

**Department of Counselor Education
Program Review
Florida Atlantic University
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Review Team:

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The review team met with members of the counselor education faculty, adjunct faculty, administration, and student bodies (masters and doctoral) during a visit that took place on January 19-21, 2016. The review team focused on the following tasks:

- address the three areas of concern provided to us in the department's self-study;
- assess strengths and challenges of the counselor education department and program areas;
- provide actionable recommendations that could take the program to a higher level.

Overview

The Department of Counselor Education consists of 8 full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, one visiting faculty, and the Department Chair. The faculty has a strong record of research productivity, excellent teaching evaluations, and outstanding university service and national service to the counseling profession. In the past two years the department has contributed approximately 25% of the publications in the College of Education and has a record of procuring external grant funding, placing the program at a competitive level among similar counseling programs across the country. The programs are nationally accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), and the school counseling program contributes to meeting accreditation by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The Department demonstrates a strong record of documentation of student learning outcomes (SLOs), consistent with meeting national accreditation standards. Due to funding issues across the university, challenges are apparent related to transitioning to 3-2 or 2-2 course loads to increase attention on research productivity and external funding opportunities.

Programmatic Strengths

CACREP requires that 50% of courses be taught by core faculty, and the department currently exceeds this standard. The faculty commitment to teaching, along with the excellent student ratings and comments by the students during the program review, is commendable. Quantitative ratings of faculty are strong and consistent with ratings across the College of Education. In addition, adjunct faculty were very happy with the opportunity to teach in the program. They indicated feeling very much part of the department and identified the very supportive faculty, high program quality, and strong student performance as strengths.

The counselor education faculty members do an excellent job documenting SLOs, consistent with CACREP and CAEP requirements. Faculty has done an excellent job aligning CACREP

and CAEP standards and integrating the standards into LiveText. The programs in the Department of Counselor Education received full accreditation until 2021 by CACREP. Over the past few years, the Department procured two grants contributing \$3.8 million in school counseling and rehabilitation counseling. The Department submitted 12 grants in the past three years. While there were fewer publications in the most recent year, five grants were submitted with one being funded, and the faculty appear to have numerous research projects in progress and articles under review, which will demonstrate continued high research activity consistent with previous years. In addition, the faculty established research lines in evidence-based practices (EBPs) and mathematical modeling of the counseling relationship, which have strong funding possibilities. The combination of research productivity and grant procurement exceeds what is typically seen in doctoral-level counselor education programs across the country. In addition, the American Counseling Association (ACA) and Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling (AARC), a division of ACA, recognized the exemplary research from the department faculty, and in particular the research lines on evidence-based practice and mathematical modeling of the counseling relationship. Exemplary research is also noted from students. Students are actively engaged with faculty on research projects. Dissertations are reflective of the high quality research needed in the counseling profession.

The faculty is also engaged in national service. Dr. Paul Peluso is editor of *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, the flagship journal for AARC and among the top counseling journals. Dr. Peluso also serves as President of the International Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, a division of ACA. Dr. Carmen Gill is a past-president of the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling, a division of ACA. In 2016 the Department is hosting the National Conference for the Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling. Faculty credentials reflect state and national certifications and licensures. The department curriculum prepares students for school counselor certification, national certification through the National Board of Certified Counselors, and professional counselor licensure in Florida.

Admissions appear to be consistent with the necessary student-faculty ratios required by CACREP. The faculty employs a screening process that includes student interviews. Faculty appear to be admitting strong students. There is no history of student appeals due to dismissal, and the department maintains over a 90% retention rate in each of the program areas.

Running counselor education program on two campuses is certainly a challenge, but Dr. Peluso and the faculty have actually turned it into an opportunity and programmatic strength. Faculty are already enacting systemic efficiencies with online education and instructional technology support.

Themes, Challenges, and Recommendations

1. Diversity and Area Specialization

Faculty members represent a balance among males and females, but would benefit from additional representation among areas of diversity, including race/ethnicity. As future lines are considered, an additional position in rehabilitation counseling is needed, especially due to only having one faculty member in this area. A faculty member with specialization in the area of

substance use/addictions could contribute to areas of rehabilitation and clinical mental health counseling, as well as provide community engagement specific to addiction in the South Florida area. Substance use and addiction is a funding source for grant procurement, especially given the recent initiatives offered through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and coordinated through the national Board of Certified Counselors centered on training counselors to offer services for substance use in rural/high need areas.

2. Teaching Load

With the addition of the doctoral program in 2004, an agreement was reached to provide 12 faculty lines. When the program areas were being evaluated for reevaluation from CACREP in 2013, only four core faculty were identified, thus falling below the necessary five faculty required by CACREP and resulting in provisional accreditation. The most recent faculty lines were hired in 2015. Given the current teaching load of 3/3 and the current teaching assignments by core faculty, an additional 1.5 faculty would be needed to support the move to a 3/2 assignment, anticipated for Fall, 2016. However, given that the core faculty currently exceeds the 50% CACREP requirement of core faculty to teach courses, adjunct faculty could be hired, in the short-term, to support the transition to a 3/2 teaching load. To be consistent with doctoral granting institutions with strong research productivity and grant procurement, administration should support an eventual move to a 2/2 faculty teaching load. Although the research productivity for the Department of Counselor Education is high, indicative of a 2/2 teaching load with appropriate research activity, the transition to a 2/2 load does not necessarily need to be across the college or department. Faculty work plans can be individualized to reflect those faculty members who are more teaching-centered to carry a higher teaching load (e.g., 3/2, 3/3, 3/4), so faculty who are more research-productive can achieve a 2/2 teaching load.

3. Practicum and Internship Supervision

One particular area of concern where it relates to teaching and time is courses directed toward practicum and internship supervision. Students typically complete five transcribed one-hour sessions, requiring faculty to review 30-60 hours of sessions each semester, as student enrollment in the class ranges from 6-12 students. Such a requirement may place an undue burden on faculty, which impacts research productivity. However, the requirement of five transcribed one-hour sessions is a departmental requirement and not an accreditation issue. The department does have some flexibility in amending this assignment or using doctoral students in a supervisory capacity to continue to meet this high standard of student feedback and training. Using doctoral students in this capacity will provide additional training and supervision for doctoral students, which would benefit them as they attempt to enter academe.

4. Institutional Support for Grant Activity

The 3/3 teaching load creates challenges in procuring grant support, so the current culture of activity in the Department of Counselor Education truly is commendable. In our meeting with the Assistant Vice President for Research and Director of Sponsored Programs, there was no formal presentation by the offices on the activities of the Counselor Education Department. The transition to a 3/2 or 2/2 teaching load will likely benefit both the faculty and university in successful external funding opportunities, an area where the department faculty has already experienced success. Further changes that could result in additional grant submissions and procurement that do not require additional resources is the communication of rules and

procedures that follow successful grant procurement. At this time there is no formal procedure outlining what percentage of indirect costs is shared among the college, department, and faculty. Establishment and communication of these procedures could play an important role in incentivizing faculty to pursue grant funding. We recommend that principle investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs be included in this plan to incentivize grant procurement.

5. Professional Development

The current climate of limited financial resources contributes to limitations in faculty travel. The faculty has a national reputation in leadership and research, requiring university funds to continue their tradition of national service and peer-reviewed presentations. In addition, the faculty indicated a desire to have funding for continuing education, particularly with respect to advanced training in research methods (e.g., structural equation modeling, hierarchical linear modeling), which would not only enhance course work at FAU but also provide methods of evaluation that are aligned with external funding efforts. The potential for collaborative funding with other colleges and departments (e.g., psychology) was evident should FAU wish to bring in experts to train or consult with faculty.

6. Accreditation Issues

The initial provisional accreditation status from CACREP (which has since been rectified and now reflects full accreditation) resulted from the lack of the necessary core faculty mandated in the CACREP 2009 and 2016 standards. Clear communication over accreditation standards followed by recognition and actions by administration of the importance in maintaining the appropriate FTEs is necessary. CACREP accreditation is becoming increasingly important in the licensure of professional counselors and the hiring of counselor education faculty. The absence of CACREP accreditation would result in a detrimental disadvantage to the counselor education programs. To maintain accreditation efforts, integration of the 2016 Standards into LiveText should take place immediately, which would allow for monitoring of student outcomes across multiple years, thereby benefitting future accreditation efforts. We recommend that a faculty member receive release time in order to complete this integration into LiveText.

7. Faculty Recognition

When a department runs smoothly and is high-achieving, attention of the college and university may shift toward areas that are more challenging and require intervention. The result is that high-achieving faculty may not receive well-earned recognition, and this may be the case with the Department of Counselor Education. Although the financial awards are limited, faculty should be recognized for their strong achievements and productivity, exemplary training, extraordinary satisfaction expressed by students and adjunct faculty, community engagement, and service to the profession at a nationally recognized level. In fact, there is frustration from the faculty with the lack of recognition of grant activity and successful procurement from the university. Attempts were made to publicize the grant awards, yet such attempts did not result in any attention from university media. The lack of faculty recognition represents an important theme that can be readily improved without need for further resources.

8. Graduate Student Support

Graduate student support should continue to be an area of priority, with increased opportunities for graduate assistant, teaching assistant, and research assistant funding to help promote faculty

productivity. Some faculty expressed the need for funding of more full-time doctoral students to harness their support on research, grant procurement, and grant implementation. To develop a competitive edge in the counselor education job market, it is imperative that doctoral students receive ample opportunities to independently teach (develop a teaching performance pedigree) and collaborate on research and grant work (develop a scholarly pedigree). Enhanced scholarship and assistantship funding help to accomplish these goals. We discussed with administration strategies for better integrating doctoral candidates into teaching roles. Many counselor education doctoral program graduates around the country have taught several courses and have several publications when they begin applying for counselor education faculty positions. Also, we had many discussions over the need for graduate student health insurance, and this should become a priority given the prominence of FAU's medical school and the competitive disadvantage this presents for graduate admissions.

9. Lack of a Training Clinic

Consider re-initiating the counselor education training clinic, perhaps through a collaboration with college counseling center. In addition to creating a competitive training advantage, a training clinic can become a center for faculty research and funding. For example, substance use grants and counseling outcome research are fundable initiatives that can help support the clinic. Hiring an additional faculty member can create specific release loads to staff and supervise clinic operations. A training clinic also promotes the university pillar of community engagement and outreach.

10. Faculty Mentoring

With so many new hires in the Department of Counselor Education and more on the way, the faculty should immediately implement a mentoring program. Tenure-track faculty very much want a more formalized mentoring system, even though they are highly complementary of the current support from the chair and senior faculty. We strongly encourage that any created mentoring system be within discipline (counselor education senior faculty mentoring counselor education junior faculty) in order to enhance collaboration and the formation of viable scholarship agendas.

11. Enhancing Job Satisfaction

Of course, every discussion in some way touched on the systemic underfunding for university and program resources, including faculty salaries. To their credit, every single administrator and faculty member acknowledges the problem and is working toward solutions in a collaborative and nimble fashion. As counselor educators we teach that job satisfaction (in any occupation) is determined by a combination of compensation + autonomy + feeling like we are making a difference. While compensation is likely to be a problem in the foreseeable future, FAU administrators can help promote job satisfaction by enhancing faculty autonomy to pursue meaningful scholarly, grant, service, and other academic challenges. And, perhaps most importantly, administration can help develop formal and informal ways of recognizing counselor education faculty and student accomplishments. Promoting academic freedom and recognition can help enhance satisfaction during these challenging economic times.

Specific Questions for the Reviewers

We were asked three specific questions by program faculty prior to our visit, and offer the following insights and ideas to help guide current and future counselor education initiatives.

1. Is the department delivering its programs effectively?

The answer to this question is a resounding “Yes,” and there are ample continuous quality improvement mechanisms in place to adopt additional efficiencies as needed. We were duly impressed by the administrative efficiency of the chair, the comradery of the faculty, and effusive praise from the students across programs.

Still, there are several suggestions for improvement offered. The tenure and promotion process at universities is always anxiety-producing for tenure-track faculty, and we continue to appreciate the vulnerable position in which tenure-track faculty are placed. In this spirit, clearer communication with tenure-track faculty regarding tenure and promotion requirements and processes are needed. In addition, we highly recommend that the department diligently separate the annual evaluation process from the annual progress toward tenure and promotion. This appears to be happening in some FAU colleges and departments already. A simple step toward accomplishing this goal would be the annual construction of two letters by the chair: annual letter of faculty evaluation, and annual letter of progress toward tenure and promotion. In addition, adjunct faculty expressed a strong desire for the chair and/or department faculty to provide periodic feedback and evaluation of their teaching performance for personal and professional growth and development.

In the area of programmatic assessments, we recommend that all program students complete the CPCE exit exam, not just students in the clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) program. The CPCE measures the 8 core areas of the CACREP standards, so the CPCE can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of all program students. We also strongly encourage dispositional assessments periodically throughout programs for all students. Assessment of dispositions is conducted currently at admission for all students, then only for CMHC students moving to field experience. Consider conducting dispositional assessments at end of practicum and end of internship for all students, including doctoral students.

2. How is the field and practice of counseling changing and how can the department meet these needs?

Many colleges of education are adopting funded or fundable “centers of excellence” models, which become a hub for fundable faculty research. FAU’s new strategic plan merges nicely with such models. In particular, the neuropsychology and community engagement/outreach pillars have great potential, especially when considering the possibility of restarting the training clinic. FAU counselor education faculty have already embraced outcome research and evidence-based (research-based) practices as a program foundation. As such, FAU faculty actually are ahead of

the counseling profession curve, which has only recently begun to promote EBPs in earnest. EBPs are a potential center of excellence for FAU faculty and students. In addition, given FAU's geographic proximity to hurricane trajectories, a second potential center of excellence could be the faculty focus on crisis intervention, trauma counseling, and emergency preparedness.

3. *If the department is to fulfill its aspirational goal of "Transforming Counseling," what additional resources are needed?*

Additional resources will be a continuing challenge given the university's systemic funding issues. We support Dean Bristor's move to a survey salary model for starting salaries. Hiring at market is critical to attracting the quality faculty needed to build an outstanding program. As mentioned earlier, fully funding all 12 lines while maintaining or slightly increasing current student numbers is key. This will become particularly important when the proposed law passes to require a school counselor in every K-12 school, leading first to increased, and then stable enrollments. FAU needs to be prepared for the required faculty capacity. Two searches are currently under way, and we recommend additional rehabilitation counseling and substance use counseling faculty positions. One of these four lines could be used to staff/support restarting the training clinic. A move from the current 3/3 teaching load to the proposed 3/2 model starting in Fall 2016 will help faculty research and grant productivity. However, an immediate course release is needed for a faculty member of Dr. Vallares's caliber to integrate the 2016 CACREP standards (SLOs) into the LiveText system.

It is essential to systematically incentivize the continued pursuit of external funding. Areas of strength for FAU faculty deserving of grant support are evidence-based counseling practices, rehabilitation counseling, substance use interventions, the mathematical model for understanding therapeutic alliance, and crisis response and intervention. These goals will allow the counselor education faculty to continue to proceed toward deeper community engagement. Coupled with substantial recognition programs for faculty and students, FAU is poised to make large and continuous gains in the grant procurement arena. Likewise, we encourage counselor education faculty and students to focus on conducting the actual evidence-based research, in addition to promoting its use as consumers.

Some faculty wanted to move back to full tuition waivers for 6 students to attract the best possible doctoral candidates. But working doctoral students are fast becoming the national norm, and probably a sustainable model to promote at FAU (12 half-time GA positions). Still, as additional future funding becomes available, consider offering a staggered model, similar to what is standard practice in undergraduate financial aid: some may be ½ time, some ¾, and some full.

Finally, colleges of education all over the country are promoting interdisciplinary research and grant team collaborations with faculty from other colleges. Accessing K-12 students and agency clinic participants is becoming more challenging with high stakes testing and managed care policies in place, thus making economy of scale projects more attractive. The College of Education should also promote interdisciplinary collaborations between counselor education students, teacher education candidates, and principal candidates whenever possible.

Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a great deal to celebrate in the accomplishments and future potential of this outstanding Department of Counselor Education. The faculty members are very productive scholars who submit many grants for external funding. They are excellent teachers who generate accolades from students. They are also faithful and hard-working servants of both the university and their counseling professional organizations. The quality of their programmatic offerings are mirrored by accreditation from CACREP, CORE, and CAEP. In spite of systemic underfunding, enrollments are stable and faculty and student comradery substantial. Many opportunities are on the horizon and faculty continuously scan for these possibilities, and in many ways are on the forefront of important counseling initiatives, such as outcome research, EBPs, a mathematical model for understanding and promoting the therapeutic alliance, spirituality in counseling, and crisis intervention. With continued administrative support and enhanced future funding, FAU's Department of Counselor Education will continue to thrive and rise in the national rankings.