

Surveying Graduates of a CACREP-Accredited Counselor Education Program: Instrumentation and Results

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A growing body of literature underscores the importance of program evaluation for counselor education programs (Engels & Wilborn, 1984; Osborne & House, 1995; Sayers, Carroll & Loesch, 1996, CACREP Standards, 2001). Reasons for this changing climate include reduced resources (Osborne & House, 1995), increased accreditation requirements (CACREP, 2001), increasing demand for program accountability, improved decision-making and increased student/employer satisfaction (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995), and the need for

quality data for program improvement (Osborne & House, 1995).

There are no standardized measures in the professional literature designed to evaluate graduate counselor education programs and fulfill CACREP's standards (Engels & Wilborn, 1984; Osborne & House, 1995; Sayers et al., 1996).

CACREP's 2001 Standards require formal follow-up studies of graduates, clinical site supervisors and program graduate employers at least once every three years "to assess their perceptions and evaluations of major aspects of the program" (Section VI.C.3, 4, 5).

Only three comprehensive graduate and/or employer surveys exist in the professional literature (Engels & Wilborn, 1984; Osborne & House, 1995; Sayers et al., 1996). The first published survey was developed to assess the eight objectives of a particular counselor education program (at the University of North Texas) (Engels & Wilborn, 1984). A *Survey of Graduating Students* was administered at the end of a students' last semester prior to graduation. A *Graduate Follow-Up Survey* was used to collect data from graduates at 1-, 3-, and 5-year intervals following graduation. The survey included 91 items in 36 questions, including eight demographic questions (Engels & Wilborn, 1984).

The second survey in the literature was prepared by authors at Oregon State University (Osborne & House, 1995). The items in their survey derive generally from the major elements of accreditation standards (Sayers et al., 1996) as well

as the objectives of their individual program (Osborne & House, 1995). The *Graduate Survey* included 93 items in 82 questions including ten demographic questions. The *Employer Evaluation* had 14 items. The authors mailed these surveys two years *after* graduation, suggesting this delay allowed both graduates and employers a base of experience to assess the value of their educational program. The survey was administered to graduates twice before publication, resulting in graduate response return rates of 57% and 70%. The employer survey return rates were 29% from community agency employers and 38% from school employers (ibid, p. 261).

The third survey in the literature was developed utilizing an ACES grant by authors at the University of Florida at Gainesville using a “consensus approach,” collecting question items from approximately 50 graduate surveys from universities with CACREP-accredited programs (Sayers et al., 1996). The resulting 130 question items were submitted to 342 counselor educators who were asked to rate the items from 0 (not important to include) to 9 (very important to include) “to indicate the extent to which they believed it important to include each item listed in follow-up surveys for program graduates or for their employers” (Sayers et al., 1996, p. 181). Means and standard deviations of importance ratings were calculated to identify the most highly rated items in this consensus of counselor educators. The result was a Graduate Survey of 66 items and an Employer Survey of 46 items which was utilized with a greater than 75%

return rate for both surveys.

In the Spring of 2002, the authors at Oakland University collaborated to refine their graduate and supervisor/employer surveys by researching the literature and comparing graduate and supervisor/employer surveys utilized among CACREP-accredited universities. After discussion it was decided to develop and utilize a survey patterned after the Sayers' et al (1996) "consensus" model. After review and input by the entire full-time counseling faculty, an instrument with 85 total questions was designed for graduates, and an instrument with 47 questions was designed for supervisors and employers. The *Graduate Survey* is included in the Appendix.

The *Graduate Survey* was sent in March, 2004 to the 520 graduates of OU's Masters in Counseling program since December, 1995. A cover letter from the department chair invited the graduates to give an enclosed *Employer Survey* and a postage-paid return envelope to their employers. The *Supervisor Survey* was mailed to 156 supervisors active since Spring, 2002. Respondents were assured in the cover letter that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and that only aggregate (i.e. grouped) data would be reported.

A total of 103 graduates (20%), 27 employers (5%) and 17 supervisors (11%) responded as of August, 2004. The authors provided no means of identifying how many graduates gave their surveys to their employers as requested. Results

were distributed to counseling program faculty, university administrators, graduates who requested copies, and the counseling library for review by students currently enrolled in the program and for review by prospective students. Benefits included curriculum changes and positive feedback from students about specific aspects of the program which improved faculty morale.

Highlights of the Graduate Survey include:

∅ *Demographics of those who responded:* mean age 39 years, SD = 10 years, range 25-63 years, 92% female, 97% white

∅ *How they identified themselves:* 45% community agency or private practice counselor, 32% school counselor, 23% other (including social workers, career counselors, youth assistance caseworkers, “stay-at-home” mothers, etc.)

∅ *Months between graduation and start of job:*

28% of graduates who responded (19 of 69) had counseling jobs immediately upon graduation

90% of grads who responded (62 of 69) had counseling jobs within 3-1/2 months of graduation

∅ *Starting salary by identity for those working full-time* (Univariate ANOVA F=3.198, df=12, p=.002)

\$30,188 Community Agency Counselors (n=16)

\$44,221 School Counselors (n=28)

\$36,500 Private Practice Therapists (n=2)

∅ *Current salary by identity for those working full-time* (Univariate ANOVA

F=8.217, df=11, p<.001)

\$36,343 Community Agency Counselors (n=16)

\$58,733 School Counselors (n=26)

\$51,667 Private Practice Therapists (n=3)

∅ *Current licenses/certifications held:*

NCC 63 of 93 responding (68%)

LLPC 43 (46%)

LPC 37 (40%)

∅ *Graduates' Program Components* (highest and lowest mean scores)

Highest:

Evaluation of program duration (ie, 48-hour program) 4.23

General evaluation of academic knowledge received, 4.21

Evaluation of supervised field experiences (ie, Internship), 4.2

Evaluation of faculty competence, 4.2

Lowest:

General evaluation of academic advisement 3.54

Evaluation of faculty as mentors to you 3.55

Evaluation of faculty accessibility/availability, 3.97

∅ *Graduates' Knowledge Attainment in Specific Curricular Areas and Graduates' Skills Attainment While in the Program* were also provided, and are available from the authors.

∅ *Major strengths of the program*

The *most frequently mentioned positive* comment by both groups described the **helpfulness of the faculty and staff**.

∅ *How could the program be improved?*

The *single most consistent suggestion for improvement* came from those who identified themselves as school counselors, and described their need for **a more school-related, “real world,” curriculum** and application, including

Highlights of the Employer Survey and Supervisor Survey were also included in published reports.

In summary, the surveys indicated:

Graduates value highly the academic knowledge they received during their graduate program

Graduates who responded were employed within a few months of graduation

Employers rated graduates as dependable, conscientious, ethical, and professional (at the 97 to 99.6% level)(4.87 to 4.98 out of 5)

School counselors' starting salaries average 46% higher than community agency counselors' starting salaries

School counselors' current salaries average 62% higher (> \$20,000 higher) than community agency counselors' current salaries

86% report being licensed as LLPC or LPC

Graduates, employers and supervisors agreed on

the need for more focus on
marriage/family/couple knowledge
and skills

the need for more focus on clinical
diagnosis skills

Appendix A

Graduate Survey Oakland University, Department of Counseling

Please provide the following information as appropriate:

Graduates' Demographic Information

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____

The month and year you received your Masters in Counseling degree:

_____/_____ Mo/Year

Please indicate your major emphasis of study:

____ community agency

school

What elective(s) did you take?

Significant Loss

Community Agency Cns

Intro to Couple & Family

Diagnosis & Treatment

Experiential Cns

Art Therapy

Intro to Chem Dep/Addictions

Other

What specialization(s) did you complete?

Advanced Career Counseling

Mental Health Counseling

Child & Adolescent Cns

Couple & Family Counseling

Post-MA School Cns

Post-MA Teacher's Cert for

Cnslrs

Other _____

In regard to your world of work:

How do you identify yourself?

Community Agency Counselor

School Counselor

Private Practice Therapist

Other

Current position title:

Current employment setting (agency, school, institution name):

Current agency/institution City/State location:

Current primary counseling clientele:

Current primary position functions/roles/job duties:

Hours worked currently: fulltime $\frac{3}{4}$ time $\frac{1}{2}$ time $\frac{1}{4}$ time

Post-graduation starting date and salary: Date _____
\$_____ /yr

Current income from counseling activities: Salary
\$_____ /yr

Other counseling activities (private
practice, etc)
\$_____ /yr

Current licensures and/or certifications held:

Additional professional counseling activities other than your primary employment setting (e.g., private practice); please briefly describe your activities in this capacity:

Graduates' Program Components

Please use a scale of **1 = low/poor** to **5 = high/very good** to indicate your personal evaluation of each of the following aspects of the program(s) from which you graduated:

- General evaluation of program curriculum
- General evaluation of academic knowledge received
- Self-evaluation of in-program skills development (e.g., Techniques)
- Evaluation of supervised field experiences (e.g., Internship)
- Evaluation of on-campus field experience (e.g., Practicum)
- General evaluation of instructional effectiveness
- Evaluation of faculty competence
- Evaluation of faculty accessibility/availability
- General evaluation of academic advisement
- Evaluation of facilities and resources

- Evaluation of supervisors' competence/effectiveness
- Evaluation of faculty as mentors to you
- Evaluation of in-program student evaluation procedures (i.e., did you feel the procedures used to evaluate you were valid and effective?)
- Evaluation of program duration (i.e., 48-hour academic length of the program)

Graduates' Knowledge Attainment in Specific Curricular Areas

Please use a scale of **1 = low/poor** to **5 = high/very good** to indicate your personal evaluation of each of the following **knowledge areas** in your program(s). **Use NA** if the area is **Not Applicable**.

- Ethical and legal issues in your profession
- Small group dynamics and counseling
- Theories of counseling
- Career and lifestyle counseling
- Multicultural counseling
- Human growth and development
- General evaluation of practicum experiences
- General evaluation of internship experiences
- Large group dynamics and counseling

- School counseling
- Standardized (i.e., group) testing
- Crisis intervention/counseling
- Consultation
- Psychological clinical diagnosis
- Professional credentialing
- Theories of personality
- Family counseling
- Case management/planning
- Professional organizations
- Research and statistics
- Advocacy
- General evaluation of practicum supervisor(s)
- General evaluation of internship site supervisor(s)
- General evaluation of practicum site
- General evaluation of internship site

Graduates' Skills Attainment While in the Program

Please use a scale of **1 = low/poor** to **5 = high/very good** to indicate your personal evaluation of each of the following **skill areas** in your program(s). **Use NA** if the area is **Not Applicable**.

- Individual counseling skills
- Small group counseling skills
- Multicultural counseling skills
- Large group counseling/guidance skills
- Career and lifestyle counseling skills
- Crisis intervention/counseling skills
- Child and adolescent counseling skills
- Family counseling skills
- Consultation skills
- Case planning/management skills
- Psychological clinical diagnosis skills
- Assessment skills
- Couples/marriage counseling skills

What were the major strengths of the preparation program(s) from which you graduated?

In what ways could the preparation program(s) from which you graduated have been improved? What would you like to have added? Deleted? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

Please return this survey by [DATE] to: Oakland University, Department of Counseling, 491B Pawley Hall, Rochester, MI 48309

References

CACREP. (2001). *The 2001 Standards*, [internet]. Available:

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Hadley, R. G., & Mitchell, L. K. (1995). *Counseling research and program evaluation*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

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