

Department of Counselor Education - Academic Program Review Response to Site Team Report and Action Plan

It was with great pride that we received the official report of the Academic Program Review Site Team following their review and visit in January 2023. We have found this process to be thorough and rigorous, and this exercise has allowed the department to identify strengths and goals for the future.

Site Team Report

In addition to the goals that the site-team has outlined, we would like to highlight several of the findings of the site-team's report:

- *"The faculty are distinguished scholars who contribute positively to the profession's advancement."*
- *"Additionally, their training approaches, at the master's and doctoral levels, appear to be well-connected to community and professional needs as their graduates are highly competitive applicants and sought out by many employers."*
- *"Despite noted limited resources, the faculty are committed to each other and the university. This collective vision helps the program stand out and serves as a model for other programs in South Florida."*
- *"Students discussed multiple research opportunities with multiple professors, enabling them to better understand their coursework and pathways to professions and research."*
- *"Great reputation – 90 quality applicants with minimal recruitment competing for 18 spots in their CMHC program."*
- *Every single group we interviewed mentioned the amazing work done by Mikeala Kursell to make sure everything runs smoothly between faculty, students, and adjuncts within the program.*

Response to Site Team Report

The Department of Counselor Education, in response to the Academic Program Review Site Team report dated January 21, 2023, have developed the following goals:

1. Support the Maintenance of CACREP Accreditation

From the site team report:

- *"Despite multiple competing programs in the area, the department's accreditation by CACREP elevates their degree programs above competing programs in the region."*
- *"The department previously had two clerical support staff to cover all aspects of the program, including field placement. While everyone from the department head to students raved about Mickaela, the department could benefit greatly with additional clerical support."*
- *"Additional support is needed for clinical placements, internships, practicum, and related administrative work."*
- *"Additional faculty lines would enable them to meet the current and future mental health needs of the region and state. Accreditation related to faculty-student ratios limits the current number of students allowed in the program. Given the infusion of funding from federal and state government initiatives, the demand is obvious, but the accreditation standards require additional full-time faculty to increase the number of students in the program."*

The Department of Counselor Education faculty are highly cognizant of the continuing importance of CACREP accreditation for graduates' ability to obtain employment post-graduation. Many states and programs within the Federal government now explicitly require graduation from a CACREP-accredited program to become licensed or to bill for reimbursement. FAU's Counselor Education department includes four CACREP-accredited programs, making it

one of the few CACREP-accredited programs in the area for all specialties. Several competing private institutions (Lynn University, Nova Southeastern, Palm Beach Atlantic, and South University) are in the process of becoming CACREP-accredited for the Clinical Mental Health Counseling track only. For the Clinical Rehabilitation, School Counseling, and Ph.D. programs, our department remains uniquely CACREP-accredited, with the closest comparable programs being in Miami, Orlando, or Tampa. This accreditation continues to be a strategic advantage, but is also necessary to maintain a competitive edge in the region. Our re-accreditation site visit will occur in the fall, and we hope to receive an 8-year re-accreditation from CACREP.

We must focus on re-aligning our programs with the new 2024 CACREP standards. Aligning to the upcoming 2024 CACREP standards is a time-consuming process that requires a review of the curriculum in every track and re-aligning the student learning objectives (SLOs) and the systems used to track these (currently LiveText). We will need additional support to complete this task. However, the faculty are committed to maintaining and updating this accreditation with the proper resources from the university.

The Department of Counselor Education faculty unanimously agreed with our APR site visitor's report regarding the need for additional clerical support. The workload is quite substantial for one person, particularly navigating multiple programs. We need more hires to support all programs and field placements. This is a must, a top priority for the faculty who also acknowledge the additional work assumed by the field placement coordinator for CMHC as a result of diminished clerical support. The site visit team further suggests, *"If a full-time person cannot be hired, possibly explore hiring someone at 50% or co-hiring someone with another department in the College of Education."*

The site visit team acknowledged the undeniable need for counselors in South Florida and throughout the state. In Florida, 29% of the population is without mental health services, [and almost every county reports that the entire county is a shortage area](#). Further, The Department of Health and Human Services has [designed all Florida counties as Health Profession Shortage Areas \(HPSA\)](#), specifically for mental health. In the Counseling Department, we are uniquely poised to address the mental health crisis this area is experiencing. Our master's level graduates are highly sought after, often gaining employment before graduation.

As noted by the APR report, *"the accreditation standards require additional full-time faculty to increase the number of students in the program."* In CMHC, we turned down over 20 qualified candidates, accepting 18, out of total pool of over 80. Additionally, the S.W.E.L.L. grant provides St. Lucie County with more than 75 new school counselors, and the new addition of the W.A.V.E.S. program (a \$6 million grant recently awarded) will train 119 school counselors to help fill the gap in high-need schools throughout the WAVES Network (including Brevard Public Schools, School District of Indian River County, School District of Manatee County, Polk County Public Schools, and School District of Palm Beach County). Other counties have expressed a desire for similar programs (Broward and Marion County).

The Counselor Education faculty strongly believe that this department needs a minimum of 12 faculty members, as part of our comprehensive strategic plan, to promote growth and serve our community. Additional recommendations regarding faculty hires are made in section 2.

2. Support High Research Productivity-

From the site team report:

- *"Faculty/staff/student interaction and research opportunities a. The level of interaction appears to be extremely high and positive within the department. b. Students discussed multiple research opportunities with multiple professors, enabling them to better understand their coursework and pathways to professions and research."*

- *“Additional pre- and post-award grant support to ensure that grants and related expenses, such as paying adjunct faculty when grants result in faculty course buyouts, are paid for in a timely manner.”*
- *“Discretionary funding for travel to conferences, software, and related uses above and beyond current levels. The current levels - \$800 (sic) to attend a conference if the attendee is not presenting a paper and \$1,1000 if the attendee is presenting a paper - is extremely low.”*

As noted in our self-study, the CE faculty are very productive regarding research and grant funding. Since 2017, we have engaged in the community, collaborating with partners and constituents to bring over \$13.3 million in grant money to fund interdisciplinary efforts, as demonstrated by Dr. Torres’s Patient Centered Outcome Research Institute (PCORI) community engagement grant (250K), Dr. Villares’ S.W.E.L.L. program (\$1.6. million), and following the APR’s site visit in January, another Department of Education Mental Health Demonstration Grant (Wellness Advocates Valuing Educators and Students, WAVES – \$6 million). As academics who are mindful of the obligation to contribute to the body of research and scholarship and who seek to create a department that is the highest producing and nationally recognized, the CE faculty know that pre- and post-award support (and incentives for these grants) remain a significant obstacle, as does funding for travel, software, and other expenses commonly incurred by researchers. Yet, despite this fact, the Department of Counselor Education has made significant strides toward creating partnerships with constituents outside the university and within FAU. We currently function as if we were a department within a Research 1 institution. Still, we are hindered by the lack of pre- and post-award grant support, limited faculty and clerical resources, and lack of discretionary funding. These grants are huge revenue streams for FAU, and the CE department and COE should see some of the benefits. The high indirect cost (IDC) rate discourages faculty from going after many grants, so these training grants, which have lower IDC rates, should be encouraged and monies directed back to the department. As a result, we believe that cost-sharing with the Division of Research should be revisited and a policy within the COE created.

Looking forward, we would lay out a plan within the next 5 years to add at least three full-time faculty lines beyond the two replacement lines we are currently hiring: one in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling, one in School Counseling, and one in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. With these three lines, the department could nearly *double* the number of degrees awarded in the Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s program and Clinical Mental Health Master’s program. This would significantly *increase* the number of degrees awarded in the School Counseling Master’s program and reduce the time to graduation in the doctoral program (in essence, increasing the number of doctoral degrees awarded in any given year). The Department recognizes that resources are precious in any university setting, especially at FAU. They should be given to programs and departments with a proven track record of productivity and in areas that have a significant impact on the community in line with the university's strategic goals. We believe that we have shown this over the last 10 years in a climate where the lack of resources may compromise our accreditation. However, we also believe we have not yet “hit our stride” regarding productivity.

Our APR site visitor’s report recognized that *“the department could benefit greatly with additional clerical support.”* Additional clerical support is also crucial to supporting current and future research productivity. As noted previously, in addition to the \$7.3 in grant funds already obtained by the CE faculty, Drs. Villares, Bowers, Mariani, and Peluso received \$6 million in funding for the WAVES program to train a minimum of 119 new school counselors across five school districts. In addition to this new grant, Mikaela manages all CE faculty grant funding, directly benefiting FAU. For example, from Fall 2022-early Spring 2023, CE faculty had already obtained, partnered in, or been subcontracted for approximately 4.5 million dollars in grant funds in one year (RSA, PCORI, SWELL, and Alliance Lab). She has had a wide range of grant-related duties, including: student/participant recruitment; admissions; advisement; course scheduling; registration; tuition lists; hiring/credentialing; field

placement assistance; communication with district partners; data collection and report generation for P.I.; hiring, training, credentialing, and payroll management of all employees (OPS, postdoctoral researchers, adjuncts, graduate assistants, suppliers/contractors); budget transfer forms; research support; editorial work for publications and websites; purchases for grant and community form participants; etc. The recent addition of the WAVES program and School District of Palm Beach County (SDPC) ESOL Cohort VI will further increase the needs for support of these tasks (and more) in 2024-2025.

Beyond standard department and grant support, Mikaela has lent editorial, data collection, report generation, narrative, and survey administration support to numerous research projects for all (6) six counselor education programs and CACREP-accreditation-related projects, as well as for faculty books and journal articles for publication. She is establishing an auxiliary unit (Counselor Education Community Center) to support our department's community workshops, programs, and training. Overall, this work supports not only the grant funds in the department but also the books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and professional service/conference positions held within the Counseling Department (for example, over 5 books, 31 articles, and 159 committees in 2020 alone). Replacing our clerical person who retired two years ago (who had been hired to assist with the doctoral program, another area in need of support) is key to ongoing high-level research productivity.

3. Support High Quality Training

From the site team report:

- *"Students discussed multiple research opportunities with multiple professors, enabling them to better understand their coursework and pathways to professions and research."*
- *"Funding for recruitment of doctoral students a. While doctoral student stipends and related benefits have increased significantly, the cost of living in South Florida may still not make these offers competitive."*
- *"Determine the best way to tap into the various health-related initiatives, such as the possibility of creating a counseling clinic as part of future campus-based health expansions."*

There are numerous indicators that the training programs within the Department of Counselor Education are rigorous and highly successful. This year, our College of Education was ranked at 117 in the Education Graduate school rankings by U.S. News, our faculty received multiple college, university and national and international counseling organization awards and our Rehabilitation Counseling program was ranked 36th in *U.S. News and World Report* (the highest ranked program at FAU). Further, our doctoral program was awarded the SACES 2020 Outstanding Doctoral Counselor Education and Supervision Award. In order to succeed in our goal of "Transforming Counseling" in the areas of School Counseling, Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling, and Clinical Mental Health Counseling, there are several directions that the department will need to make advances including: creating a tele-health training center; providing the appropriate level of funding for recruiting doctoral students; adding clerical support (also see Goals 1 & 2); adding faculty lines (also see Goals 1 & 2); recouping a greater share of grant funding (also see Goals 1 & 2); and developing a comprehensive strategic plan that includes health-related initiatives.

At one time, the Department of Counselor Education had a self-sustaining clinic (the Community Counseling Network). It was deactivated in 2004 pending a re-evaluation of resources and space. It has not been re-activated as of yet, but this remains an aspirational goal of the department. To best provide hands on training and supervision to students in their practicum and internship experiences, as well as those taking advanced level courses, re-activating a tele-health training clinic would be ideal. Many of our aspirational programs and fellow SUS institutions already have training clinics where students gain practicum and internship hours working with clients in the lab. This allows the universities to partner with the greater community and meet community needs with high quality and low-to-no cost mental health care while providing students with the chance to work with clients. Additionally, faculty are

directly involved in supervising unlicensed doctoral students through licensure and doctoral students can gain hands-on supervision experience and are provided with research opportunities. Moreover, having a clinic helps better meet CACREP standards for counselor training. A tele-health clinic could be one that is self-sustaining (with minimal support from the university) that will answer the needs of all students.

With strong support from our Dean, the pay for graduate assistantships was recently raised to a reasonable level. This is helpful in our effort to recruit high-quality doctoral students. The site visitors noted, due to the low levels of funding for recruitment of doctoral students, in combination with the cost-of-living increases in the state of Florida, it is difficult to recruit high-quality out-of-state doctoral students. SUS peer institutions can provide substantially more incentives to doctoral students (i.e., UCF, UF). Doctoral-granting institutions that do not provide sufficient assistance to doctoral students are often at a great disadvantage. We believe that increasing the funds for recruitment, provided by the Graduate College, as well as increasing the number of Presidential and Provost fellowships, will assist in our mission to enroll and educate the next generation of counselor educators. We also endorse further increases in the funds provided to our Graduate Assistants in order to keep their wages consistent with the cost of living in South Florida. We believe that this should be changed immediately in order to keep up with the counselor education doctoral programs in aspirational institutions.

4. Support Faculty Involvement in University Strategic Plan

From the site team report:

- *“...Despite noted limited resources, the faculty are committed to each other and the university. This collective vision helps the program stand out and serves as a model for other programs in South Florida.”*
- *“Determine the best way to tap into the various health-related initiatives, such as the possibility of creating a counseling clinic as part of future campus-based health expansions. Health is a major strategic initiative at FAU as well as in the State of Florida. Based on FAU’s current strategic plan, the department can tap into three of the four institutes of excellence.”*
- *“Moreover, the timing of the strategic plan provides an opportunity to incorporate the new faculty hires as part of the vision of the department to achieve the goal of “Transforming Counseling” in the future.”*

The Counselor Education faculty agree with the site visitors’ report recommending that we “Develop a comprehensive strategic plan.” We do have a mission statement, goals, and a current plan, but we are mindful that a new University Strategic Plan will be created in the next few years (current one runs out in 2025), and with a new President/Provost, that will surely be one of their top priorities. Further, evaluating and re-evaluating our mission and goals is consistent with CACREP’s requirement that these guiding principles be driven by the available data from internal and external constituents.

Central to any strategic plan is the role of clerical support and faculty involvement. Incorporating the university’s mission of becoming an R1 and one of the top 100 universities will require additional manpower for the high level of clerical work and navigating the multiple systems and programs used at the university. Further, faculty are committed to the mission of the university and creating a strategic plan that supports this mission. However, they are currently fully engaged in grants, research, publication, teaching, mentoring, and leadership activities. Additional faculty would not only allow us to grow in terms of students but also in terms fulfilling the university’s mission.

In the next five years, we plan to continue to address the site visitors’ recommendations by tapping into the various health-related initiatives, such as collaborating with FAU’s I-HEALTH and I-SENSE research institutes with the goal of training counseling students to work within integrated medical practices. The faculty believe that integrated medical practices, including behavioral health and wellness

initiatives, are the focus for the foreseeable future. While this is a significant opportunity, missing out on it could pose an existential threat to the department and the COE. Partnerships and initiatives can only be considered if we have additional faculty. Currently, six (two-thirds) faculty members are dedicated to at least one grant and others are actively applying for grant funding. Additional faculty lines that focus on this initiative are crucial for networking with on- and off-campus partners toward being part of these conversations and funding sources.

Toward this goal, we propose restoring the faculty to a minimum of 12 full-time faculty immediately. As it stands now, there are only 9 full-time faculty lines (not including the chair, who serves in an administrative capacity). When our Ph.D. program was approved in 2004 by the Florida Board of Governors and the FAU Board of Trustees, both approved a full-time faculty of 12. This number has never been achieved. With support of the COE Dean, we are searching for a full-time, tenure track professor in school counseling and we have two COE-funded post-doctoral positions available. We will seek to convert both post-doctoral positions into Assistant/Associate tenure-track lines which would allow us to grow our CMHC and Rehabilitation programs. This would bring the department to a total of 12 full-time faculty, which is a minimum, and must receive the highest priority.

5. Support Department Faculty Leadership and Program Visibility in the Counseling Field

From the site team report:

- *"...The faculty are distinguished scholars who contribute positively to the profession's advancement."*
- *"Highly involved with professional organizations and editorships, without any financial or related compensation such as course releases."*

Faculty in the Department of Counselor Education are also heavily involved at the national level in service to the American Counseling Association (ACA) as well as several of the divisions of ACA. Several faculty members have served as presidents of national counseling organizations and as editors or associate editors of major counseling and related journals. Many other faculty currently serve on editorial boards and on other service committees within professional organizations. In addition, several faculty members have been recognized by the ACA and other state and national organizations with awards in the field of counseling. Challenges to these accomplishments include financial support and the lack of recognition and publicity that the university creates around these accomplishments (relative to the attention that such recognition has garnered for colleagues at other institutions).

The site visitors noted our "comparatively low" travel funds. Within the counseling field, attending a national conference typically has low-end funding of \$1,700, and ours remains at \$1,100, the same as over a decade ago. Most conference registration fees are \$500-600 dollars. The rest can only cover the plane, etc. This is a critical issue for faculty. The COE Dean has graciously offered to cover additional travel costs as end-of-the-year funding allows, however, faculty cannot plan on this reimbursement and, as a result, often turn down prestigious presentations to the detriment of the department, COE, and FAU. Realistic, reliable funding must be provided for the high-level work of the department. Marketing efforts centered around the department's successes would benefit the university as a whole, as it creates a culture of success at all levels.

Finally, to continue with the upward progress towards greater national recognition, the department is acutely aware of the need for additional pre- and post-grant award support (as noted in Goal #2) and additional faculty lines to assist us with tapping into the various health-related initiatives (Goal #1-4). These needs identified by the site visitor team inform our individual goals, as stated throughout this document, and guide us toward forming a comprehensive strategic plan. This is something we can address when we update our CACREP standards.