**University of Alabama at Birmingham**

School of Education and Human Sciences

*Department of Human Studies*

Counseling Program

2023-2024 State of the Program Report

**Current Affiliated Faculty**

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**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

The UAB Counseling Program (CP) relies on data from various sources to inform programmatic decisions. Data are divided into two categories, including enrollment data and learning outcomes. Enrollment data are used to document trends in the characteristics of applicants, current students, and alumni. Learning outcomes are used to assess whether students are indeed acquiring and demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities targeted by the current curriculum. A detailed outline regarding the CP’s assessment procedures is documented in the UAB Program Assessment and Evaluation Manual. The current report summarizes program data to guide decision making and program development and informs program stakeholders.

*Enrollment Data*

Enrollment data are collected via three sources: Admission/Application Data, Enrollment or Headcount Data, and Specialty Track Data. This total does not typically include certificate-only students, though those numbers are noted in the next table. Accreditation plays a significant role in admission numbers and thus enrollment data, as CACREP has a specific faculty-to-student ratio to which programs must adhere.

Overall, enrollment peaked in the 2020-2021 academic year due to admission decisions made in spring 2020 when there was a program-high count of six faculty members. While applications remained steady, enrollment deliberately decreased in the 2022-2023 AY due to faculty decreasing to 5 full-time core faculty members (from 6 in 2020), and a need to stay within CACREP ratios for students to faculty. Enrollment further decreased in AY 23-24 when the faculty decreased to four full-time faculty, necessitating another deliberate adjustment in overall numbers to accommodate the CACREP ratios. Application numbers increased in AY 23-24 from the previous academic year, resulting in a smaller admission rate.

**Total Counseling Program Enrollment Data 2019-2024**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Enrollment Data** | |
| **Academic** | **Count** |
| **Fall 2019** | 111 |
| **Spring 2020** | 115 |
| **Summer 2020** | 95 |
| **Fall 2020** | 118 |
| **Spring 2021** | 136 |
| **Summer 2021** | 116 |
| **Fall 2021** | 125 |
| **Spring 2022** | 121 |
| **Summer 2022** | 95 |
| **Fall 2022** | 110 |
| **Spring 2023** | 112 |
| **Summer 2023** | 89 |
| **Fall 2023** | 86 |
| **Spring 2024** | 84 |
| **Summer 2024** | 70 |

Each specialty also tracks student enrollment. (See Enrollment by Specialty Table following narrative.) Enrollment in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) steadily increased since fall 2019-2021, which also reflects increasing application numbers. Due to compliance with CACREP ratios and a smaller number of faculty, that number has slightly decreased since the 2020-2021 peak.

The Marriage, Couples, and Family Counseling (MCFC) concentration, which began in fall 2016, continued to grow steadily, though the decrease in enrollment in this concentration for 2023-2024 echoes the deliberate decrease in the CMHC concentration as well due to compliance with CACREP ratios. This concentration’s growth increased since the CMHC certificate was added in 2019 which allowed MCFC students to also take the CMHC courses as part of their program of study. The CMHC certificate was developed in response to feedback from students interested in the MCF concentration but who wanted coursework in both MCFC and CMHC.

Substantial declines in summer enrollment can be observed largely for three reasons: School Counseling (SC) students do not enroll in clinical coursework in the summers due to a lack of placement opportunities in schools, full time students often take an average of 6 credits in the summer instead of the average of 9 credits in fall and spring due to the more intensive 10-week summer course schedule (with the exception of clinical courses, which are 14 weeks), and the program offers fewer courses overall in the summer semester.

The CP does have some students (normally graduates of Counseling Programs, including UAB’s) who are admitted just for completion of the MCFC and CMHC certificates, and those numbers are listed below. As the numbers illustrate, enrollment in these certificate-only options has fluctuated, but remains steady. Internal numbers for the certificates are not reported here, but it is important to note that many students complete a certificate while enrolled in the program to take the coursework from both concentrations.

\* It is important to note that in the fall 2023 semester, an administrative decision was made to sunset the school counseling concentration and no longer admit school counseling students due to lower enrollment numbers (for further information regarding this change, please refer to the CACREP Updates section on page 11). Therefore, the SC enrollment numbers will continue to decrease as remaining SC students graduate. A data review indicates that enrollment in the School Counseling (SC) track noticeably decreased in the most recent academic years from 18 students in fall 2021 to 8 students in fall 2023. This was accompanied by a decrease in applications for the school counseling concentration, though CMHC and MCFC applications remain steady. Faculty also note the absence of a full-time school counseling faculty member from 2020-2022 as a factor affecting recruiting for that concentration.

**Enrollment by Specialty 2019-2024**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **CMHC** | **SC** | **MCFC** | **MCFC Cert.-Only** | **CMHC Cert.-only** |
| Fall 2019 | 76 | 22 | 12 | 1 |  |
| Spring 2020 | 80 | 22 | 12 | 1 |  |
| Summer 2020 | 63 | 16 | 9 | 7 | 1 |
| Fall 2020 | 87 | 18 | 13 | 5 | 1 |
| Spring 2021 | 96 | 19 | 21 | 7 | 1 |
| Summer 2021 | 83 | 14 | 19 | 9 | 2 |
| Fall 2021 | 81 | 18 | 26 | 5 | 1 |
| Spring 2022 | 77 | 16 | 28 | 4 | 1 |
| Summer 2022 | 63 | 11 | 21 | 8 | 1 |
| Fall 2022 | 71 | 10 | 29 | 3 | 1 |
| Spring 2023 | 74 | 9 | 29 | 4 | 1 |
| Summer 2023 | 53 | 9 | 27 | 7 | 3 |
| Fall 2023 | 53 | 8 | 25 | 6 | 2 |
| Spring 2024 | 59 | 5 | 20 | 3 | 1 |
| Summer 2024 | 52 | 2 | 16 | 7 | 2 |

CMHC: Clinical Mental Health Counseling; SC: School Counseling; MCFC: Marriage Couples and Family Counseling; MCFC Cert.: Marriage, Couples, and Family Counseling Certificate; CMHC Cert: Clinical Mental Health Counseling Certificate

NOTE: The MCFC and MCFC Cert programs began fall 2016. The CMHC Cert. program began fall 2019 for internal students, and summer 2020 for external certificate-only students.

The School Counseling program stopped admitting students in fall 2023.

**National Counselor Examination (NCE) Examination Results 2019-2024**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date of NCE** | **Number Tested** | **Number Passed** | **UAB**  **Passage Rate** | **National Passage Rate** |
| Fall 2019 | 4 | 4 | 100% | 90.5%  (2,190 test-takers) |
| Spring 2020 | 18 | 16 | 88% | 83.9%  (3,825 test-takers) |
| Fall 2020 | 10 | 9 | 90% | 80.5%  (4,235 test-takers) |
| Spring 2021 | 17 | 17 | 100% | 80.7%  (5,117 test-takers) |
| Fall 2021 | 10 | 10 | 100% | 79.9%  (9,969 test-takers) |
| Spring 2022 | 19 | 19 | 100% | 63%  (8,177 test-takers) |
| Fall 2022 | 7 | 7 | 100% | 79%  (3,151 test-takers) |
| Spring 2023 | 9 | 9 | 100% | 80.7%  (5,094) test-takers |
| Fall 2023 | 11 | 11 | 100% | 91%  (3523 test-takers) |
| Spring 2024 | 8 | 7 | 87.5% | 92%  (3960 test-takers) |

As evidenced by this chart, UAB Counseling student pass rates remain consistently high for the NCE and are either near or above the national pass-rate.

NOTE: The NCE is typically offered in the fall and spring each year.

**Key Program Indicator: CPCE Examination Results (Non-Exit)**

\*The following results reflect scores from fall 2023, spring 2024, and summer 2024 examinations. The CPCE is taken by each student the semester before beginning their clinicals which is generally during their last year of the program. The UAB scores and National scores represent those students who took the exam as a non-exit exam. The UAB internal Counseling Program pass rate for 2023-2024 was 83% with 29 students taking the exam during this academic year.

\***CPCE Examination Results (Non-Exit) Fall 2023**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Exam Section** | **UAB Results**  **(Average Score)**  **n=10** | **Fall 2023 National Results (Non-Exit)**  **(Average Score)** |
| Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice | 10.2 | 10.6 |
| Social & Cultural Diversity | 8.8 | 10.0 |
| Human Growth & Development | 11.9 | 11.6 |
| Career Development | 10.2 | 10.0 |
| Counseling & Helping Relationships | 8.1 | 9.6 |
| Group Counseling & Group Work | 10.6 | 11.1 |
| Assessment & Testing | 9.0 | 9.0 |
| Research & Program Evaluation | 8.8 | 10.2 |
| Total Score | 77.6 | 82.0 |

\*When viewing these scores, it is important to note that in fall 2023 there was one set of scores that was significantly lower than the other nine. This resulted in the fall 2023 score averages skewing far lower than those in previous semesters. When that outlier is removed from the fall 2023 scores, the averages are much more consistent with past semesters and those in the spring and summer of 2024.

**CPCE Examination Results (Non-Exit) Spring & Summer 2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Exam Section** | **Spring & Summer 2024**  **UAB Results**  **(Average Score)**  **n=19** | **2024 National Results (Non-exit)**  **(Average Score)** |
| Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice | 12.3 | 11.57 |
| Social & Cultural Diversity | 11.7 | 10.63 |
| Human Growth & Development | 12.5 | 11.66 |
| Career Development | 12.6 | 11.57 |
| Counseling & Helping Relationships | 12.2 | 10.72 |
| Group Counseling & Group Work | 12 | 10.72 |
| Assessment & Testing | 11.8 | 11.06 |
| Research & Program Evaluation | 12.9 | 12.48 |
| Total Score | 97.9 | 90.45 |

From these data, it appears that overall, UAB counseling students, on average, continue to score at or above the national average for total score on the CPCE. When examining the spring and summer 2024 scores, UAB Counseling students appear to demonstrate strong performances in Social and Cultural Diversity, Career Counseling, Counseling and Helping Relationships, and Group Counseling and Group Work as compared to the national mean (more than 1 point higher on average).

Conversely, UAB student scores tend to fall a bit closer to the national means (within .5 point) in Research and Program Evaluation. As Research and Program Evaluation was a stronger area in the CPCE scores in academic year 2022-2023, Counseling Program faculty will continue to monitor the scores for this area in the upcoming year.

**Key Program Indicator: Counselor Competencies Scale (CCS)**

**Midterm and Final Evaluations for ECG 695, 696, and 697 AY 2023-2024**

The Counselor Competencies Scale (CCS) is a Key Performance Indicator administered to all students in each semester of clinicals in ECG 695, ECG 696, and ECG 697. Clinical site supervisors complete the CCS for each student midway through the semester (the midterm evaluation), and at the end of the semester (the final evaluation). The CCS evaluates 32 clinical skills and professional dispositions through three sections (Primary Counseling Skills, Professional Dispositions, and Professional Behaviors). It has four categories: Unacceptable (score of 1), Near Expectations (score of 2), Meets Expectations (score of 3), and Exceeds Expectations (score of 4). Students are expected to have an average score of at least 3 on the CCS after each clinical semester.

**2023-2024 AY CCS Average Scores**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Midterm Evaluation**  (Range 1.0-4.0) | **Final Evaluation**  (Range 1.0-4.0) |
| ECG 695: Practicum II | 3.14 | 3.42 |
| ECG 696: Counseling Internship A | 3.33 | 3.59 |
| ECG 697: Counseling Internship B | 3.61 | 3.76 |

As evidenced by the above chart, for the academic year 2023-2024, Counseling Program students scored above the Meets Expectations/Demonstrates Competencies category (3.0) for both the midterm and final evaluations for all three clinical courses.

**Non-Academic Program Outcomes:**

All students who graduated in the 2023-2024 academic year completed eight counseling sessions as a client before starting clinical courses. All students who graduated during this academic period completed 15 hours of approved counseling-related professional development training while enrolled in the UAB Counseling Program. At least half of these hours are completed through workshops and monthly seminars offered by the UAB Counseling Program’s Zeta Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, the international counseling honor society.

**2023-2024 Student Site/Site Supervisor Evaluation Results**

The counseling program regularly conducts systematic follow-ups with students in clinical field experience. Every semester students are surveyed on their clinical sites. New surveys were developed with faculty and administrator input to include questions about site supervision in addition to existing questions about their clinical sites. Student evaluations of their clinical fieldwork experiences revealed positive feedback about both the clinical sites and the supervision they received. Overall, among 48 respondents, approximately 93% of students recommended their clinical sites as a placement for other students.

Clinical Site. Students consistently reported that their clinical sites offered valuable opportunities to apply their counseling skills in real-world settings. Many students praised the diversity of client populations they worked with, noting that the experience allowed them to practice a wide range of counseling techniques, including individual and group counseling, treatment planning, and case note documentation. These hands-on experiences helped students build confidence and develop professionally. Among all responses, 94% of students found their clinical sites to be highly nurturing and supportive of their learning. They described the environments as nurturing and conducive to growth, with many expressing appreciation for the resources and opportunities available to them. Students felt well-integrated into their clinical teams, and many highlighted how their experiences exceeded expectations in terms of professional development.

Site Supervisor. Around 98% of students provided positive feedback regarding their site supervisors, considering their site supervisors encouraging, optimistic, and motivational. Supervisors were often described as accessible, knowledgeable, and deeply invested in the students’ success. Students highlighted the constructive feedback they received from their supervisors, which helped them refine their skills and apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Supervisors were praised for creating encouraging learning environments and for their availability to provide guidance and support when needed. Students remarked on the personal investment their supervisors made in their development, noting that this helped them feel confident and supported throughout their clinical experiences. The regular supervision sessions were viewed as critical for student growth, and the feedback provided during these sessions was considered invaluable for shaping their professional identities.

Some areas of improvement that were indicated in these surveys include a lack of formal orientations or opportunities to attend staff meetings at some sites. Program faculty will take this feedback under advisement and continue to monitor this issue closely in future semesters, especially when the clinical placement process changes in summer of 2025 (see “Other Program Changes” section below for further information).

**Stakeholder Surveys:**

The counseling program regularly conducts systematic follow-up studies of graduates, site supervisors, and employers of program graduates. These surveys were administered in spring 2023 and the results were discussed in the 2022-2023 annual report. These surveys are administered every 2 years and will be administered in spring 2025.

**Faculty Changes in 2023-2024 academic year:**

The UAB Counseling Program welcomed Dr. Matthew McKenzie as a visiting assistant professor starting in August 2023. Dr. McKenzie is a graduate of the UAB Counseling Program and has worked as an adjunct instructor for the program since 2020.

The other full-time program faculty in academic year 2023-20234 consisted of Dr. Shannon McCarthy, Associate Professor, CACREP Liaison; Dr. Dayna Watson, Associate Professor, Program Director; Dr. Dwayne White, Assistant Professor and acting Clinical Placement Coordinator; and Dr. Yusen Zhai, Assistant Professor, Director of the UAB Community Counseling Center.

In spring 2023, Dr. Dwayne White announced that he would be leaving UAB at the end of the spring 24 semester and Dr. Matt McKenzie announced that he would no longer be a full-time faculty member (though he will continue to be an adjunct instructor) after the summer 2024 semester. In August 2024, the program brought in visiting Assistant Professor, Dr. Andrea Whitten, a longtime UAB CP adjunct. She is joining Drs. McCarthy, Watson, and Zhai as the faculty for 2024-2025.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, a faculty search was conducted for a non-tenure-track MCF faculty member, but it did not result in a hire.

**CACREP Updates:**

A decision was made in AY 23-24 to sunset the school counseling program and close any future admissions due to diminishing enrollment numbers and the lack of a school counseling faculty member. A teach-out plan was developed to ensure the graduation of the current school counseling students. The current school counseling students were informed early in the spring 2024 semester, followed by notification of all current students, school counseling sites and site supervisors, and other program stakeholders via the counseling program listserv. Subsequently, a substantive change report was sent to CACREP for approval and that was formally approved in July 2024, meaning that the school counseling program will retain CACREP accreditation until the last school counseling student graduates.

The UAB CP’s current CACREP accreditation expires in March 2026 (a full accreditation cycle is 8 years). As the 2024 CACREP accreditation standards were released in summer 2023 (effective July 2024) the program worked throughout 2023-2024 to align to the new CACREP standards and prepare their comprehensive self-study in anticipation of applying for reaccreditation. The counseling program’s self-study for reaccreditation will be submitted by the end of 2024 as the first major step in applying for reaccreditation. The CACREP reaccreditation process will continue through 2026 and will include an initial review of the self-study and an eventual site visit.

As part of this effort all course syllabi were reviewed to ensure coverage and evaluation of the new CACREP content standards. Additions were also made to all syllabi to clearly show how the required CACREP course content is covered and evaluated. Some course content was changed to accommodate the 2024 CACREP standards.

**Other Program Changes (based on student and faculty feedback, program outcome data, etc.):**

After reviewing applications and admissions data for the program, as well as research regarding the GRE, and considering the number of counseling programs and UAB graduate programs that have waived the GRE as an admissions requirement, the UAB CP decided to permanently remove the GRE requirement as part of the application for the UAB counseling program. This requirement was officially removed for the fall 2024 application cycle. Program faculty will continue to assess the impact of the removal of the GRE requirement.

Based on feedback from a survey of site supervisors and students that was conducted in 2022-2023, the UAB CP has finalized a plan to change the clinical placement process. Starting in summer 2025, students who begin clinicals can contact and procure their own placement site. This will allow for students to have more choice and freedom in selecting their clinical site, while also allowing for a less time-consuming task each semester for the clinical placement coordinator. Two semesters before they are due to begin clinicals, students will have a group meeting with the clinical placement coordinator to discuss the process of finding a site, and lists of active clinical sites will be distributed, with separate lists for CMHC and MCFC. At that point, students may begin contacting potential clinical sites to indicate interest, request interviews and send their resumés. As students procure a site, they will notify the clinical placement coordinator.

For AY 2023-2024, after considering feedback from students and faculty, the counseling program removed the non-academic program requirement for students that required each student to present at a counseling conference. In previous years, most students completed this requirement by participating in the graduate poster session at the annual Alabama Counseling Association conference. This is now a voluntary experience for UAB counseling program students. Faculty continue to encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity to present, particularly those that may be interested in future research or doctoral studies and will support and mentor any students that choose to present.

After reviewing several years’ worth of data regarding UAB CP students’ performance on the CPCE, which are used for the program’s comprehensive exam, and reviewing other counseling programs’ practices, program faculty elected to institute an optional portfolio for students that do not pass the CPCE. This was also due in part to the data showing that, while a small number of students did not pass the CPCE each year, those students often did well in their classes. Therefore, the portfolio, which functions as a remediation practice, and not as an alternative to the CPCE, allows students to opt to continue into clinicals without disruption to their program of study while completing a portfolio that demonstrates understanding and rigor in each core CACREP academic area. Program faculty piloted the use of the portfolio in spring 2024. This meant that students who did not pass the CPCE that semester were given the option to complete a written portfolio or delay their clinicals by one semester and re-take the CPCE (all students opted to create the portfolio). The portfolio requires students to write a reflection or prompt for each of the eight CACREP core areas and submit a written artifact from a corresponding class. Program faculty then separately grade each element of the portfolio. If the student does not pass each element with an average of “meets expectations” then the student is asked to re-write and re-submit the subject(s) that they did not pass. If the student passes the portfolio by the end of the Practicum II semester, they can move forward into clinicals. Following the spring 2024 semester, some edits informed by student and faculty feedback were made to the portfolio prompts and scoring system. The portfolio is now fully operational as an option for students who do not pass their comprehensive exams.