ASSESSMENT REPORT
COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

MASTER'S DEGREE LEVEL

Period Covered: Academic Year 2008-2009

Date Submitted: September 16, 2009

MISSION AND GOALS

Institutional Mission: NMHU is a diverse comprehensive university serving the global community by integrating education, research, public service, and economic development, while celebrating our distinctive New Mexico cultures and traditions. We achieve this through a University-wide commitment to quality student-centered education.

Program Mission: The mission of the NMHU Counseling and Guidance Program is to train entry-level counselors and prepare them for positions in community service agencies as **mental health counselors**, in school systems as **school counselors**, or in rehabilitation settings as **rehabilitation counselors**. Throughout their training program the emphasis is on the **growth** and **development** of each student to promote a **positive self-concept** and to maximize **individual potential** in all domains, personal and professional. The program is **student-centered** and **outcome-based**, seeking to train individuals who are skilled in working with **culturally diverse populations** and who are **ethical, competent, and reflective practitioners.** Proactive knowledgeable professional counselors are crucial to the growth of the profession.

<u>**Criteria of Program Success:**</u>
Based on the program mission statement there are three criteria by which the success of the Counseling and Guidance Program is measured.

1. Students are adequately prepared to pass one or more of the three licensing exams: the NCE (National Counselor Exam), the PED School Counselor Exam, and the CRCC (Council for Rehabilitation Counselor Certification) Exam.

2. Students are adequately trained to be effective counselors.

3. Students are adequately prepared to enter the work settings of their professional orientation.

Intended Student (Educational) Outcomes:
The achievement of the above criteria of program success is demonstrated by attaining the following student outcomes.

1. To demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge base of the Counseling profession.

2. To demonstrate the effective use of counseling skills.

3. To demonstrate the appropriate application of a counseling theory to a specific problem.

Means of Determining Program Success and Student Outcomes

Success Criterion 1: Students are adequately prepared to pass one or more of the three licensing exams.

Student Outcome 1: To demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge base of the Counseling profession.

First Means of Program and Student Assessment for Success:

1. **The Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam (CPCE)** is administered each semester to students in their first or second semester of Internship. It measures the student's overall mastery of **eight core areas of knowledge** determined by the **National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)** as being necessary for entrance into the Counseling profession. These areas constitute the **general knowledge base of the Counseling profession**, and are tested in **New Mexico's Counseling and Therapy Practice board's** licensing exam for the **LMHC (Licensed Mental Health Counselor)** exam. They also constitute the **areas of competency** for the **School Counselor License** as defined by the **Public Education Department (PED).**

Analysis of Data Collected:

We administer the CPCE in both the fall and spring semesters. The exams are sent in to the NBCC for scoring, and the scores are printed out and sent back to us. We give the same exam to students at both Rio Rancho and main campus. But we no longer receive scores in one report. Rio Rancho has its own report and the main campus has its own.

In the fall of 2008 we administered the CPCE to 9 students with the result that 7 passed and 2 had to retake the exam the following semester, spring 2009. We generally have more students taking the CPCE in the spring than in the fall, and spring 2009 was no exception. We had 11 students take it in that semester with

the result that all but 2 passed. Both of these students were given additional essay exams in the area(s) of their lowest scores.

When we examine the scores we conclude that those who did not pass simply did not prepare well for the exam. Those who did pass, however, seemed to have their lowest scores in the area of Career and Lifestyle Development. Since this is true for both the fall and spring administrations of the CPCE, we have to look at the value of teaching online courses.

Use of Data for Program Modification:

We try to identify those content areas of the CPCE (there are 8 discrete content areas) that have the lowest overall score. With these two administrations we see that the area of Career and Lifestyle Development had the most frequent of low scores.

We are going to try to offer this course in the classroom again. We suspect that the online format of this course does not allow the students sufficient means to master the material.

Success Criterion 2: Students are adequately trained to be effective counselor.

Student Outcome 2: To demonstrate the effective use of counseling skills.

First Means of Program and Student Assessment for Success:

1. **Internship evaluations** are completed by the student's **Internship site supervisor** at midterm and at the end of each semester in which the student is enrolled in the Internship. The evaluations measure the composite skills of effective counseling that include the ability to **assess the client's problem,** the ability to **formulate an appropriate and accurate treatment plan**, and the ability to **attain the treatment goals** through the effective and appropriate use of the **interactive skills** that comprise the **essence of counseling**.

Analysis of Data Collected:

The Internship evaluation forms are turned in at midterm and at the end of each semester. They are completed by the student's site supervisor. In the fall, 2008, there were 13 students in either the first or second semester of their internships at main campus, 18 at Rio, and 2 at Farmington. In the spring, 2009, there were 14 at the main campus, 7 at Rio, and 2 at Farmington. The evaluations showed that our students were consistently performing effectively in their various counseling roles. If there were any concerns that emerged at the midterm evaluation they were adequately handled. In these cases all it took was for the faculty supervisors to meet with those students and their performance in the area of concern improved.

We have received feedback from a few placement sites suggesting that our students are quite well trained to provide quality professional services.

Use of Data for Program Modification:

Since the evaluations showed a general satisfactory to high level of student performance at their internship sites, there was little need for modification in any particular course. The most we did was to meet with the students who received comments of concern by their supervisors to encourage them in that area. We then gave clarifying talks to the interns collectively in the Internship Seminars, reiterating the expectations of the internship experience.

Success Criterion 3: Students are adequately prepared to enter the work settings of their professional orientation.

First Means of Program Assessment for Success:

1. We send out an **Alumni Survey** every three years to students who have graduated within that three-year period. This instrument measures the **student's overall level of satisfaction** with the training and preparation he and she had received. Included is a scale that reports the student's perception of the **relevance of the courses** as well as an assessment of how well the program **prepared the student for entrance into professional work settings**.

   We have examined the option of surveying every two years, or even with each graduating class. But we have determined that three years is a more realistic schedule in order to obtain accurate assessment with the various scales on the survey. First, the average for most students to **complete their program of study** is **three years**. Second, it can take up to **several months** before a graduate **finds employment in a counseling setting**, be it in mental health, school, or rehabilitation. Thus, with the time spacing between surveys students should have a better estimate of **how well they were prepared** for entering the Counseling profession.

Analysis of Data Collected:

We had sent out our Alumni Survey early in the fall of 2007 and the returns were completed by the end of that semester. Out of 75 sent out we had 22 returns. We look at the evaluations in a few distinct areas, advisement effectiveness, course relevance, and professional preparedness. The vast majority of students rated the effectiveness of faculty advisement in the high moderate to maximum range. Only 6 students suggested that they had difficulty in taking a few courses when they needed to. The courses were likewise rated in the high moderate to maximum

range of relevance. Of the 22 respondents, 17 indicated that they had found work and 14 students thought that they had been adequately prepared to enter the counseling profession.

Use of Data for Program Modification

Based on a few items on the survey we see that 12 students of the 22 suggest having more evening and weekend classes. While all of our courses are held either at 3 PM or at 6 PM once per week, only a few of our elective courses have been on weekends. We are in the process of looking at the scheduling and sequencing of our courses with the idea that we may offer more courses either on weekends or in the evenings via the internet. The courses in the Rehabilitation track are being offered online and via ITV more often now. This is having mixed consequences. On the one hand it is convenient for many students who live in outlying areas. But on the other, we wonder about the quality of learning that is accomplished in internet courses.

The fact that our courses follow the standards of CACREP (Council on Counseling and Related Educational Programs), PED (Public Education Department), and CORE (Council on Rehabilitation Education) means that all students who go through our program in any of its three tracks need to qualify for licensure and/or certification. Since these licenses are based on standardized exams, it is essential that the students master the course material.

Student Outcome 3: To demonstrate the appropriate application of a counseling theory to a specific problem.

First Means of Student Outcome Assessment for Success:

1. The **Professional Paper** is the student's final major paper in which the student **thoroughly researches a specific counseling theory**. The paper is of professional quality in content and format, using the **APA Publication Manual** as the standard. Included in the paper is research into a **specific problem** that is typically encountered in the counseling setting, such as **depression, anxiety, or impulse-control disorders**. The third part of the paper covers **research into the application of the theory to the problem**. All parts of the Professional Paper are taken **from the literature** and there are **no reports** from actual cases that the student has been working with.

Analysis of Data Collected:

Since initiating the Professional Paper we have been generally satisfied with the product that most students produce. At the same time, however, we have seen some difficulty that our students are having with the discipline of researching a particular counseling theory. The difficulty seems to be around the ability to focus their thinking and clearly express their ideas. As a result, the faculty has had to

closely monitor the students' progress in the writing of the paper, and we have had to do several editings of their papers along the way.

With this concern we have noticed over the last several semesters that the quality of writing has decreased significantly with our students. While we are aware that this is not a problem unique to the Counseling program, that it is found across the university, we are sufficiently concerned as to institute a writing sample from the student in his or her initial application packet for admission into the Counseling program.

Use of Data for Program Modification:

We created a 1 semester-hour course called Professional Paper about a year ago. It is for the explicit purpose of helping our students write their papers. For the past year we have left it up to the student as to whether he or she would want to take this course. However, we are going to make this course mandatory for those students whose writing skills need significant work to produce a quality Professional Paper.

In this course we meet regularly with the students, guiding them through the process of writing their Professional Papers. This includes a close review of the APA writing guidelines, exercises in organizing thoughts and major concepts into headings and subheadings, and work in grammatical structure of sentences and paragraphs.

Second Means of Student Outcome Assessment for Success:

1. The student's **Oral Exam** is based on the **Professional Paper** and is the **student's presentation** of his or her findings in doing the research. The Oral Exam is also the **forum for questions** from the committee members regarding the **student's overall mastery** of the **coursework** and **training** received in the program.

Analysis of Data Collected:

The greatest problem we have encountered has been in the actual writing of the Professional Paper. Not only does there seem to be a major difficulty in writing coherent sentences and paragraphs, but there are also serious problems in organizing thoughts through writing. While some of this difficulty may be due to the increased abstract and theoretical content of the paper, we believe that most of the problems are the result of the students' general difficulty in organizing thoughts and expressing their research in clear structured ways.

As a result of these concerns we faculty have found ourselves having to read, edit, and revise the students' Professional Papers several times before they are of sufficient quality to be distributed to the Orals committee members. This has

increased the time and effort we faculty put into our advising, teaching, and supervising schedules.

<u>Use of Data for Program Modification</u>:

We see that this problem has to be approached directly and with all of the students who are sitting for their Oral Exam in their first and second semesters of Internship. We are hopeful that using the Professional Paper course will rectify this major problem and will make the writing of the Professional Paper a quality learning experience rather than the hardship that several students experience it as.