

School Counselors: Supporters of Academic Rigor (SOAR) University of North Florida

UNF SOAR School Counseling Program Portfolio

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INTRODUCTION TO SOAR AND UNF

School Counselors: Supporters Of Academic Rigor (SOAR) is a partnership between the University of North Florida (UNF) and the Duval County Public Schools with outreach efforts to St. Johns, Clay, Putnam and Nassau counties with the expected outcome of preparing counselors who will practice as advocates, leaders, and academic advisors helping to create the conditions necessary for academic achievement for all children.

The counselor education program at UNF is embedded in a college and university committed to K-12 school district partnerships for educational reform. The University of North Florida, located in Jacksonville, Florida (Duval County), has joined forces with the Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) to restructure the preparation program for urban teachers and school counselors. For the past 12 years the College of Education and Human Services and DCPS have worked in partnership to increase achievement for public school students in urban classrooms and redesign the preparation of urban teachers and school counselors. Supported by over \$4,000,000 in grants, the UNF/DCPS partnership has become a national prototype for successful urban university/school district collaboration.

The University of North Florida was founded in 1972 and currently has a student body of over 15,000 students enrolled in 90 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Students come from all over the United States and from over 90 foreign countries. UNF emphasizes quality undergraduate and graduate education while playing a vital role in the cultural, economic and civic fabric of the Jacksonville community.

Admissions to the UNF SOAR School Counseling Program is twofold:

- 1. Admissions to the SOAR program through interview, public speech and a review of a portfolio containing information specific to 21st Century School Counseling, and**
- 2. Admissions to the Graduate School Program**

SCHOOL COUNSELING:

The School Counseling program focuses on preparing counselors to meet the academic, career and personal/social needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The School Counseling program will prepare school counselors to:

- serve as advocates, educational leaders, team members, counselors, and consultants to maximize opportunities for students to succeed academically;
- develop in students a commitment to achievement and provide conditions that enable students to accomplish their goals;
- help students recognize their potential and enhance their capacity to make academic and career decisions;
- serve as leaders and stewards of equity and achievement and be able to impact institutional and environmental barriers impeding students' progress;
- provide all students with academic and career advising in order for them to form values, attitudes, and behaviors conducive to their educational and academic success: and,
- manage resources and build partnerships by enlisting the support of parents, agencies, and community members.

The SOAR School Counseling Program is accredited by the **Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)**. Graduates of the SOAR program will have fulfilled the educational requirements for Florida certification as school counselors and for the English as a Second Language requirement for school counselors.

ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM:

The School Counseling program is organized according to a cohort model. Students are interviewed for the program each February through May for the cohort which will begin the following summer semester. Applicants:

- must take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and have a combined verbal and quantitative score of 1000 **OR** they must have a 3.0 average for the last 60 hours of their undergraduate study
- are required to have completed at least 6 semester hours in the behavioral sciences (all with grades of A or B)

Applicants must also complete the SOAR Portfolio which contains:

- 3 provided reference forms, one of which needs to be from your school principal and/or vice principal, or for non-educators a current or recent supervisor
- a professional goals statement
- written reactions to journal articles and school scenarios
- unofficial copies of transcripts from all institutions previously attended*
- unofficial copy of GRE scores*

Applicants will interview with a selection committee comprised of program faculty and practicing school counselors and will deliver a brief public speech on the achievement gap.

Currently, Sylvan Learning Center (1-888-EDUCATE) and the UNF Testing Center (www.unf.edu/dept/testing/index.html) are where you can take the GRE. Call early to set up a test date. Occasionally, they have to assign a test date that is after the application deadline. If this happens to you, then you can submit your score later, but please know that your score will need to be submitted before the

interview. The GRE is the only piece of the information that you can submit late. You are given your score immediately after taking the test. Please carefully record your score and put the unofficial score in your portfolio.

***OFFICIAL COPIES OF TRANSCRIPTS AND GRE SCORES MUST BE FORWARDED TO THE UNF GRADUATE SCHOOL AS PART OF THE GRADUTE DEGREE ADMISSIONS PROCESS.**

CONTINUANCE IN THE PROGRAM:

All cohort members will be admitted on a trial basis; at the end of the first semester instructors will provide written feedback regarding each student's progress. Final admission will occur at the end of the second semester. The SOAR program faculty is ethically obligated to monitor each student's performance throughout his/her studies. Completion of the program is dependent not only upon academic performance but also on the demonstration of appropriate interpersonal skills, professional demeanor, and social and ethical judgment. Faculty will advise students in cases where they receive grades lower than a "B" and/or are not performing satisfactorily.

**School Counselors: Supporters of Academic Rigor (SOAR) Application Checklist
University of North Florida**

*This page needs to be the first one in your portfolio.
(Forms can be found online at www.unf.edu; Search **SOAR**. If you are unable to access the web page call 904-620-1826.)*

Name _____ S.S.# _____

Address _____ N # _____

Telephone Numbers (H) _____ (W) _____
(C) _____

Email Address _____

I attended a SOAR Information Session _____ YES _____ NO

Your **SOAR School Counseling Admissions Portfolio** should contain these items.
Please check them off and place them in this order.

- _____ Student Statement of Understanding
- _____ Unofficial Transcript from all institutions previously attended
- _____ Unofficial copy of GRE exam score (verbal and quantitative)
- _____ Three Provided Reference Forms
- _____ Individualized School Experience Contract
- _____ Professional Goals Statement
- _____ Journal Article
- _____ School Scenario Response

Your application for the UNF OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS should include the following.
Please check each item that you have submitted to that office.

- _____ UNF Application for admission – Graduate Study
- _____ Official Transcript from all institutions previously attended
- _____ Official GRE Scores

Portfolio materials submitted become the property of the SOAR program. Please make sure that you keep copies of all your work.

**School Counselors: Supporters of Academic Rigor (SOAR)
University of North Florida**

STUDENT STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

We are delighted that you have chosen to pursue graduate study in the UNF SOAR School Counseling Program. It is our goal to identify outstanding students and to support them throughout their program of study.

Each admission day, SOAR candidates will be given an opportunity through their portfolio to present their personal qualifications. The SOAR Selection Team will nominate those candidates for admissions that we believe demonstrate the personal qualities needed to be an outstanding school counselor and who have the best opportunity for success. All nominated students will be admitted on a trial basis with final admissions coming at the close of the second semester with written feedback on the student's progress at the end of the first semester. Beyond the second semester, the SOAR Faculty is ethically obligated to safeguard the school counseling profession by continuously monitoring student performance. Completion of the program is dependent not only upon academic performance, but the demonstration of appropriate interpersonal skills, professional demeanor, and social and ethical judgment. Grades are only part of what is needed for a student to be successful in the SOAR Program. If concerns arise, students will be directed to do one of the following: participate in a writing and/or speech course, drop temporarily from the program, perform voluntary or paid work in a school, repeat a course, seek personal counseling, or withdraw from the program permanently. As a student, you have the right to appeal any grade or decision about your standing in the program.

The SOAR Program is designed to accommodate working students who have busy lives. However, a challenging, demanding two years will be required from each of you. Please carefully weigh the commitment against your personal and professional demands. Attendance in each class is paramount and high quality work is a given. Because of the need for quality school counselors we MUST graduate every student who begins the program. The SOAR program relies on a continuation of skill building rather than discreet courses. It will be difficult for you to sit out a semester or to take only a portion of the semester's course work. Students who have emergencies will be accommodated to the extent possible with a new sequence of courses. Each situation will be addressed individually.

Active class participation is needed. Courses are designed for self-reflection and self-evaluation. Also, class discussion will be frank and open to help you become comfortable dealing with uncomfortable subjects such as the examination of "isms", e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Confidentiality, professionalism, willingness to be open and forthrightness are necessary.

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I have carefully read the above statement and I agree to the terms as outlined.

Student's Signature

Date

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University of North Florida

REFERENCE FORM

To the Applicant: Please copy and distribute these forms to the people you have chosen to be your references. You must have a total of three (3) references to complete the portfolio. If you are a teacher, one reference should be from your building principal and/or vice principal. If you are not employed in a school one reference needs to be a current or recent supervisor. Provide your references with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to facilitate the forms return to you. These envelopes must remain sealed and be placed in your portfolio.

_____ I give permission for this information to remain confidential and not be made available to me.

_____ I reserve the right to view this information.

Applicant's Signature _____

Name of Applicant _____

Name of Reference _____

Title _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

A Note to the Reference: Thank you for your willingness to serve as an official reference for the above named applicant for admissions into the School Counseling Program at the University of North Florida. Your comments and observations are an essential part of our admissions decision. We ask for your honest and direct feedback regarding the qualifications of the applicant. This form has been designed to aid you in this process. Please complete the rating scales and whenever possible provide narrative comments that address specific behaviors or traits you have observed in this applicant.

How long have you know the applicant? From_____ To_____

Please indicate how you know the applicant:

Please assess the characteristics of the candidate using the scale below. Where appropriate, please provide an example of a specific activity or action performed by the candidate that you believe supports your rating.

- 4-** high level, top 10%
- 3-** above average, top 25%
- 2-** average level, top 50%
- 1-** low level, bottom 50%
- d/k-** don't know, no basis for judgment

Willingness to take risks.....1	2	3	4	DK
comments/examples:				
Ability as a leader.....1	2	3	4	DK
comments/examples:				
Ability to advocate for students.....1	2	3	4	DK
comments/examples:.				
Promotes and accepts diversity.....1	2	3	4	DK
comments/examples:				
Committed to educational equity for all students.....1	2	3	4	DK
Comments/examples:				
Collaborates with others effectively.....1	2	3	4	DK
comments/examples:				

Understands and uses the political landscape
of institutions to advocate for change.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Can envision a goal and develop strategies
to achieve it.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Is an effective public speaker.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Intellectual ability.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Writing skills.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Please rate the candidate on overall sense of his/her
potential as a school counselor.....1 2 3 4 DK
 comments/examples:

Additional comments regarding the applicant's ability and potential for being an effective
school counselor:

Signature

Date

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INDIVIDUALIZED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE CONTRACT

To the Applicant: As an applicant for the school counseling program it would be desirable for you to have some sort of experience, either voluntary or paid employment, within a school setting. Applicants who do not have such experience may be asked to contract with us to gain a specified number of hours of experience in a school. If you are admitted into the program and need school experience your program sponsor will discuss the details with you. You will have until the end of the first year of your graduate studies to fulfill your school experience requirement. Please note however, that the terms of your individualized learning contract may be subject to revision during the first semester of graduate studies depending upon your needs and performance in the program.

Name _____

Please indicate all school experience to date:

Volunteer (ie. PTA Board Member, room mother, tutor).

Please specify your role, your function/duties, the location(s) and the date(s)

Employment (list current and previous school employment)

Please specify your role, your function/duties, the location(s) and the date(s)

Fingerprinting

Have you been fingerprinted by **Duval County Public Schools**? YES ____ If so, when? ____
NO ____

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

.....
School experience to be gained by the applicant:

Date to be completed by:

Student's Signature:

Sponsor's Signature:

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WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Directions to the Applicant: Please respond to the following three writing assignments. Clearly indicate the assignments and include in the portfolio.

1. PROFESSIONAL GOALS STATEMENT:

Directions to the applicant: In 500 words or less, address the following two areas: (a) an explanation of why you are seeking admissions to the UNF SOAR School Counseling Program, and (b) a description of any leadership activities in which you have been involved as a volunteer or professional. Please type your response.

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2. JOURNAL ARTICLE

Directions to the Applicant: Please go to the following online journal article and respond to the following questions. Be sure to type your response. Do not exceed three pages double spaced. (If you click on the print button and print a copy it's much easier to read.)

Advocacy as a critical role for urban school counselors: Working toward equity and social justice, *Professional School Counseling*, February, 2005

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KOC/is_3_8/ai_n10301212/pg_1

What implications does this article have for your future as a school counselor?

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3. SCHOOL SCENARIOS

Directions to the Applicant: Below you will find a series of problem situations you might encounter in your job as a school counselor. Select 1 of the 3 scenarios and respond to the question that follows it. Be sure to type your response. Your response should not exceed two pages. Clearly indicate the scenario to which you are responding.

SCENARIO #1

This is your first year as a school counselor at Johnson Elementary School. You received a note today from Mrs. Brown, fourth grade teacher, requesting a conference with you. She indicated her concern about Joan D., a student in her class who is currently repeating the grade.

You agree to meet with Mrs. Brown the following day. At which time she expresses several concerns about Joan's performance and personal circumstances. She explains that Joan was highly motivated when school first started and was determined to get promoted so that she could advance to the fifth grade. Since that time, Joan's behavior and school performance have drastically changed. She rarely ever completes class assignments, her attendance is sometimes poor, and she often falls asleep in class. Mrs. Brown has made several attempts to have Mrs. D., Joan's mother, come in for a conference, but her mother cancelled the appointments. Other teachers and students

have indicated that there are problems at home. Mr. D. recently left the family and Mrs. D. is struggling to provide for her family of four. At least one of the other children, Johnny, a sixth grader, is experiencing trouble in school.

**As the school counselor what would you do?
What would you say to Joan D.'s teacher Mrs. Brown?**

SCENARIO #2

As the school counselor in a local high school you have an appointment with a female student with whom you have had prior contact and you know well. The student comes into the office frustrated and distraught. She indicates that her teacher has consistently expressed preferential treatment to the most advanced students in his classroom.

**As the school counselor, in this situation what would you do?
What exactly would you want to say to this student? What recommendations would you make?**

SCENARIO #3

You have been a high school counselor for three months. You recently received a memorandum from the District Supervisor of Guidance about the requirements of the Bright futures Scholarship (a \$2,500 per year scholarship for four years). Scholarship requirements are: four years of English, three years of mathematics that must be Alg. and above, three years of science to include two lab classes, two years of foreign language, a 3.0 GPA: and a 970 on the SAT. The GPA and SAT requirements are attainable for a large number of students but many students will miss the requirements because they may not have had the foreign language or three higher level math classes.

The School Counseling Department at your school has weekly staff meetings. This week's Department Meeting is devoted to getting ready for presentations in sophomore English classes to discuss scheduling for next year's courses. You ask the Department Chairperson if this would be a good opportunity to begin informing students of the requirements for the Bright Futures Scholarships so that students will enroll in the right courses. The Department Chairperson responds, "This scholarship is for the motivated students who strive towards academic success. The students who should get this scholarship are going to take the right courses and will not need prodding from us. We are going to let this scholarship be a natural consequence for those who strive towards high standards. We will not be bringing this up in English class."

**What would you do in this case? What would you say to your Department Chairperson?
What is your personal reaction to the Department Chairperson's response?**

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PUBLIC SPEECH

Directions to the Applicant: The statistics below show a gap in high school and post-graduate completion based on minority and non-minority status, and socio-economic status. Prepare a two to four minute speech responding to this data. In other words, what do you think of this data?

You may use only one 4x6 index card for notes. Do not present handouts or use any visual aids. You will deliver the speech on the day of your interview.

You speech will be evaluated in three areas:

1) topic 2) delivery 3) overall impression.

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- **The overall high school graduation rate in the United States is 75%**

- **Of every 100 White kindergartners 91 will graduate from high school**

- **Of every 100 African American kindergartners 87 will graduate from high school**

- **Of every 100 Hispanic kindergartners 62 will graduate from high school**