

Brooks College of Health

Department of Public Health

# clinical mental health counseling Program

Annual Report 2021

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## Introduction

The Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program (CMHC) at the University of North Florida (UNF) developed this annual report to document the outcomes of our systematic program assessment along with descriptions of program changes and innovations that have occurred since the last report. This report is disseminated to our current students, program faculty, institutional administrators, community partners, and the public. This year’s report reviews the 2020-2021 academic year.

## Program Overview

The CMHC is a two-year, 60-credit hour, full-time master’s degree program that meets the educational requirements for mental health counselor licensure (LMHC) in the state of Florida. The program is fully accredited by the [Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)](https://www.cacrep.org/). The program provides students with an intellectually stimulating and supportive environment that encompasses academic rigor and promotes excellence, ethical and professional integrity, and effective interpersonal communication and therapeutic skills. Curricular experiences include opportunities to explore the life span; social, and cultural foundations of behavior; practice psychotherapeutic and diagnostic skills; and complete extensive field experiences in order to apply knowledge and skills in professional settings. The CMHC is a cohort model program with two cohorts of 24 students each, enrolled annually.

There are currently 4 full-time core faculty and 1 affiliate faculty who are active in course delivery and student mentoring and provide leadership in other aspects of the program:

Lena Salpietro, Ph.D – Assistant Professor & Assessment Coordinator

Kassie R. Terrell, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor & Faculty Advisor to Chi Sigma Iota

Tes Tuason, Ph.D. – Professor & Clinical Coordinator

Richmond Wynn, Ph.D (Affiliate Faculty) – Associate Professor & Director of University Counseling Center

Robert J. Zeglin, Ph.D. – Associate Professor & Program Director

A full description of our program including detailed faculty profiles is available on our website: <https://www.unf.edu/brooks/public_health/cmhc.aspx>

## Program Assessment and Evaluations

### Student Assessment

We conduct systematic developmental assessment of each student’s progress throughout the program using the following measures and methods:

**Student Progress Assessment (SPA)** – This assessment is focused on students’ professional development and personal dispositions (e.g. ethical behavior, professionalism, respect for diversity and inclusion, communication skills). It is completed three times during each student’s time in the program: after their first Fall semester, after their first Summer semester, and after their second Spring semester. Faculty advisors develop students’ SPAs in collaboration with the student and all other faculty. The 2021 results of the SPA revealed that students are, in general, on track developmentally and progressing as expected. This is especially noteworthy considering the tremendous stress that students were under during the 2020-2021 academic year, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Evaluation (CPCE)** - This national standardized exam is designed to assess students’ fundamental counseling knowledge. It is administered to first year students at the end of year one prior to beginning Practicum. An overall passing score must satisfy both of the following conditions:

1. Achieving a total score that is equal to or greater than the national mean for total scores.
2. Achieving a score that is equal to or greater than the national mean on at least six (6) of the eight (8) content areas.

Our students have consistently performed well on the CPCE with overall mean scores at or higher than the national average. In the Summer of 2021, the total UNF scores were above the national mean. All but four students passed the CPCE. These four students will retake the exam in December 2021. Historically, our students perform quite well on their re-tests.

**Clinical Case Exam (CCX)** - This exam is designed to assess students’ clinical mental health counseling skills. This is a case-based exam, wherein students are presented with a hypothetical client and asked five open-ended questions related to various clinical treatment decisions the student might make when working with this client. It is administered to second year students at the end of their Practicum and before Internship. Each answer is scored by two faculty members on an Unsatisfactory (0), Satisfactory (1), Exemplary (2) scale. An overall passing score must satisfy both of the following conditions:

1. Achieving a total score of 13 or greater after totaling both scorers
2. No question on the CCX received a 0 score from both scorers

The Spring 2021 semester marked the first administration of the CCX. All students passed the CCX. This, again, is remarkable evidence of our students’ skills, as the cohort of students taking the CCX last year had their Practicum and Internship experience most severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Program Assessment

Our annual assessment of student learning outcomes at the program level is done through Graduate Academic Learning Compacts (GALCs), student exit and alumni surveys, and site supervisor surveys.

**Graduate Academic Learning Compact** **(GALC)** - Each year, we assess and report on a minimum of two of our eight student learning outcome domains - a 4-year reporting cycle - using the university’s Tracdat platform. We use this data to gain insight into how the curriculum, pedagogy, and program policies impact student learning.

In the 2020 GALC, we measured student performance in the “Group Work” domain and the “Research & Evaluation” domain. As a result of the GALC process the below follow-up actions were identified:

*Group Work (16% of students were over the goal):*

1) Continue building the adjunct onboarding process to help adjunct instructors accurately assess student performance relative to expectations

2) Review, as a faculty, the current design of the MHS6510 course to identify any opportunities to create/amend assignments/activities that better meet the expectations in the rubric.

*Research & Evaluation (100% of students were over the goal):*

1) Maintain current design of the course through at least one more GALC cycle (2024) to ensure that this year's results are not anomalous

Our 2020 GALC was rated “Exemplary” by the UNF Director of Assessment.

**Alumni Surveys** – Each year the CMHC program administers alumni (one-year post graduation) surveys on program satisfaction, program preparation for employment in counseling careers, current employment and licensure status. Licensure pass rates are provided by the Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Mental Health Counseling. A brief program outcomes report is developed and posted to our website annually. In 2020, 84% of our alumni rated the academic, clinical, and professional training provided by the program as “Above Average” or “Outstanding.” The next administration of these surveys is currently underway.

| **Program Outcomes** | **Academic Year** **2020-2021** |
| --- | --- |
| Number of program graduates | 22 |
| Percentage of students who graduated from the program in the expected 2-year time period. | 92% |
| Percentage of graduates who passed the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Examination (NCMHCE). | 62% (Statewide Florida average is 51%) |
| Percentage of graduates who are currently employed in mental health counseling positions. | 82% |

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|  | **Deficient** | **Average** | **Above Average** | **Outstanding**  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Overall, how would you rate the *academic preparation* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 17% | 17% | 67% |
| Overall, how would you rate the *clinical training* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 17% | 33% | 50% |
| Overall, how would you rate the *professional preparation* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 17% | 42% | 42% |

**Site Supervisor & Employer Surveys** – Site supervisors and employers are surveyed annually through Qualtrics**,** UNF’s online survey platform**,** for feedback on student preparation for practicum, internship, and careers; student performance in clinical settings; the CMHC curriculum; and site supervisor interactions with faculty. In 2020, 88% of site supervisors and employers rated the academic and professional training provided by the program as “Above Average” or “Outstanding” while 78% rated the clinical training as such. The next administration of these surveys is currently underway.

|  | **Deficient** | **Average** | **Above Average** | **Outstanding**  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Overall, how would you rate the *academic preparation* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 11% | 44% | 44% |
| Overall, how would you rate the *clinical training* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 22% | 44% | 33% |
| Overall, how would you rate the *professional preparation* provided by the UNF CMHC program? | 0% | 11% | 56% | 33% |

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**What do you see as the strengths of the UNF CMHC program as seen in the students that you supervise?**

|  |
| --- |
| * Ethics and cultural foundations
 |
| * Strong emphasis on self-care, ability to self-reflect, hardworking, dedicated to the field
 |
| * It's difficult to say this for both the students I supervised as one was outstanding and the other had issues. I supervised the first for one semester and the other for 2. My previous ratings are based on the second as I spent more time with them. I believe the program was most helpful in identifying and remediating this student, thus giving her the opportunity to mature and develop.
 |
| * Willingness to learn
 |
| * Well prepared
 |
| * Professionalism, motivation to improve, initiative
 |

**What are the areas where the UNF CMHC program could improve in order to better prepare mental health counselors?**

|  |
| --- |
| * too much emphasis on “not petting the dog”, Student concern of too much validation or praise to child.
 |
| * Process/decision tree logic in determining a working and accurate diagnosis, application and integration of objective assessments into the counseling process, ability to articulate/integrate theory to practice
 |
| * Neither of these students, nor any of the students I have supervised in the past, have been adequately prepared to address trauma. Students need a strong understanding of how trauma affects people physiologically and psychologically.
 |
| * self confidence in their ability
 |
| * None to report
 |
| * n/a
 |

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Our assessment data is used to enhance the overall curriculum, to further develop individual courses, and to improve policies and operating procedures. We have used feedback and insights from these data to make the following changes:

* Created to new elective “Psychopharmacology for Counselors”
* Revised the course sequence to better prepare students for the CCX and to improve overall instructional scaffolding
* Updated the procedure for re-taking the CPCE to count all previously passed sections
* Revised the Professional Identity Development Hours requirement to better meet the spirit of the requirement while not overburdening students
* Maintain our commitment to improvement and innovation

## Psychopharmocology Elective

In response to student and site supervisor feedback, the faculty created a Psychopharmacology for Counselors elective. There was no room in the 51 core credits to make this course a requirement of the program. Nonetheless, this course will be a viable option for students who desire to learn more about the brain, neuropsychology, and psychopharmacology. The course was offered for the first time in Summer 2021 as a Special Topics course. The Special Topics status will remain in effect for three years to assess student interest and feedback before making the course a permanent course in the CMHC program. The current course description is:

*In this course students will gain knowledge about the use of medications to treat mental health disorders. Students will learn about the neurobiology, psychopharmacology, and pharmacokinetics of mental disorders and medication use. The course will cover different types of medication, their uses, benefits, and side effects. The counselor’s role in advocating and educating clients to understand their medications and strategies for collaborating with prescribers will be covered.*

## CCX Course Sequencing

In preparation for the program’s shift from 2009 to 2016 CACREP standards, the faculty created a new comprehensive exam to be administered in the second year of the program. This exam, the Clinical Case Exam (CCX), is a case-based exam designed to assess students’ clinical mental health counseling skills. The first administration of the exam was in Spring 2021. To aid students in preparing for this type of exam, the preceding summer courses were reconceptualized to meet the evolving needs of the program. First, MHS6405 Advanced Counseling, was created to serve as a consolidation point. All of the clinical material learned in the first year of the program (i.e., prior to Practicum and to the CCX) is reviewed and synthesized in this course. The domains addressed by the CCX are used as a framework for self-reflection and case conceptualization while working on class assignments. Second, MHS6401 CMHC in Community Settings was redesigned to specifically address the administrative and leadership functions of clinical mental health counselors (e.g., billing, grant writing, supervision, consultation). This not only addresses competencies that will be later assessed by the CCX but also addresses some feedback from site supervisors related to perceived deficits in the program graduates’ knowledge-base.

## CPCE Reconfiguration

The Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam (CPCE) is a multiple-choice exam administered in the first year of the program. The CPCE tests the eight core CACREP counseling domains. Any student not passing the Summer administration must re-take it in the Winter. In past years, the re-take was a complete re-take, meaning that the domains that may have been successfully passed during the Summer administration were not carried forward as “Passed” when scoring the re-take. This means that a student could, in theory, fail both times but have, between the two administrations, passed all eight domains. After considering this possibility, the faculty voted to change the policy, now allowing domains that were previously passed to carry forward to any re-takes. This is more in line with the spirit of the CPCE, which is to assess for minimum competency with the material before entering Practicum.

## PID Hours Adjustment

Two years ago, the CMHC program instituted a new requirement of first-year students: Professional Identity Development (PID) hours. These hours are designed to help first-year students explore their growing counselor identity before they even reach Practicum in the second-year. By doing so, each student has a clearer sense of their unique skills, interests, passions, niches, and talents as they apply for Practicum/Internship placements and as they begin working with clients. They then continue to cultivate this identity throughout their second-year Practicum/Internship experience. This is now a hallmark of the UNF CMHC program; each student is encouraged to explore their individual professional identity in the field. The original requirement was 200 hours during the first year. After the 2019 cohort provided feedback that 200 hours was difficult to complete and that the burden of the hours often interfered with the spirit of the hours (i.e., to reflect on their professional identity), the CMHC faculty voted to a) reduce the requirement from 200 to 100 and b) narrow the list of acceptable PID activities to prioritize quality over quantity. Examples of acceptable PID experiences include but are not limited to:

• Volunteering at a community mental health agency

• Interviewing a clinical mental health counselor

• Attending Chi Sigma Iota special events (CSI meetings do not count)

• Shadowing clinical mental health counselors or CMHC interns in their daily tasks

(shadowing of client sessions is not permitted)

• Attending fundraisers, events, and workshops hosted by mental health organizations

• Completing trainings, certificates, or workshops in a clinical area of interest

• Volunteering at a mental health conference, event, or training

• Collaborating with community organizations to host a speaker, training, seminar, or

workshop

• Completing a targeted plan of study with your advisor for an area of special interest

## Program Improvement and Innovation

Our faculty is committed to continuous quality improvement through innovation and creativity. The following is a brief description of recent initiatives that contribute to the evolution of the CMHC program.

**VALT** – In Fall 2020, our program installed [VALT](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=valt+counseling+software) hardware and software in the four counseling labs. This industry-leading technology aids faculty in reviewing student mock sessions. As such, the ability for the faculty to provide detailed, individualized, and comprehensive feedback on each students’ counseling skills is greatly improved.

**Mental Health Sexology Graduate Certificate –** This 4-course research certificate admitted its first cohort in Fall 2020. This certificate, coordinated by Dr. Robert Zeglin, provides specialized research training in the field of mental health sexology. Students who complete this certificate will have a greater knowledge of the overlap between mental health and sexual health, will have the opportunity to conceptualize and design a research protocol of their own, and can expect opportunities to be a named author on at least one peer-reviewed publication or presentation. Possible research topics include (but are not limited to): Sexually Transmitted Infections, LGBTQ+ health, sex education, sexual dysfunction, and paraphilias.

**Time2Track –** In Fall 2020, the program began using an online platform, [Time2Track](https://time2track.com/), to track second-year students’ Practicum/Internship hours and complete all necessary forms. In the past, the CMHC program utilized paper documentation, including paper hour logs. This system was considered by all involved to be imprecise. Also, paper documents can be lost, which is a significant concern when graduates move to other states and require for licensure specific documentation from the program related to their Practicum/Internship experience. Now, with Time2Track, the students’ hours, activities, supervision information, and forms are saved on the Time2Track server forever, being easily accessible to the student after graduation and whenever needed.

**Chi Sigma Iota (CSI), the international honor society for counseling students, counselor educators, and professional counselors** **–** This year CSI focused on building our mentorship program within our cohorts. We hosted several events aimed at strengthening the personal and professional identity development of our counselors-in-training. We hosted four “Skills Nights” wherein both cohorts and faculty came together to practice clinical skills and case conceptualization; we also hosted our annual Cover Letter and Resume Workshop aimed at preparing students for the annual Practicum and Internship Fair. We were also able to participate in a fundraising event among our cohorts wherein we had t-shirts made for faculty and students. Within the community, we were able to participate in the virtual Out of the Darkness, Community Suicide Walk hosted by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. We also started the process for an upcoming Telehealth CEU training that will take place in March 2021. Finally, we hosted our annual CSI Initiation Ceremony and inducted 22 new CSI members in a joint ceremony where we also honored several outstanding graduates in their leadership, advocacy, research, and clinical service.

CSI has also made a concerted effort to prepare our counselors-in-training through hosting several workshops and trainings that aid in job preparation, training, and placement. In addition, CSI has implemented and plans to continue implementation of a mentoring system among 1st and 2nd year students.

## Changes in Program Operations

Though the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many facets of life, including academia, the UNF CMHC program was able to address the complex necessities of the pandemic with very few changes to program operations. Several of our Practicum/Internship sites transitioned to virtual sessions either in part or in full; we supported students in working with their sites during this transition to ensure that they maintained the necessary caseload to obtain their required clinical hours. Many courses were moved to Distance Learning or Remote Instruction delivery methods; we did so with minimal disruption to the predictability that our program’s cohort model is built to facilitate. Skills courses (e.g, Group Counseling, Advanced Counseling) were prioritized to be face-to-face. No program changes affected the program’s compliance with CACREP standards at any time.

## Summary

The UNF CMHC program is committed to continuous quality improvement, creativity, and innovation. We embrace reflective practice through self-study, feedback from students, community partners, and university administrators. In the last year, and despite the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, we instituted several advancements to our program, strengthening our ability to support and train our students. With the hiring of Dr. Lena Salpietro in Fall 2020, she is anticipated to assume the role of Assessment Coordinator beginning in Fall 2021. She has, in fact, already done so at the time of the writing of this report. This separation of program assessment duties from the Program Director role is evidence of the program’s commitment to continuous quality improvement. Future years will refine this commitment and identify opportunities to enhance the program’s mission, identity, and values.