Counseling Students' Research and Professional Writing Skills

Counseling MS – College of Health and Human Development

Step 1: Student Learning Outcome

Students will be able to: critically analyze research methodology and the professional literature regarding a counseling topic; construct an original research project; and demonstrate professional writing skills in accordance with APA guidelines.

Step 2: Methods and Measures

Direct: Assess using a rubric for beginning skills in a signature assignment given in their first semester of the program (COUN 500), and then through a signature assignment, a capstone project completed in the last semester of the degree (COUN 597).

Both assignments require a literature review and writing skills regarding a counseling topic of students' own choosing. The capstone project in COUN 597 requires advanced skill with an original research study to include: Introduction (Literature Review), Method, Results, and Discussion sections. The capstone project necessitates skills in analysis of research methodology and original data, in-depth knowledge of a counseling topic, and professional writing according to APA style standards.

Department developed Research and Professional Writing rubric is calibrated and scored by committee with the following elements:

- E.1: Utilizes a formal system of inquiry that integrates the work of researchers and counselors, and applies it in a research project regarding a specific clinical issue relevant to clinical mental health counseling.
- E.2: Writes a literature review regarding a specific clinical issue relevant to clinical mental health counseling.
- E.3: Demonstrates writing that is concise and organized, as well as correct in terms of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- E.4: Demonstrates original writing that is correct according to APA style (e.g., structurally and mechanically, including correct citations and references).

  Scale: Exceeds Expectations (5-6), At Expectations (3-4), Below Expectation (1-2)

NOTE: E.1, E.2, and E.3 apply to COUN 500 assignment, while E.1-E.4 apply to COUN 597 assignment.

Indirect: Assess students' knowledge using applicable questions from the following surveys;

- Graduating Student Survey: Q9 whether students believed the department had met their expectations regarding "*Research and Program Evaluation*".

- Employer Survey: Q6 "Compared to other Master's degree counseling students that you have hired, CSUF students' professional writing skills are…"
- Alumni Survey: Q18 "*How well did the program prepare you to conduct research and demonstrate the ability to think critically and solve problems*? / Q19: *How well did the program prepare you to write effectively*?

Step 3: Criteria for Success

Direct: Average score is 3 or higher for each rubric element.

Indirect:

- Graduating Student Survey: 80% or more of our students to respond with "Met".
- Employer Survey: 100% of employers answer "average" or above.
- Alumni Survey: 80% of alumni rate each question "moderately well" or above.

Step 4: Results

Direct:

COUN 500

Fall 2018 included the full incoming class with twelve signature papers (approximately 20% random sample across two COUN 500 courses) assessed for E3 and E4 only to focus on writing skills alone.

Average scores as follows:

$E3 = 4.25$

$E4 = 4.41$

Spring 2019 included a new incoming class from a separate cohort program through extended education. Building on the work done in the fall, students (n = 24) were assessed on E2, E3, and E4.

Average scores as follows:

$E.2 = 4.8$

$E.3 = 4.3$

$E4 = 4.3$

There are no comparison data from previous years, as this is the first year assessing these skills at the beginning of the program. Scores indicated that students met expectations (3 or above) for the outcome.

COUN 597

Fall 2018: Four signature papers (approximate 20% random sample across two COUN 597 courses) were assessed on all four elements.

Average scores with comparison to 2016-17 results:

	2016-17	2018-19
E.1	4.31	5.13
E.2	3.38	4.75
E.3	4.2	4.88
E.4	4.25	5.00

2018-19 scores indicated that students met expectations (3 or above) for the outcome. Improvement in average scores across all four-rubric elements when compared to 2016-17 suggests that students' writing has improved, possibly due to the efforts by all professors across the curriculum to emphasize this identified area of growth.

Indirect:

Graduating Student Survey: Data collected via online survey at the end of fall 2018 and spring 2019, with 100% (n=18) of fall graduates reporting the department had "met" its objectives in assisting students with their ability to think critically and evaluate research, and 97.96% spring graduates (n=49) reporting the department had "met" this objective. Both groups exceeded the 80% threshold for success.

Employer Survey: Approximately 52 employers were sent an online survey with 19 (37%) responding. Of those, 100% rated CSUF students' professional writing skills as; 44.4% "average", 27.8% "above average", and 27.8% "excellent", which meets the criteria for success (100% answer 'average' or above). These data are similar to 2016-2017 (the excellent rating was slightly lower at 24% and the above average rating was slightly higher at 32%, and the average was nearly the same at 44%). Although there were no below standard scores, there is room for improvement, particularly in increasing the "above average" and "excellent" percentages, as well as improving the response rate.

Alumni Survey: Online survey distributed to 500 alumni, of which, 205 (41%) responded as follows to the two survey questions;

> **Q18:** 90% responded "moderately well" or above (slightly well 4.88%; moderately well 24.88%; very well 41.95%; extremely well 28.29%); none responded "not well at all."

> **Q19:** 96.59% responded "moderately well" or above (slightly well 2.44%; moderately well 19.51%; very well 40.49%; extremely well 36.59%), and .98% responded "not well at all."

Although the criteria for success was met for both questions, and the majority of alumni rated the items "very well" and "extremely well", the .98% that responded "not well at all" for Q19 is an area that the program will continue to work to improve.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

The program and faculty are committed to improving the quality of students' writing. Overall results, as well as comparison data, indicate that there has been positive progress. In COUN 500, great emphasis is placed on writing and research, and students are provided opportunities to obtain help and attend additional workshops (e.g., in APA style). Expanding assessment during the first and last semesters provides important data on students' progress. In addition to sampling for data, individual students will also be tracked across both courses. Research and writing skills will be assessed in every COUN 500 and COUN 597 class every year with course professors rating the signature assignments using the Research and Professional Writing rubric for each student, which will allow individual and aggregate data to be reviewed. In addition, an advisor and/or the entire faculty will examine each student's writing scores at a minimum of two points during the student's progression through the program. Data will continue to be sampled periodically (on a rotating basis with other SLOs) and outside team consensus scoring will be conducted to continue with the current methodology and ensure that the scoring of individual students remains consistent.