

**Executive Summary**

**Comprehensive Program Review Self-Study  
M.Ed. School Counseling**

**Columbus State University  
Spring 2013**

## **Executive Summary for the M.Ed. School Counseling**

### **Program Major Findings of the Program's Quality and Productivity**

#### **Program Quality and Productivity: Very Strong**

The mission of educator preparation programs at Columbus State University is to prepare highly qualified teachers, counselors, and leaders who promote high levels of learning for all P-12 students by demonstrating excellence in teaching, scholarship, and professionalism. These three themes (i.e., excellence in teaching, scholarship, and professionalism) are the principles that form the foundation of the Educator Preparation conceptual framework and encompass the principles and standards derived from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, and various specialty association guidelines. In line with the mission and conceptual framework of educator preparation, the M.Ed. program in School Counseling is strong overall and prepares highly qualified school counselors in elementary, middle, and secondary school settings who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to promote academic, career, and personal/social development in all P-12 students. The program continues to receive national accreditation by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The minimum 48-semester-hour degree program is designed around the eight core areas of (1) Human Growth and Development, (2) Social and Cultural Foundations, (3) The Helping Relationship, (4) Group Dynamics and Processes, (5) Lifestyle/Career Development, (6) Appraisal of Individuals, (7) Research and Evaluation, and (8) Professional Orientation. The program is aimed to prepare students to design and implement comprehensive, developmental school counseling programs. Curricular experiences include clinical supervision of a 100-hour practicum and two 300-hour internships in a school setting. The program leading to the M.Ed. in School Counseling is designed also to prepare students for state certification in School Counseling. The M.Ed. School Counseling and M.S. Community Counseling programs have been awarded reaccreditation status by CACREP through October 31, 2017.

In February 2013, a continuing approval review of the Educator Preparation Unit at CSU was conducted by a Board of Examiners (BOE) consisting of representatives from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC). The 2008 NCATE Standards and the Georgia 2008 Standards were used to assess the unit and its programs. The BOE judged all standards to be met for the unit and for all initial and advanced programs. There were no areas for improvement cited, and the team noted multiple areas of strength. Through these processes and completion of annual assessments such as the Annual Program Review and Improvement Report, evaluation of the M.Ed. School Counseling program is ongoing.

When reviewing a 5-year average of students enrolled, the number of candidates in the School Counseling program is comparable to other M.Ed. programs offered in the College of Education and Health Professions. In addition, the number of M.Ed. School Counseling candidates has remained relatively steady over the course of the last five years. Despite the ongoing implementation of stringent and consistent admissions standards it shows an increase in enrollment in 2011-2012 when compared to the program's 5-year average.

The 3-year graduate rate for the M.Ed. School Counseling program is similar to the graduation rates of many other M.Ed. programs in the College of Education and Health Professions.

The oversight of the M.Ed. program in school counseling is provided primarily by counseling faculty and in collaboration with part-time faculty, colleagues in the department and college, practicum/internship site supervisors, and the Program Advisory Committee. Program content, even with ongoing review, remains in alignment with CACREP, ASCA, and NCATE Standards.

It is important to note that, at the time of writing this program review, a decision has been made to develop a fully online M.Ed. School Counseling program. At present, the implications of adding this program are currently being evaluated; however, at a minimum, adding this program is likely to generate a need for additional resources (e.g., faculty) to continue offering a quality campus-based program and implement successfully a new fully online program.

### **List of Recommendations for Improving Program Quality**

Though the program quality is very strong, we continue to look for ways to make improvements. Current initiatives include:

- Continuing to integrate LiveText as the assessment platform to assist with program reviews and strategic planning.
- Ongoing integration of 2009 CACREP Standards (the program was reaccredited under the 2001 standards).
- Developing and implementing a fully online School Counseling curriculum to increase the availability of the program, degree and certification to a larger portion of the population.
- Ongoing review of the program of study to enhance program delivery (could include, for example, exploring implementation of a cohort model).
- Ongoing assessment of program learning outcomes and key assessments.
- Continuing to support efforts of the Counseling Student Association (CoSA) and Chi Sigma Iota National Honor Society in service and scholarly activities.
- Maintaining compliance with CACREP standards.
- Continuing to focus on enhancing program diversity.
- Continuing further integration into the Partner School Network, including possible training and research activities.
- Exploring the possibility of moving to a stricter cohort structure to tighten program of study and increase the number of classes students will have with full-time faculty.
- Continuing to seek monies and other resources to support faculty and student professional development opportunities and research.
- Enhancing assessment strategies that are related to field experiences and that also reflect integration of CACREP, BOR, and NCATE/PSC standards.
- Expanding recruitment efforts to continue obtaining quality applicants.
- Continuing to strengthen admissions, orientation, and exit processes to support gatekeeping procedures reflective of candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- Continuing staffing meetings each semester to enhance assessment of student progress.

### **List of Recommendations for Improving Program Productivity**

Counseling program faculty, in collaboration with colleagues in the COEHP, the Counseling Program Advisory Committee, and/or members of the Partner School Network, will oversee efforts to improve the curriculum, courses, and resources offered to counselors-in-training. Recommendations to improve program productivity are to:

- Continue aligning coursework with CACREP standards, while maintaining compliance with BOR initiatives and NCATE/PSC standards, is likely to help the program remain competitive with other nationally-accredited programs.
- Hire additional faculty members to balance resources with training and administrative demands. The program has received recent support with the hiring of an additional faculty member who began working at CSU during the Fall 2012 term.
- Continue focusing on enhancing program diversity, which is likely to attract a larger pool of quality applicants.
- Integrate further into the Partner School Network, including possible training and research activities, to foster productivity across multiple domains.
- Explore a more comprehensive cohort structure to address issues pertaining to the program-of-study or course offerings (e.g., a number of enrollment caps have been greatly exceeded, as some courses are offered only once per year).

### **Conclusion about the Program's Viability at CSU**

The M.Ed. School Counseling program at CSU is a viable one. As indicated by the evaluation of the recent reaccreditation awarded by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), the quality of the program is very strong. Furthermore, collaboration with the COEHP Student Advising and Field Experiences (SAFE) Office is strengthening policies and procedures regarding counseling field placements that are more consistent with placement policies pertaining to other educator preparation programs, which helps to ensure compliance with NCATE/PSC standards.

Although the enrollment numbers are not large, CACREP accreditation promotes smaller faculty/student ratios, particularly in supervision of field experiences. Because the courses in the program of study overlap most of the coursework required of students in the M.S. Community Counseling program, counseling faculty members teach students in both programs, and resources are shared by both programs. Although the 5-year average of students enrolled is equal to 73 (includes M.S. Community Counseling, M.Ed. School Counseling, and Ed.S. School Counseling programs), enrollment figures for AY 2011 for all three programs total 99, with an increasing trend over the last five years. The addition of a fifth faculty member during the current academic year is helping to provide support for delivery of administrative and teaching responsibilities. Given the enrollment trend, future addition of faculty should help to expand course offerings, provide administrative support for oversight of the programs, remain in compliance with CACREP standards and other accreditation requirements (e.g., NCATE/PSC), supervise field experiences of counselors-in-training, and serve the region and profession through service and research initiatives.

## Program Improvement Plan

The *M.Ed. School Counseling* program continues to receive recognition as a nationally-accredited program by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), and the program quality is strong.

Furthermore, ongoing efforts to integrate policies and procedures (e.g., assessment practices, field experiences) that are in alignment with the COEHP Educator Preparation help to ensure compliance with NCATE/PSC standards. The program is enhanced by qualified, diverse faculty members who are active in service and research/professional development activities and by an administration that supports program, student, and faculty needs and CACREP standards.

Although the program quality is strong, the program can continue to be strengthened primarily through refinement of the program of study, ongoing enhancement of assessment practices, enrollment of current classroom teachers in the program and continued focus on meeting CACREP accreditation standards within the context of needs to address standards of multiple other bodies (e.g., NCATE/PSC, SACS) and while decisions are made to expand online offerings.

With the goal of continued program improvement, specifically within the context of possible expansion of online offerings, additional faculty resources are needed to meet the instructional and administrative needs of the *M.Ed. School Counseling* program. Additionally, support for strategic planning of program changes that are in concert with CACREP standards and ongoing university support of graduate education, in general, would help counseling faculty continue to deliver a quality program.

### **Summary Recommendation and Supporting Rationale**

#### **Recommendation:** Enhance or Expand the Program

Despite the small number of degrees conferred each year, the program quality is very strong and the recent program reaccreditation by CACREP and the February 2013 review of the Educator Preparation Unit at CSU (which includes the School Counseling programs) provide evidence of the program's strength. Recent market surveys indicate that there is a significant demand for a fully online School Counseling Program. It is recommended that a fully online School Counseling Program be developed and implemented to serve a large portion of the population that is not being served under the present system. It is also recommended to review how to recruit current classroom teachers into this program to expand enrollment and diversity of student population.

Additionally, CSU will continue to work to strengthen the *M.Ed. in School Counseling* by improving the curriculum, developing a retention and graduation plan to improve program viability, and intensifying recruitment efforts.

By enhancing the quality of the program, we hope to continue attracting students to the School Counseling program.