



November 24, 2015

To the Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council,

As noted in the MPCAC manual, an interim report is expected during the fourth year of accreditation (November 2015). It is requested that we document 1) *any other changes to the program*, 2) *department*, and 3) *institution* that affect the master's program, and 4) *address any other concerns mentioned in the site visit report*.

#### *Changes to the Program*

- No major changes have occurred to our program. We have commented on minor changes to the program below.

#### *Changes to the Department*

- We have hired two tenure-track clinical faculty members.
  - Dr. David Pan was hired in 2012 and is a licensed clinical psychologist in New Mexico. He graduated from the University of Southern California in 2011 and specializes in research on brief interventions for depression and anxiety and culturally diverse populations. Dr. Pan has taken on teaching the following graduate courses in our clinical program: Introduction to Counseling and Therapy, Advanced Psychopathology, Behavior Therapy and Assessment, Advanced Developmental Psychology, and Practicum.
  - Dr. Lara Heflin was hired in 2013 and is a licensed clinical psychologist in New Mexico. She graduated from the University of Southern California in 2009 and conducts research on the neurocognitive effects of cancer and older adults. She teaches the following courses in our clinical program: Introduction to Counseling and Therapy, Personality Assessment, Professional Ethics and Issues, Memory and Cognition, and Practicum.
  - Both of their CVs are attached.

#### *Changes to the Institution*

- New Mexico Highlands University had a changeover in presidential leadership starting in July 2015. Our new university president, Dr. Sam Minner, has been a strong supporter of graduate programs and we do not expect any institutional changes to affect the operation of our Master of Science Program.



*Other Concerns from Site Visit Report*

The following “*Recommendations and Suggested Areas of Development*” were noted in the Site Visit Report from Oct 9-12, 2011:

1. It is highly recommended that the program gain approval for immediate hiring of a clinical faculty member, and complete a successful search, in order to meet curricular and training needs. Consideration should also be made for hiring a second clinical faculty member in the near future.
  - a. **Response:** As mentioned earlier, NMHU has been successful in hiring two tenure-track clinical faculty members since 2011. This information was passed on to MPCAC and our accreditation length was increased from five years to ten years.
  
2. The program should consider means of improving attrition rates, and review admission requirements, focusing upon developing more specific provisional admission standards.
  - a. **Response:** The baseline admission requirements remain at having a 3.0 overall GPA and a 3.0 Psychology GPA. However, in addition to these basic requirements, our program handbook states that “*Successful applicants should demonstrate the ability to perform well in a challenging academic program, the interest and ability to perform sound scientific research, and the personal characteristics and integrity necessary for the practice of psychology. The successful applicant will possess goals and a career orientation that are congruent with the psychology program’s philosophy and emphasis.*” We modified our graduate application to require that applicants submit a writing sample, preferably from an upper division Psychology class, and a 500 word statement of educational goals and objectives addressing *research* interests and experience in order to better evaluate whether applicants can meet the academic rigor that our program expects.
  - b. **Response:** Our program handbook states that provisional admission may be an option for “*students who do not meet these requirements (overall and Psychology GPA of 3.0) but who demonstrate other strengths may be admitted to the program on a provisional status while they make up deficiencies.*” Provisional admission to our program has been rare, but works well as the faculty consult about applicant deficiencies on a case-by-case basis.
  - c. **Response:** It is believed that the elevated admission requirements will have a positive impact on student attrition as those who are admitted to the program will be more prepared for graduate work.



- d. **Response:** Given that completing the thesis requirement is the most difficult barrier to student completion of the MS degree, significant steps have been taken to help students along the way. A requirement for 602 Psychological Methods class, taken in the Spring semester of the first year, is to write a literature review proposal and methods section for thesis. We have been more stringent about ensuring that thesis proposals are orally defended to the program faculty before the research is undertaken. Finally, a writing class is offered in which students may bring in their thesis for ongoing correction and improvement.
3. The 12 credit hour teaching load for clinical faculty is significant and may have a negative impact upon supervision and faculty productivity. Administration appears willing to pursue options including compensatory support for supervision and/or thesis direction, and these options should be pursued.
  - a. **Response:** Reduction of teaching load has been pursued university-wide but no changes have occurred since 2011. A one credit course release has been granted university-wide for each completed Master's thesis that a faculty member was the chair.
4. Consideration should be made toward enhancing the professional identity of students by encouraging membership in NAMP and other professional organizations.
  - a. **Response:** Students have been encouraged to join professional organizations and some progress has been made as many graduate students are presenting their research at professional conferences (i.e., Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Western Psychological Association) and learning about the benefits of professional membership.
5. The development of a clinical training lab would seem significant and the program should be encouraged to expand this opportunity as a means to enhance in-house clinical training experiences, including the use of videotaped interactions to support the development of clinical microskills.
  - a. **Response:** Since 2011, the clinical training lab has developed into a vital resource for in-house clinical training experiences particularly for *Introduction to Counseling and Therapy* and *Behavior Therapy and Assessment*. The technology available in the training lab is beneficial not only for clinical training (i.e., using one-way mirrors in observation rooms to allow students to watch faculty use therapeutic techniques with volunteers, use rooms as settings for students to



practice clinical skills with each other and volunteers), but also as a resource for clinical research that students and faculty conduct.

6. Graduate assistantship support is significant, provides an effective recruiting tool, and should be continued.
  - a. **Response:** We continue to provide as much financial support to our students as we can through graduate assistantships.
  
7. Providing release time or some other compensatory consideration for the coordinator of the graduate program would further enhance this position and recognize the efforts involved in this position, and make it compatible with similar master's-level training programs.
  - a. **Response:** At this time, Graduate Coordinators are not granted release time for their duties at this university. The program is currently pursuing recognition as a department, and if successful, a Chair of the department would take on the duties of the Graduate Coordinator and would be compensated with a 3-credit course release and a summer stipend.
  
8. The program should consider developing a Community Advisory Board comprised of professional and appropriate lay persons. Regular gatherings with this Board can enhance the quality of a program by strengthening community relationships, and by developing an understanding of community needs and addressing these needs as appropriate.
  - a. **Response:** This suggestion is currently being considered by the program. We continue to have strong relationships with the community, particularly through the strength of our outside practicum placements. Our current plan is to develop an advisory board made up of our field supervisors, who come from a variety of clinical settings in the community. This would serve the purpose of developing strong relationship with our field supervisors as well as providing a mechanism to ensure that community needs are understood and addressed in our program.

Please do not hesitate to contact the program if you have additional questions about this Interim Report.

Best,



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