



**2022 Academic Program Review External Review Report**

**Department of Counselor Education**

**Review Team Members:**

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**Part 1: Overview**

**A. Degree Programs by Level**

**Bachelor’s (BA):** None

**Master’s (MA):** Master’s of Education - Clinical Mental Health Counseling  
Master’s of Education - Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling  
Master’s of Education - School Counseling

**Doctoral (Ph.D.):** Counseling

**B. Summary of Visit**

This report provides the findings of the review team for the academic program review of FAU’s Counselor Education Program based on a review of the academic program review report, web materials, additional materials requested and emailed to the team, and interviews. The interviews with department stakeholders, ranging from students to faculty, occurred via Zoom on January 24 and 25, 2023. In addition to these group meetings, the review team met with the following individuals separately during the site visit:

- Dr. Steve Silverman, Dean, College of Education
- Dr. Bill Kalies, Interim Dean, Graduate Studies
- Dr. Karin Scarpinato, Executive Associate Vice President for Research
- Ms. Debra Szabo, Director of Assessment, Accreditation, and Articulations

Each meeting lasted from 30 to 75 minutes and provided the review team with much of the insight incorporated into this academic program review report.

**C. Major changes since the last program review**

Since the last program review, the Department of Counselor Education underwent multiple changes related to faculty, accreditation, and the formal establishment of rigorous, measurable student learning outcomes. The major changes since the last program review include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Two of the accrediting bodies merged between 2014 and 2017, which resulted in the department converting the Rehabilitation Counseling program to a Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Program. The program was fully converted and accredited through 10/31/2023, and

- is currently undergoing re-accreditation.
2. Approximately around the time of the previous academic program review , the department hired three faculty members that have contributed extensively to elevating the program through research, service, and teaching. The two new faculty hires will be replacement hires for faculty that have retired since the previous academic program review.
  3. The entire department’s programs at the Master’s and Doctoral levels are also currently undergoing re-accreditation, with their self-study portion of the process concluding in May, 2022. The accrediting body, CACREP, will be conducting a site visit in Spring of 2023, and meeting in Summer of 2023 to determine re-accreditation.
  4. Despite multiple competing programs in the area, the department’s accreditation by CACREP elevates their degree programs above competing programs in the region.
  5. The department developed a comprehensive mission statement driven by three overarching goals to accomplish its mission
    - a. The mission statement is: *Our mission is to educate students for professional counseling practice and leadership in local, national, and international domains. Mindful that education extends beyond coursework, faculty and students collaborate with schools, communities, agencies and other professionals, to conduct research, and provide services in accord with the highest ethical and professional standards and values in response to the personal, educational, and vocational needs of individuals and families living in diverse and multicultural environments including persons with disabilities. Faculty aspire to produce new knowledge and relevant research, create dynamic atmospheres for learning, and inspire students to actualize their potential, all with the goal of achieving just solutions to human concerns.*
    - b. The three goals to achieve this mission are creating an ethically-informed professional identity; carrying out a disciplined scholarly inquiry and research agenda; and a commitment to efficacious professional service.
  6. A large portion of the academic program review report discusses the establishment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) to ensure that the program is meeting and/or exceeding its obligation to accrediting bodies, the State of Florida, FAU, and its students in terms of the provision of education. The program has an extensive evaluation process of SLOs at the master's and doctoral levels. Their process is multifaceted and addresses all the critical curricular, practice, and dispositional standards we (as a profession) look for in an emerging counselor/counselor educator.

## Part 2: Findings

### A. Strengths

1. 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.
  - c. Adjuncts also discussed continuing research with faculty and/or collaborating on new research with faculty.
2. Students discussed the program as being extremely supportive and having a very connected cohort. One major theme discussed multiple times revolved around the opportunities for developing and/or expanding leadership abilities in multiple courses and experiences.
3. Training grant
  - a. Creates community engagement by strengthening connections to the community between FAU, Counseling Education, and addressing community mental needs.
4. Highly involved with professional organizations and editorships, without any financial or related compensation such as course releases.
5. The Early Career Academy sponsored by the Division of Research is extremely helpful in fostering the ability to pursue and write grant proposals.
6. Faculty credit for chairing dissertations creates an incentive to chair and ensure that students graduate to get compensation.
7. Great reputation – 90 quality applicants with minimal recruitment competing for 18 spots in their CMHC program.
8. 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.
9. Many of the faculty have obtained tenure and promotion at FAU, demonstrating long-term

stability of the faculty and the program. Additionally, the department's faculty as a whole are the most research-productive and grant-productive in the College of Education.

10. New dean is very supportive of the program and faculty in trying to change the culture for the better.
11. The self-study report and visit demonstrate that the Counseling program as a whole has a robust assessment plan that is aligned with CACREP standards. They have identified student learning outcomes for the core and specialty areas. Furthermore, the program uses the data generated from the SLOs to make programmatic decisions and improvements.

## B. Weaknesses

1. **Doctoral-level Statistics Course within Program**
  - a. One of the only major hurdles discussed by all students stemmed from the quantitative statistics course required and taught by the Math Department. The course is a pure statistics course without direct examples and application to data and topics in Counseling Education. As a result, students have many issues trying to get through the class, even with the tutoring available. Whether a current faculty member or one of the new hires could teach a quantitative class related to counseling to address this issue is unclear.
2. Programmatic activities somewhere on campus if space is unavailable within the department.
  - a. We know that there is a conference room available to students when not in use, but there is a minimal amount of dedicated space within the department and building for students to meet and/or congregate. Possible programming activities elsewhere on campus provide opportunities for strengthening student cohesiveness.
3. Clerical support
  - a. 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. 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.
  - b. Additional support is needed for clinical placements, internships, practicum, and related administrative work
4. 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.
5. Need for 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.
6. Discretionary funding for travel to conferences, software, and related uses above and beyond current levels. The current levels - \$700 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. While it is preferred that grants fund these types of expenses, for new faculty, these amounts only partially cover expenses.
7. Lack of course/program diversification. The course offerings are standard related to core CACREP course requirements, but the program needs to diversify course offerings to better differentiate their programs from competing programs.

## C. Recommendations

1. 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. Additionally, there should be a role for counseling within future health initiatives, but it will require working with the College of Medicine and the College of Nursing to define this role and develop partnerships.
2. 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.
3. Considering the large amount of funding brought in by training grants, the department should continue to explore and/or work with the Division of Research to determine how to recoup a greater share of those funds.
4. Develop a comprehensive strategic plan to better focus/tailor the Ph.D. program and Master's programs related to the goal of "Transforming Counseling" outlined throughout the self-study report. This strategic plan should incorporate ways to address weaknesses from the self-study report, this external review report, and any additional issues that may need to be addressed after the program is re-accredited in the coming year. 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.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the Counselor Education program appears to be making great strides as a collective unit. 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. As the program prepares for its accreditation visit and subsequent transition to the new 2023 CACREP standards, we anticipate positive changes to its curricular offerings that will keep FAU graduates at the forefront of their profession.

### **Questions from the department**

There were no specific questions included in the report from the department to the academic program review team.