evaluations, (c) student progress, activities, and achievements, (d) stakeholder surveys, (e) student surveys, and (f) qualitative data collected through advising, informal course feedback, conversations with students and faculty, faculty meetings, focus groups, and more.

KPI Data

The CACREP defines KPIs as: "Student learning outcomes that are connected to the required curriculum and that program faculty have chosen to represent student knowledge and skills related to program objectives." The department of counseling has 17 M.A. level KPIs, measured by 50 specific course assignments. There are five Ph.D. KPIs, measured by 11 different course assignments. Using grades students obtain on these assignments, we rate student performance with the following 3-point scale or rubric.

- 2 = 90-100% or a grade in the A range
- 1 = 80-89% or a grade in the B range
- 0 = 0-79% or a grade of C+ and below

Overall, KPI data are very high. Given that grades perfectly correlate with KPIs ($r = 1.0$), when instructors engage in grade inflation, KPIs can appear high, even when learning is suboptimal. As a faculty, we are aware of this flaw in KPI validity, and therefore strive to make KPIs challenging and meaningful. Nevertheless, we recognize the limits of KPI-based evaluations and use convergent assessment procedures to compensate.

After examining the data, the faculty decided to only discuss KPIs as potentially relevant indicators of teaching and learning problems if the mean score was below 1.75. Within the M.A. data set, only four of the 50 independent KPI measures had scores below 1.75. Within the Ph.D. data set, only one of the 11 independent KPI measures was below 1.75. What follows is a mini-table describing, one-by-one, each of the four lowest M.A. program KPI scores. After each mini-table is a brief summary of the faculty discussion around each low KPI outcome.

KPI 2: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY, 2.F.2.d. Students can describe the impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual's views of others

Course and Measure	Target Knowledge/Skill	When Measured	Description of Measure *syllabus contains details	Mean Rubric Rating (0-2)
COUN 520: Groups Reflection response to prompt	Students will demonstrate understanding of types of groups and other considerations that affect conducting groups in varied settings; and ethical and culturally relevant strategies for designing and facilitating groups (K,S)	Spring Semester 1st or 2nd year	Students will respond to prompt: "In reflection of 'The Color of Fear,' describe the impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual's views of others. How will this inform your work as a group counselor?"	1.71

In our discussion, all faculty agreed that integrating cultural awareness and knowledge into group design and facilitation was an advanced homework assignment requiring substantial cognitive complexity. Overall, student mean scores on the assignment were approximately the equivalent of a grade of A-. In conclusion the faculty decided that we should keep this challenging assignment as a means for making distinctions between students more and less capable of higher-level integration. No program changes related to this KPI data were recommended.

KPI 5: CAREER DEVELOPMENT, 2.F.4.e. Students can identify strategies for assessing abilities, interests, values, personality and other factors that contribute to career development				
Course and Measure	**Target Knowledge/Skill**	**When Measured**	**Description of Measure *syllabus contains details**	**Mean Rubric Rating (0-2)**
COUN 570: Career Counseling Career Counseling Sessions and Assessment Report	Students will be able to apply methods of career counseling, assessment and program planning, practice various career counseling techniques, and understand contemporary trends of career development and counseling. (K,S)	Summer Semester 1st or 2nd year	Students will engage in two 45-60 minute career counseling sessions with a peer to complete a career counseling intake interview and review career assessment results, then write a career counseling assessment report.	1.54

Similar to the preceding KPI outcome, in our discussion, faculty believed that the assignment was sound, and that we did not need to hold expectations that everyone attain a perfect score. For some students, the writing process is challenging. This subgroup of students typically struggles more and obtain lower grades on most written assignments. To address this trend among a subgroup of M.A. students, the faculty agreed that we should make greater efforts to refer students more quickly to the UM Writing and Public Speaking Center. Specifically, because the earliest writing assignments are in COUN 510 (Intro to Counseling) and COUN 511 (Counseling Theories), we decided to be more proactive in referring students with writing problems to the UM WPSC immediately when problems arise in COUN 510 and COUN 511.

KPI 10: RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION, 2.F.8.a. Students can describe the importance of research in advancing the counseling profession, including how to critique research to inform counseling practice					
Course and Measure	**Target Knowledge/Skill**	**When Measured**	**Description of Measure *syllabus contains details**	**Mean Rubric Rating (0-2)**
COUN 511: Theories and Techniques of Counseling Test scores	Students will understand the importance of research to inform evidence-based practice. (K)	Fall Semester 1st year	Test scores will reflect students' understanding of research and ability to critique research to inform counseling practice.	1.54

We evaluate this KPI using a traditional multiple-choice quiz. The faculty acknowledged that traditional testing has both limitations and utility. Limitations are associated with test anxiety and a history—that some students have—of poor performance on standardized tests. Nevertheless, our students need practice with standardized tests, if only to help prepare them for the NCE. As a consequence, the faculty decided to retain this assignment and encourage students to view these tests and quizzes as one method for preparing themselves for the NCE.

KPI 11: CMHC SPECIALTY (Foundations), 5.C.1.c. Students can identify principles, models, and documentation formats of biopsychosocial case conceptualization and treatment planning					
Course and Measure	**Target Knowledge/Skill**	**When Measured**	**Description of Measure *syllabus contains details**	**Mean Rubric Rating (0-2)**
COUN 615: Diagnosis and Treatment Planning Mental Status Exam and Diagnostic Interview	Students will demonstrate diagnostic interviewing and case conceptualization skills to assess a wide variety of mental and emotional disorders. (K,S)	Spring semester 1st year for CMHC; optional Spring semester of 2nd year for SC.	Students conduct and record a diagnostic interview with a classmate role-playing an assigned DSM-5 disorder, and prepare a written	1.44

			psychological report.	

During our discussion we noted that this was an example of some students obtaining suboptimal grades on a diagnosis and report-writing task. Similar to one of the preceding KPI outcomes, we agreed that for some students, the writing process is challenging. Additionally, we noted that a substantial number of our students are reluctant to engage in the diagnostic assessment process. To address this slightly lower than preferred KPI score, we agreed to keep our emphasis on making referrals to the UM WPSC. We also agreed that all faculty should try to model the importance of learning and implementing psycho-diagnostic assessment protocols.

The only doctoral KPI with a score below 1.75 is described in the following mini-table.

KPI 22: PhD SPECIALTY (Leadership and Advocacy), 6.B.5.k. Students can engage in strategies of leadership in relation to current multicultural and social justice issues.				
Course and Measure	**Target Knowledge/Skill**	**When Measured**	**Description of Measure** *syllabus contains details*	**Mean Rubric Rating (0-2)**
COUN 645: Comps	Students will demonstrate an understanding of multicultural and social justice issues in the context of a timely and relevant leadership subject in counselor education.	Spring of 2nd year *or* when doctoral coursework is completed.	Students will respond to one of four comprehensive exam questions detailing leadership methods relevant to multicultural and social justice issues in relevant contexts of counselor education.	1.6

The comprehensive examination process that we originally established for Ph.D. students is a month-long rigorous process. In addition to the low KPI score, we have heard directly from Ph.D. students that they do not value the comprehensive examination process, and find the process very stressful. Faculty also have noticed that the timing of the comprehensive examination has been problematic. Students have become inclined to delay their comps exam, which further complicates their dissertation timelines. Specific feedback from a focus group with doctoral students included the following:

1. That the timeline is not working for comprehensive exams, wishing to extend from the format of answering one question a week.
2. That Comprehensive exams could become more practical; reducing from four manuscript like responses to more elongated projects (grant proposal; presentations)

The faculty decided that the Ph.D. comprehensive examination process was a significant problem that needed to be addressed. As a consequence, **during our Fall 2021 retreat, we re-designed the Ph.D. comprehensive examination process**. An excerpt from the 2021-2022 Doctoral Handbook describing the new comprehensive examination process is included below:

Students will build a portfolio of evidence demonstrating proficiency across the following areas of foci in their doctoral studies: counseling, teaching and supervision, research and scholarship, and an area of scholarly interest.

Demonstrating proficiency in these areas must include evidence of: manuscript submission as the lead author; a professional presentation as the lead presenter; a standard question response; a demonstration.

The design of the comps portfolio is done in consultation with one's Comprehensive Exam Chair, with each committee member leading the design for one area in collaboration with the student.

Course Evaluations

All faculty collect course evaluation data for all courses they teach. Although many faculty collect formative data during the semester, the data used for our program evaluation purposes are the summative data collected at the end of the semester. In recent years the department has shifted from paper/pencil summative course evaluations to using electronic surveys (i.e., Qualtrics) to collect and analyze data.

During 2020-2021, most faculty course evaluations were very high. Course evaluations are on a five-point Likert scale with labels ranging from: Excellent, Good, Adequate, Poor, Very Poor. Several faculty never obtained ratings below "Good." In such cases there was no constructive feedback available. However, several courses/instructors obtained a few ratings in the "Adequate" category and very occasionally there was a "Poor" rating. In these cases the faculty established a threshold for discussing course content and delivery only if at least two or more students rated an item as Adequate or Poor. Two courses were identified as meriting faculty discussion. These included COUN 545: Research and Program Evaluation and COUN 520: Group Counseling.

Faculty consensus was that COUN 545 always has had lower ratings than other courses. A review of the data showed that the ratings from 2020-2021 were not especially low, and certainly not significantly lower than typical semesters. However, because teaching research skills to M.A. students is notoriously challenging, the faculty decided that no single faculty should be burdened with always teaching research. Consequently, based on these data along with the stakeholder surveys (reviewed later in this document) **we decided to rotate the research course among different faculty**.

During 2020, COUN 520 (Group) suffered from the Covid pandemic disruption. As a consequence, low ratings in that course (one that requires significant experiential learning), were mostly viewed as an anomaly. However, through faculty discussion, it was decided that our M.A. students would benefit from a higher rate of involvement in actually running groups. The faculty brainstormed on this issue and based on these data along with the stakeholder surveys (reviewed later in this document) **decided to integrate the COUN 520 course with the 2021 undergraduate course on the Art and Science of Happiness**.

Overall, students gave high ratings on course evaluation item #4. Item #4 is a particularly important check on whether faculty are, in fact, teaching the content as outlined in

their course syllabi. The item reads, "There was agreement between announced course objectives and what was taught." In combination with other data, we use item #4 as a check on and affirmation of whether we're teaching not only our course objectives, but also on whether we're addressing our program objectives (because these objectives are logically connected to individual course objectives).

Student Professional Progress and Student Evaluation data

As an additional data source, we also discussed data we obtained from student progress in the programs, as well as data obtained from our annual student evaluation process. We collected data from all faculty and student profiles to examine, for both M.A. and doctoral students: (a) student completion (and discontinuation) rates, (b) demographic data from admissions; (c) aggregated data from student self-evaluations; and (d) commentary and feedback provided by faculty within the confidential UMBox repository.

Student completion rates have been historically high and continue to be high. Specifically, in 2019-2020 we had the following retention outcomes (based on the transition from Spring 2019 to Fall 2019:

Student Status	M.A. in CMHC	M.A. in SC	Ph.D. in Counseling
Continuation to Graduation or the Following Semester	38	23	8
Dropped Out	1	1	0
Counseled Out	1	0	0
Discontinuation Rate	5.2%	4.3%	0%

For the current review period, in 2020-2021 we had a 100% retention rate—despite the fact that our students and department have been coping with the global pandemic! (See below.)

Student Status	M.A. in CMHC	M.A. in SC	Ph.D. in Counseling
Continuation to Graduation or the Following Semester	36	23	10
Dropped Out	0	0	0
Counseled Out	0	0	0
Discontinuation Rate	0%	0%	0%

With such a small discontinuation rate, it was difficult to disaggregate data based on demographic information. The two students who discontinued the CMHC program were both cisgender white males. The one student who discontinued the SC program was a cisgender white female.

Further, in a focus group the doctoral students referenced positive aspects of the department's climate, and these climate factors were hypothesized as likely playing a role in retention and completion rates. These climate factors included:

- o Non-hierarchical, supportive, collaborative faculty; openness to questions and concerns
- o Overwhelming sense that it's okay to be human- you don't have to be perfect
- o Faculty are supportive and responsive; if we are not completely prepared, we are supported along the way and not alone
- o Relationships among people in the department are primary, and the culture is responsive to student needs

Stakeholder Surveys

During the reporting period, we conducted an electronic survey of former students/alumni and supervisors. The focus of the survey was on advising, faculty feedback, and our coverage of the CACREP core standards, as well as our departmental program objectives. The data are summarized below:

Advising and Faculty Feedback on Student Performance: Current students (12/15) rated their advising experiences as positive. Current students (11/15) also rated faculty feedback as positive (11/15). All alumni rated faculty feedback as positive (13/13). The biggest concern in this area is that 10 of 15 current students didn't *strongly agree* with their advising experiences being positive. Although advising is adequate across the board, there seems room for improvement here.

i. Lifespan Prep: Feedback on how well we are prepping students in the Lifespan domain was very positive Approximately 91% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

ii. Theoretical Prep: Approximately 89% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

iii. Reflection/Self-Awareness Prep: 100% of all respondents rated this domain as positive!

iv. Training Accountability: Approximately 91% of all respondents rated this domain as positive, but there were 2 "Somewhat disagree" responses.

v. Open and Curious about Diverse Beliefs: Approximately 95% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

vi. Ethical and Legal Alignment: Approximately 98% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

vii. Understanding Heritage and Culture: Approximately 91% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

viii. Effects of Power and Privilege: Approximately 98% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

ix. Foundational Clinical Skills: Approximately 98% of all respondents rated this domain as positive. The majority were "Extremely satisfied" with the training in this area.

x. Effectively Lead a Group: Approximately 77% of all respondents rated this domain as positive. Four respondents rated themselves as "Dissatisfied" with their training in this domain, and yet supervisors provided 96% positive ratings.

xi. Research and Evidence-based Practice: Approximately 86% of all respondents rated this domain as positive.

The faculty reviewed this survey data and discussed the implications. In particular, we focused on the two lowest rated areas, Group Counseling and Research and Evidence-Based Practice. Not surprisingly, as you read earlier in this report, the Group Counseling and Research class were also identified as potential problem areas based on the faculty evaluation data.

The other potential area of concern arising from the data was advising. Although advising was rated as adequate or above by nearly all students, the ratings were lower than most other ratings in the survey. Based on these data, in our faculty discussion, **we decided to monitor and review our advising processes during this coming fall and spring semesters**. In particular, we believe our transition to using Tevera for data management and collection may have a positive effect on advising process.

Student Surveys

For 2020-2021, we surveyed the Ph.D. students using two methods: (a) an email survey on their perceptions/ratings of the doctoral program objectives, and (b) a focus group designed to obtain qualitative feedback about the program.

Email Survey

In the email survey, former and current Ph.D. students were asked to rate how well we covered (or were currently covering) the doctoral program objectives. Each program objective was rated using a 5-point Likert scale where: 1 = Very poor; 2 = Poor; 3 = Adequate; 4 = Good; and 5 = Excellent. Results from the rating task are in the Table below.

Program Objective	Mean Rating	Rank
1. Prepared to implement instructional theory and assess learning in a University environment.	4.5	4
2. Prepared to supervise counselors and counseling students who are providing individual, group, and/or marital, couple and family counseling.	4.8	3
3. Prepared to serve the profession and public as advocates and active participants in organizations such as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) and the American Counseling Association (ACA).	4.3	Low
4. Knowledgeable of professional issues in the counselor education and counseling fields.	4.3	Low
5. Knowledgeable of ethical issues and practices of counselor education and counseling.	4.5	4
6. Knowledgeable and skilled in providing advanced clinical counseling.	4.3	Low
7. Knowledgeable of cultural contexts and identities, and how they inform experiences of power, privilege, and oppression when teaching, supervising, counseling, and conducting research.	4.5	4
8. Experienced in developing and conducting research.	4.3	Low

9.	Experienced in scholarly work including professional presentation, writing for professional publication, and/or grantsmanship.	4.3	Low
10.	Experienced teaching in a minimum of two CACREP common core or specialty courses.	5.0	1
11.	Reflect professional dispositions of engagement, integrity, enthusiasm, curiosity, and openness.	5.0	1

The second part of the email survey employed a "credulous assessment" (Kelly, 1955) approach where we simply ask the students what they think. After each program objective, the question was posed: "What do you think of this program goal?" Our hope was to gather the students' first thoughts or reactions to the program objective statements. A sampling of student responses is in the Table that follows.

Program Objective	Sample Student Responses
1. Prepared to implement instructional theory and assess learning in a University environment.	This program prepares doc students well by giving us so many opportunities for hands on learning (TAships, fundamentals, etc.) We were always given the opportunity to consult with professors and classmates, which was helpful. The pedagogy class allowed for consultation and brought theory to the forefront. As doctoral students I feel it is important that we are given opportunities to assess and evaluate learning. Our department does a good job of this in the classroom.
2. Prepared to supervise counselors and counseling students who are providing individual, group, and/or marital, couple and family counseling.	This is one of my favorite aspects of this program. I feel well prepared to supervise and have been given lots of resources to continue to learn and grow in this aspect. This goal is important for developing a strong sense of supervision styles the department offers many opportunities for this to occur to help is develop into strong supervisors. There was plenty of opportunity to supervise in all of these areas with the minor exception being couples/families.

3.	Prepared to serve the profession and public as advocates and active participants in organizations such as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) and the American Counseling Association (ACA).	This goal is about building networks in our field. It is emphasized and encouraged from the first days of the program I was glad to go to conferences and spent time as the RMACES rep, which I only knew about because professors encouraged us to participate. It would be extremely helpful to learn how to be an active participant of these organizations since it's a requirement for the Doc students to attend the ACES conference presenting at ACES/ACA is a part of the COMPS exam now.
4.	Knowledgeable of professional issues in the counselor education and counseling fields.	I think this one is very student led. Having a good understanding of ethical issues in our field is necessary. The department works hard to provide opportunities to challenge our thinking and increase our knowledge in this area.
5.	Knowledgeable of ethical issues and practices of counselor education and counseling.	We are exposed to a lot, and still have room to grow.
6.	Knowledgeable and skilled in providing advanced clinical counseling.	There are plenty of opportunities here too.
7.	Knowledgeable of cultural contexts and identities, and how they inform experiences of power, privilege, and oppression when teaching, supervising, counseling, and conducting research.	I think the department provided me an opportunity to process where I situate myself and how I present to the world. The department created a space for me to ask questions and to consult as I navigate my own transition from a different culture where I had a lot of privilege to my current cultural awareness – I am sure there is more to do!
8.	Experienced in developing and conducting research.	YES! I have the basics and general idea, so I am excited to work on this goal.
9.	Experienced in scholarly work including professional presentation, writing for professional publication, and/or grantsmanship.	I enjoy the "team" approach to these projects.
10.	Experienced teaching in a minimum of two CACREP common core or specialty courses.	Yep, plenty.

	This goal is important for our learning and I feel lucky to be a part of the program because faculty are willing to offer these opportunities
	The opportunities to teach were abundant, and the learning through experience as a result was invaluable.
11. Reflect professional dispositions of engagement, integrity, enthusiasm, curiosity, and openness.	I'm grateful for the amazing faculty here.

Qualitative data from the doctoral student focus group that was held one year prior to the survey data both confirm and add to the larger program evaluation picture, as well as specific data obtained from our program objectives survey. Overall, the data obtained were mostly very positive. Similar to the survey data, doctoral students in the focus group confirmed the many opportunities to function in teaching and supervising roles, and they report being well supported in these roles. Although the focus group did not include any comments on "cultural contexts and identities, and how they inform experiences of power, privilege, and oppression when teaching, supervising, counseling, and conducting research," in the survey, a culturally diverse student spoke to this issue. However, because this is a goal central to our training program, future assessments need to seek specific qualitative feedback in the area. Last, students expanded on research and scholarly opportunities in the department. They affirmed that there is a range of opportunities for professional presentations, and less opportunities for writing manuscripts and conducting research before dissertation stages of their degree. They also requested that more of their research classes be taught in the Counseling Department by faculty who are more equipped to integrate aspects of Counseling professional identity and Counseling related research. **As a result of this feedback, obtained previously, and in the 2020-2021 evaluation, the Department created a two-part qualitative research course sequence within the Department (COUN 674 and 675) that integrates applied research and opportunities for manuscript development and submission.**

Qualitative Data from Advising, Faculty Meetings, Etc.

As a part of our program evaluation, we are also tracking student response to recent program changes. In response to issues raised in previous program evaluations, in 2019-2020, we began (a) offering a Risk and Resilience course to M.A. students; and (b) offering our own 2-semester qualitative research course to our doctoral students. Thus far, in the absence of quantitative data, our impression is that these additional courses have been appreciated.

Additionally, because the global pandemic disrupted courses, practica, internship, and supervision in spring, 2020, we increased our email and virtual communication with students. Specifically, we asked them what we could do to support them during this difficult time. Overall, students generally responded by saying they wanted more contact, while simultaneously reporting feeling burnt-out on Zoom and virtual formats. In response, we offered more virtual activities with a positive or recreational focus (i.e., faculty-student trivia

nights; a three-hour virtual happiness workshop). These activities were well-received and, perhaps related, we had our largest turnout ever this fall for our departmental pot-luck.

Program Modifications

All program modifications associated with this program evaluation were **bolded** in the preceding sections. In addition, we've listed them below as a quick summary for readers.

1. During our Fall 2021 retreat, we re-designed the Ph.D. comprehensive examination process; the process shifted to a portfolio approach. After discussing this new approach with current doctoral students, we are hopeful that it will retain the academic rigor, while reducing the stress of compacting a month-long comprehensive examination project into an already busy semester.
2. We decided to rotate the research course among different faculty. This isn't a particularly new practice, and the faculty is open to the possibility that an individual faculty member might be identified who has great passion for research and who can pass on that passion to our M.A. students. For now, we decided that rotating who teaches research is the best alternative for students and faculty.
3. To address issues raised in faculty evaluations and feedback from current students, we decided to integrate the COUN 520 course with the 2021 undergraduate course on the Art and Science of Happiness. This integration will potentially provide students with more hands-on and meaningful group skills practice. In most cases, our students tend to prefer practical assignments and so we hope this will increase student satisfaction in COUN 520: Group Counseling.
4. Although advising was rated as adequate or above by nearly all students, the ratings were lower than most other ratings in the survey. Based on these data, in our faculty discussion, we decided to monitor and review our advising processes during this coming fall and spring semesters.
5. As a result of this feedback, obtained previously, and in the 2020-2021 evaluation, the Department created a two-part qualitative research course sequence within the Department (COUN 674 and 675) that integrates applied research and opportunities for manuscript development and submission.

Other Substantive Program Changes

2020-2021 has been an eventful year in the Department of Counseling. Spurred by the Covid pandemic, our department quickly (and temporarily) transitioned to primarily online teaching and online tele-mental health counseling. This transition was stressful for students and faculty, but we survived the process with zero faculty, staff, and student attrition. Further, in March 2021 we had the largest number of applicants for our programs than ever before in history.

Our department has had the good fortune of wonderful students, excellent faculty (even if we do say so ourselves), and fabulous staff. This good fortune has paid off because we have good news for our counseling programs. The good news includes:
1. Hiring a full-time visiting assistant professor (in Fall, 2021)
2. Hiring of a new full-time tenure track faculty (searching in 2021-2022 and hiring for 2022-2023)

3. Continuation of the Rural Mental Health and BHWET grants to support students on internships
4. We are also requesting additional graduate assistantships for doctoral students from the Graduate School.

Closing/Thanks

If you're reading this document, likely you're a stakeholder from our past, present, or future. For us, that means we couldn't have done what we did or continue to do what we do, without your support. Thank you for time in contributing to the mental health and well-being of everyone in Montana . . . and beyond!