

*The mission of the counseling program is to prepare interpersonally skilled and culturally competent professional counselors who facilitate the psychological growth and development of those they serve. These counselors also help those who experience difficulties in overcoming or resolving interpersonal, vocational, and emotional adjustment problems associated with modern living.*

# Annual Program Evaluation: Counseling Programs 2018-19



The Annual Program Evaluation is a way for the counseling program faculty to measure both student and overall program effectiveness. The key assessments that follow attempt to provide evidence that inform counseling faculty regarding progress and assist us in considering ways we might continue to develop and enhance the counseling program.

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**Montana State University  
Department of Health & Human Development**

- **School Counseling**
- **Marriage, Couples & Family Counseling**
- **Mental Health Counseling**

# MSU Counseling Program Objectives

## Objective #1: Core education in counseling (Portfolio Assignments HDCO 558, 521, 522, 510, 523, 550, 551, 563)

A major objective of the counseling program is to provide students with training which meets the American Counseling Association's Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) counselor education accreditation criteria in the following core areas:

- Human and family growth and development
- Social and cultural foundations
- Helping relationships
- Groups
- Lifestyle and career development
- Appraisal
- Research and evaluation
- Professional orientation

## Objective #2: Counselor's personal/professional development (Benchmarks 2 and 3)

A second objective of the program is to promote counselors' personal, interpersonal, and professional development. The counseling program is committed to encouraging persons from diverse cultural backgrounds to become counselors. Because counseling requires high levels of professional maturity and interpersonal skills, the curriculum offers a number of experiential learning courses which are designed to foster students' personal development, relationship skills, and professional orientation. The course content includes self-exploration and skill acquisition regarding personal values, cultural heritage, professional issues, personal and professional relationships, and group dynamics. These experiences include opportunities for development of cohesive relations between students through self-disclosure, empathic listening, feedback, and role play

## Objective #3: Foundations of counseling (Portfolio Assignment HDCO 502, 503, 505, 525, 530, 568)

A third objective of the program is to help students acquire knowledge in the foundations of counseling, including its history, philosophy, unique professional identity, professional organizations, training standards, credentialing mechanisms, ethical codes, and research and professional issues. Students will be encouraged to join appropriate professional organizations.

## Objective #4: Counseling in Montana's mental health and education systems (Benchmark #3; HDCO 505, 506)

A fourth objective of the option is to help students understand and prepare to fulfill mental health counseling roles in Montana's mental health care and education systems. The program is designed to meet licensure requirements in Montana for professional counselors and school counselors

## Objective #5: Counseling Skill Development (Benchmark #1)

The fifth objective of the program is that students acquire the comprehensive knowledge and skills needed for provision of counseling services across a variety of settings from schools to community mental health agencies. Studies in this areas include: 1) understanding the general principles which explain mental health; 2) becoming competent in appraisal methods including mental status exams, mental health history taking, testing, DSM-V diagnosis, and environmental assessment; learning models and techniques for promoting mental health; and treating disorders including mental health education, prevention, consultation, crisis intervention, psychotropic medication, and disorder specific individual, family, and group counseling.

## Objective #6 Theoretical knowledge and applications (Portfolio Assignment HDCO 508, 571, 598, 554, 565, 569)

Competent counseling practice is informed and guided by theory. The program emphasizes thorough knowledge of clients' developmental, cultural, and social contexts. Theory-based approaches to appraisal and individual, family and group counseling are covered in-depth. During counseling practica (100 hours), students are closely supervised by licensed mental health professionals about clients and counseling theories. Supervised practice continues and is expanded during internship (600 hours).

To meet these objectives the MSU Counseling Program has developed an assessment plan that includes a series of benchmarks, as well as portfolio assignments.

# Introduction- Overview of MSU Counseling Program Assessment Plan

The following is an overview of the assessment plan and process of the MSU Counseling Program. This assessment plan is put in place to assist with measuring and tracking program outcomes, and assist faculty in identifying key assessments in order to measure whether students in the program are meeting/exceeding expectations.

The assessment plan for Montana State University-Bozeman starts with the interview and proceeds through a series of benchmarks and portfolio assignments designed to meet specific learning outcomes in each specialty area. The final overall assessment of student learning culminates with the final benchmark- the comprehensive exam. The assessment process comprehensively addresses both **knowledge** and **skills/practices** outcomes for Mental Health, Marriage, Couples & Family, and School Counseling programs. Knowledge Areas in the 2009 Standards are demonstrated using portfolio assignments and Skills/Practices are demonstrated in benchmark or professional dispositions. Students' progress through a series of four dispositions in which Skills/Practice are evaluated, as well as Knowledge Areas reviewed.

**Skills/Practices:** is measured in a series of four benchmarks for MFC, MH and SC students. These benchmarks are outlined below:

## ➤ **Benchmark 1- Counseling Skills (December –mid- 1<sup>st</sup> year)**

Benchmark one is determined during HDCO 521: counseling skills in which students submit a final tape. This benchmark uses that tape, as well as the overall course grade and feedback to determine the benchmark disposition of the student. Any disposition of a "3", on a 5 point likert scale, which represents the equivalent of a B- grade, will most likely result in a remediation plan to address areas of concern. While this is a passing grade, it suggests concern for counseling skill. However, it should be noted that at this point in a student's training it can be difficult to determine if he or she lacks the skill or, perhaps, needs additional time to develop it, thus more leeway may be given regarding this benchmark, versus benchmarks at other points in the program. A remediation plan will be constructed in consultation with the student's committee. A disposition of 4, the equivalent of a C+ or lower grade, will result in a student retaking the skills course. Passing this course demonstrates the potential of the student to meet future benchmarks and skills/practices in each specialty area. Please see Appendix A for an example of a remediation plan for a disposition of a 3 or 4.

## ➤ **Benchmark 2- Practicum (May – end of 1<sup>st</sup> year)**

Benchmark two is determined during practicum in the spring semester. This benchmark is measured using the practicum supervisor's evaluation completed at the end of the semester. It is expected that feedback given throughout the semester has been integrated into the student's work with clients. Any benchmark disposition of 4 will most likely result in a remediation plan. A disposition of a 5 will result in a student re-taking practicum and, possibly skills if it is determined that there is a serious skill deficit or that deficits evident in Benchmark 1 have not been remediated. If students pass benchmark 2, they will be allowed to proceed to internship. In addition to the review of students' skills, students' portfolios are reviewed and tracking sheets collected at this meeting.

➤ **Benchmark 3- Internship (Qualitative Evaluation mid-fall semester & Benchmark meeting in December -2<sup>nd</sup> year)**

Benchmark three is determined by the evaluation of the student by the internship site supervisor in combination with the observation of skills by the internship course instructor (usually the faculty program leader) as well as student performance in internship class, HDCO 598. Students will be given a disposition indicating what areas of improvement are needed, as well as areas that the student is doing well. In addition to the skill review, portfolios are reviewed and tracking sheets collected.

Also, students are required during their internship course (HDCO 598) to complete a qualitative evaluation mid-semester of the feedback they have received throughout their program of study. This form is utilized to help students stay accountable for the feedback they have received throughout the program, as well as help them see areas that they have made improvements in.

➤ **Benchmark 4- Comprehensive Exam (March of 2<sup>nd</sup> year)**

Benchmark four is the comprehensive exam. Students must successfully pass this exam, which is a written paper demonstrating skill in theory based case conceptualization and treatment planning, in order to proceed to graduation. The exam is blindly graded by two faculty readers. If a student receives one pass and one fail then a third faculty member is asked to read the exam. If the third reader grades the exam as a pass, the student passes comprehensive exam. If the student receives two fails the student must re-take the exam after a 3 month period, which may be during the summer semester but is determined at the committee's discretion. If the student fails the exam a second time, he or she will not be allowed to graduate from the counseling program. Graduation hinges on successful completion of the comprehensive exam.

➤ **Checkout- (April of Final Year)**

Students will complete a final checkout with their program leaders during the last week of internship class during their final year. During this checkout students' portfolios will be given one final review. All tracking sheets will be collected and students will be given their final evaluations from their site supervisors.

**Knowledge for both core and specialty area outcomes are measured by portfolio assignments. Each course in the program has at least one assignment designated as a portfolio assignment. The matrices for each program documents the standards, which courses those standards are being met in, and how the standards are being measured (portfolio assignments).**

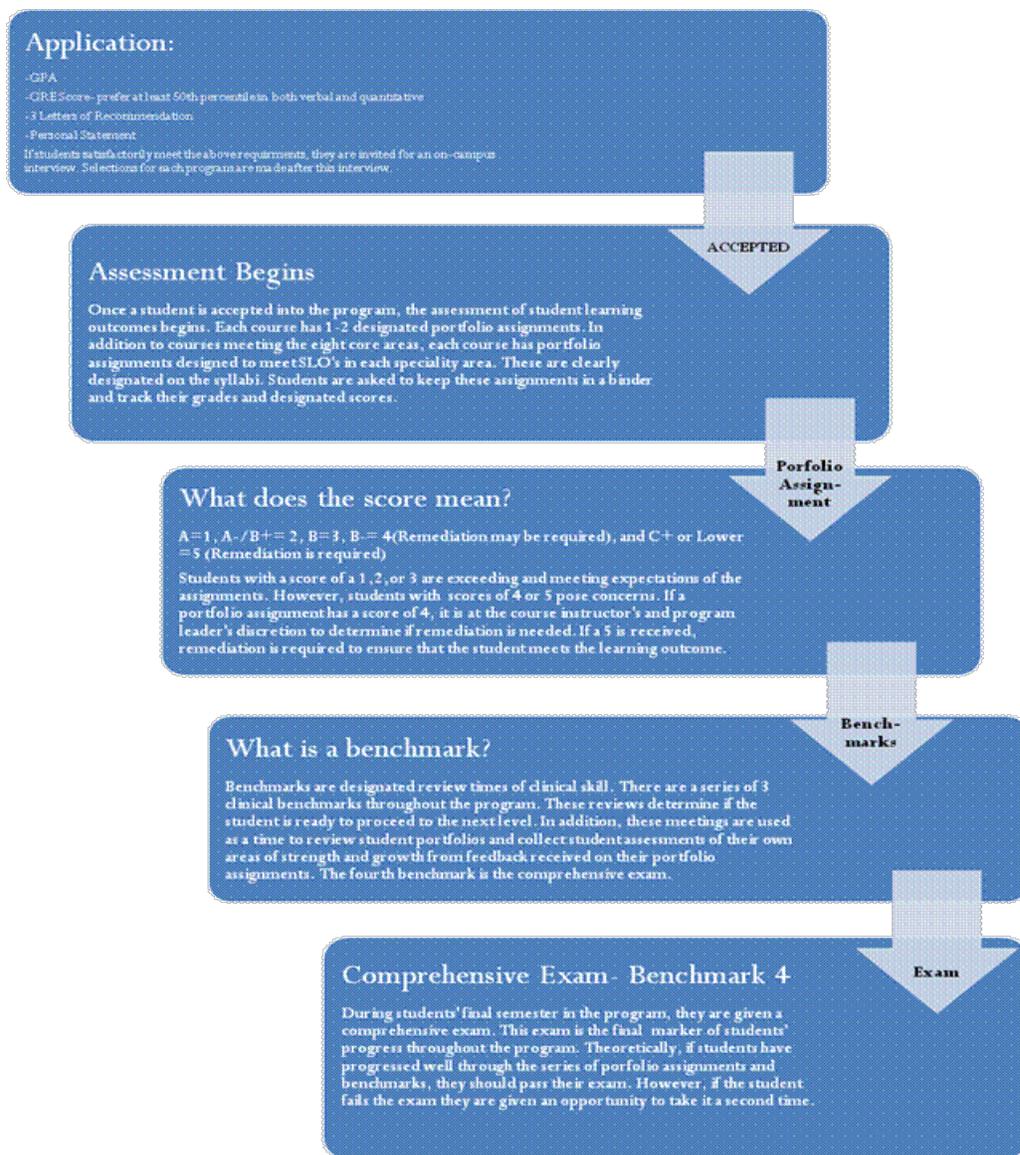
Knowledge areas in each program specialty are measured through carefully selected portfolio assignments that specifically meet those standards. Other course assignments may meet those standards; however, the portfolio assignment is an agreed upon assignment by all core faculty. Each portfolio assignment is clearly marked on all syllabi.

Students will collect portfolio assignments in a binder and keep track of the grade and corresponding assessment value in a tracking sheet located in the front of the binder. An example of this tracking sheet is in Appendix D. If a student receives a score of 5 indicative of "does not meet standard", the student will need to complete remediation. This may include repeating the assignment until he/she receives a score

indicative of “meets standard.” If a student receives a 4 “Meets standard with concerns,” the student may have remediation. This determination is based upon student performance in previous courses and if this particular issue has been a pattern throughout the student’s program of study.

In addition, students will be asked to fill out an assessment of their progress during their meetings for Benchmarks two and three. Please see Appendix C for this student assessment form. During their meetings for benchmarks two and three and the final checkout, program faculty will review tracking sheets with students to ensure that students are keeping track of their progress. This data will be collected and used to determine how successful we are at meeting the knowledge area outcomes for SC, MH, and MFC.

The flowchart below provides a visual of the process throughout a student’s progression in the program.



# MSU Counseling Program Yearly Outcome-based Report

## Application and Acceptance into the program

For the 2018/19 Academic Year, the program received 63 applications to the counseling program: 11 in School Counseling, 26 in Marriage & Family Counseling, and 26 in Mental Health Counseling. The School Program accepted 7 applicants, the Marriage & Family program accepted 10 applicants, and the Mental Health Program accepted 10 applicants for a total of 27 applicants. As of May 2019, 27 applicants have indicated they are coming into the program in the summer of 2019.

## Portfolio Assignments

The average score of portfolio assignments per program area were:

- MFC- 1.31
- MH- 1.08
- SC-1.22

For more detailed scores per portfolio assignment raw data from each portfolio assignment is available. Overall, what these averages suggest is that within program and between programs, our students are scoring well within the range of 1-2 on their portfolio assignments.

A=1, A-/B+ = 2, B= 3, B- =4, and C+ or lower = 5; Students pass Benchmark 1 with a score of 1, 2 or 3. Anything lower and the student will have remediation of the assignment.

## Benchmark/Professional Disposition Data

\*The following data is Benchmark/Professional Disposition average scores across program area.

### Benchmark 1

Benchmark 1 comprises basic counseling skill demonstration on a final tape. Students must successfully pass skills in order to progress to Practicum (Benchmark 2). For the 2017 cohort of students the average benchmark score per program area was:

- MFC Students – 1.875
- MH Students- 2.66
- School Students- 2.5

Overall Average across all three specialty areas: **2.345**

A=1, A-/B+ = 2, B= 3, B- =4, and C+ or lower = 5; Students pass Benchmark 1 with a score of 1, 2 or 3. Anything lower and the student must retake the course.

### **Benchmark 2**

Benchmark 2 is comprised of a demonstration of basic counseling skills with community clients as well as a demonstration of greater conceptual ability. Students must successfully pass practicum in order to progress to internship (Benchmark 3). For the 2017 cohort of students the average benchmark score per program area was:

- MFC Students- 1.75
- MH Students- 1.66
- School Students- 1.5

Overall Average across all three specialty areas: **1.64**

A=1, A-/B+ = 2, B= 3, B- =4, and C+ or lower = 5; Students pass Benchmark 1 with a score of 1, 2 or 3. Anything lower and the student must retake the course.

### **Benchmark 3**

Benchmark 3 is comprised of a demonstration of advanced counseling skills in a community agency or school setting. The benchmark is based upon university observation, case conceptualization grade and site supervisor evaluation. For the 2017 cohort of students the average benchmark score per program area was:

- MFC Students- 1.75
- MH Students- 1.66
- School Students – 1

Overall Average across all three specialty areas: **1.472**

A=1, A-/B+ = 2, B= 3, B- =4, and C+ or lower = 5; Students pass Benchmark 1 with a score of 1, 2 or 3. Anything lower and the student must retake the course.

### **Benchmark 4**

Benchmark 4 is the comprehensive exam distributed in the spring of the students' second year. See narrative below.

# Comprehensive Exam Data

Nineteen students took the comprehensive counseling exam in February 2019. Of the 19 students, no exams went to a third reader. For 2018/19 we had a 100% pass rate for the comprehensive exam.

# Internship Site Data AY 2018/19

Students report being overall satisfied with their internship site experiences. Areas of common concern are lack of career counseling experiences, consultation with client families, and networking in the community. The sites that we utilize for internships are very strong in terms of the quality of onsite supervision, relevance to students' career goals, and exposure to a wide range of clientele and clinical issues.

The counseling program continues to explore ways to continue to enhance the quality of our internship sites. Three new internships were added this year: a partnership with the county jail, a college counseling center in Helena, and the local Head Start program, as well as additional positions at existing sites. This increased our ability to provide affordable counseling to community members, as well as increasing the variety of clientele and internship settings to which students were exposed.

# Internship Site Supervision Data AY 2018/19

Overall, students report being satisfied and supported by their site supervisors. One area of concern was some supervisors not providing concrete or specific constructive feedback. The majority of students reported being supported and appropriately challenged by their site supervisors.

We are planning a collaborative session with internship supervisors for the fall of 2019 to discuss how the program and internships can continue to work together to provide a thorough and enriching internship experience for students.

# Vital Statistics for AY 2018/19

In 2019 there were 22 graduates from Montana State University's Counseling program: 9 graduates from the Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling program, 8 graduates from the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, and 5 graduates from the School Counseling program. Of the admitted students for the Marriage, Couples, and Family program, 100% graduated in the expected period of time and 8 students had reported employment upon graduation. Of the admitted students for the Clinical Mental

Health program, 89% graduated in the expected period of time, and 6 of the students reported employment by graduation. Of the admitted students for the School Counseling program, 100% graduated in the expected period of time and all 5 students obtained employment by graduation. Data regarding the NCE examination is not yet available for 2019; however, our graduates are consistently successful at obtaining licensure both in and out of state.

The Human Development clinic offered over 2000 hours of low cost counseling services, and for 2018/19 the counseling practicum and internship students offered over 15,000 of free mental health services to schools, community agencies and at the Human Development Clinic. Additionally, counseling students conducted three advocacy outreach projects to the community. Mu Tau Sigma, our local chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, helped at the Help Center 5K “Run for Your Life” and ran a food drive fundraiser for our county food bank.

## Program Modifications based on Evaluation Data

As a faculty we are continuing to consider ways to make our program more accessible to students throughout the state of Montana, as well as out of state students. We are also considering adjusting our curriculum trajectory and class schedule to allow students from farther away to commute to campus, who can not afford to live in Bozeman, or are not in a position to relocate themselves or their family for the two year program. This will involve continuing to explore efficacious methods of teaching online or hybrid classes, as well as creating a distance option for students to video into class. We are in the process of applying for the Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education (WICHE) that would lower out of state tuition costs. Both of these initiatives should increase the accessibility of our program to a wider spectrum of qualified applicants, as well as potentially increasing the diversity of our student makeup. This decision was based on out of state students not accepting program positions offered due to high cost of tuition, as well as the majority of our applicants coming from this region of the state. Montana State’s counseling program continues to hold regional and national recognition as a quality program; therefore, in the spirit of our land grant mission we would like to explore how to offer the program in some type of distance capacity.

The program will schedule a supervisor training in the Fall of 2019 with site supervisors to retrain in our evaluation process, as well as provide time to answer questions related to supervision they may have. This training will be provided based upon feedback from students and supervisors at the internship sites.

Students commented that there was some inconsistency between different lab supervisors’ evaluation standards. This year we had four different instructors teaching our lab supervision courses (previously taught by two faculty members). Lab supervisors met on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to establish greater consistency in expectations across sections of lab supervision, as well as to increase intentionality in how case conceptualizations semester to semester are scaffolded to increase students’ analysis and writing competencies.

# Other Substantial Program Changes

The MSU Counseling Program has not experienced additional substantial program changes but is continuing to build off of changes made in recent years.