September 18, 2013

Report to interested others about the progress and continuous quality improvement of the Hodges University Clinical Mental Health counseling Program

The Hodges University Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program (MCMHC) continues to expand its student population and consequently the number of innovative courses available. Our faculty strive to provide the best in academic and professional preparation for our students. Our diverse student population has begun to integrate into community settings through internships, and we had our first graduate in August of this year.

Students in the program in December of 2012 were surveyed as to whether they were satisfied with their progress in four professional dimensions: Identifying their professional strengths, identifying their professional weaknesses, their ability to seek timely clinical consultation and their ability to integrate their personal values with the code of ethics of their profession. All students indicated at least satisfactory progress in all four areas in an anonymous survey. This result demonstrates the success of an objective of the faculty: to provide a safe and dynamic learning environment for the counseling profession.

The program has been in the process of self-study from the time of its inception in anticipation of applying for accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The purpose of accreditation is to demonstrate program quality by upholding crucial and comprehensive standards for counselor education programs. We have found the CACREP self-study process to be a very worthwhile systematic process for reviewing our program quality and for having processes in place to continue to review and improve quality. Our self-study has been accepted by CACREP and we are in the process of scheduling a site visit.

During the year several process improvements have taken place, often with the generous support of the University. A faculty panel now interviews all prospective students in addition to all other graduate program procedures. This interview process clarifies that the student is aware of the significant commitment that they are making, and that the student will be able to follow the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, before entering the program.

Faculty now meet regularly to review student progress in the professional dimensions noted earlier, and to better coordinate assistance and support for students. An assessment of student improvement in counseling knowledge and skill led to an effort to update counseling theory and skill courses. These courses will focus more on counseling theories and evidence based practices prevalent in this community. Students will then be even more prepared for internship and employment in this area. An additional assessment of student test taking performance concluded that students needed more practice with the processes utilized in the Florida licensing exam. Improvements were added to the
curriculum in order to further educate and assess student ability to think critically in ways needed in taking the exam.

There is a high priority in the program attached to providing an optimum educational environment. MCMHC Faculty meet regularly to discuss the program, and in 2013 quality enhancements were implemented as a result of the discussions. One program quality enhancement involved the monitoring of class size and adding additional sections of a course in order to preserve ideal class size. Another involved an increasing emphasis on case record documentation in internship class, based upon student and site supervisor feedback. Also, a new elective course covering special topics was developed in order to respond quickly to student requests for specific counseling information and skill based on their internship experiences.

Additionally, student contributions to the community continue. A class study of high risk adolescent behavior in our local community was assisted by 22 local professionals. The study results will be presented at the Florida Counseling Association Annual Conference, as well as at a Hodges University one day conference planned for November though the Hispanic Institute. Another class project assisted the Southwest Florida Regional Coalition Against Human Trafficking to organize and update a reference list of all community resources that can assist in the effort to help those who are victims of human trafficking.

The MCMHC faculty continues to be active in the presentation of counseling information nationally, in state, and locally. The program had its first graduate at the end of the summer semester, and looks forward to our students’ new careers as local clinical mental health counseling professionals, as many more students are scheduled to graduate in this academic year. The MCMC program is in a dynamic growth phase in student population and continuous adjustments and improvements to program quality. The faculty look forward to the next year with anticipation as students enter our program on one end, and enter our community as professionals on the other.

Sincerely,

Mary B. Nuosce, Program Director
Hodges University Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program