Annual Program Evaluation: Counseling Programs 2015-2016

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 as well as assist us in considering ways we might continue to develop and enhance the counseling programs.

Submitted by:
Rebecca L. Koltz, PhD, LCPC, NCC

Montana State University
Department of Health & Human Development
- School Counseling
- Marriage & Family Counseling
- Mental Health Counseling
Introduction

The following assessments are done in the program: program outcomes 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 & Family, and School Counseling programs. Knowledge Areas in the 2009 Standards are demonstrated using portfolio assignments and Skills/Practices are demonstrated in benchmark dispositions. Students progress through a series of four benchmark 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- 1st 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 1st 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 -2nd 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 (see Appendix C). 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 2nd 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 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.
Application:

- GPA
- GRE: prefer a minimum of 50/percentile in both verbal and quantitative
- 3 Letters of Recommendation
- Personal Statement

If students meet the prerequisite requirements, they are invited for an on-campus interview. Selection of such programs may differ from the interview.

Assessment Begins

Once a student is accepted into the program, the assessment of student learning outcomes begins. Each course has 1-2 designated portfolio assignments. In addition to courses meeting the eight core areas, each course has portfolio assignments designed to meet SLO's in each specialty area. These are clearly designated on the syllabi. Students are asked to keep these assignments in a binder and track their grades and designated scores.

What does the score mean?

A = 1, A-/B+ = 2, B-/B = 3, B- = 4 (Remediation may be required), and C+ or Lower = 5 (Remediation is required)

Students with a score of 1, 2, or 3 are exceeding and meeting expectations of the assignments. However, students with scores of 4 or 5 pose concerns. If a portfolio assignment has a score of 4, it is at the course instructor's and program leader's discretion to determine if remediation is needed. If a 5 is received, remediation is required to ensure that the student meets the learning outcome.

What is a benchmark?

Benchmarks are designated as reviews of clinical skill. There are a series of 3 clinical benchmarks throughout the program. These reviews determine if the student is ready to proceed to the next level. In addition, these meetings are used as a time to review student portfolios and collect student assessments of their own areas of strength and growth from feedback received on their portfolio assignments. The fourth benchmark is the comprehensive exam.

Comprehensive Exam - Benchmark 4

During students' final semester in the program, they are given a comprehensive exam. This exam is the final marker of student progress throughout the program. Theoretically, if students have progressed well through the series of portfolio assignments and benchmarks, they should pass the exam. However, if the student fails the exam they are given an opportunity to take it a second time.

Portfolio Assignment