

ANNUAL REPORT

Counselor Education Department

Viterbo University

2023-2024

The purpose of this annual report is to transparently communicate the progress and achievements of Viterbo University's Counselor Education Department over the 2023-2024 academic year. In alignment with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2024 standards, this report serves as a testament to our unwavering commitment to continuous improvement, educational excellence, and the professional development of our students and faculty. It highlights our program's efforts in evaluating and enhancing our curriculum, pedagogy, and clinical experiences to meet the evolving needs of our students and the counseling profession at large. Through a detailed review of program evaluation results, subsequent modifications, and other significant changes, we aim to provide our community of students, faculty, administrators, and cooperating agency personnel with a comprehensive overview of our program's strides towards achieving the highest standards of counselor education. This report underscores our dedication to not only maintaining accreditation standards but also fostering an environment of transparency, accountability, and collaborative growth.

Program Evaluation

Our department employs a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to assess the effectiveness of our counselor education programs, aiming to foster a culture of continuous improvement. This approach integrates feedback from all program stakeholders, including current students, site supervisors, faculty, alumni, and employers. Annually, we conduct a thorough program evaluation each summer to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, assessing our alignment with educational missions and the department's overall effectiveness. This process involves conducting surveys among current students, faculty, employers, alumni, and site supervisors to evaluate various aspects of the program, from mission fulfillment and clinical skill development to the quality of instruction and supervision. Additionally, the Board of Advisors reviews program and curricular assessments, offering expert insights to enhance our offerings. Student academic progress and key professional dispositions are also evaluated annually, with results shared for reflection and action. Similarly, faculty are assessed through student-completed course evaluations, providing valuable feedback on teaching practices and course design. This holistic evaluation strategy ensures our commitment to providing a quality education that prepares competent and ethical counseling professionals, maintaining our program's dynamic responsiveness to the needs of our students and the counseling profession.

The annual program evaluation for the 2023-2024 academic year has yielded significant insights into our counselor education programs, with particular focus on the Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC), School Counseling (SC), and Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of student learning outcomes, faculty performance, clinical experiences, and other critical areas assessed in relation to CACREP standards.

Vital Statistics

The chart below provides vital statistics summarizing key outcomes for the Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) and Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) programs for the 2023-2024 academic year. It illustrates the programs' achievements in terms of the number of graduates, pass rates on credentialing examinations, completion rates, and job placement rates, underscoring their effectiveness in equipping students for professional excellence in the counseling field. Our School Counseling (SC) program just recently launched, and we anticipate celebrating our first group of graduates in May 2025.

| Program | CES | CMHC | SC |
|--|------|------|----|
| Number of Graduates | 5 | 13 | 0 |
| Pass Rates on Credentialing Examinations | 100% | 97% | NA |
| Program Completion Rates | 96% | 97% | NA |
| Job Placement Rates | 100% | 100% | NA |

These outcomes affirm the strength and quality of our counselor education programs, attesting to our faculty's dedication, our rigorous curriculum, and our commitment to student success. The high pass rates on credentialing examinations, exceptional completion rates, and stellar job placement figures not only highlight the effectiveness of our program designs but also our graduates' readiness to make meaningful contributions to the counseling profession. As we move forward, these findings will serve as a foundation for continuous improvement and innovation in our programs, ensuring alignment with CACREP standards and the evolving needs of our students and the communities they will serve.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The KPI evaluation results from the Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Summer 2024 terms are discussed below. Thorough faculty review highlighted a thoughtful and rigorous approach to assessing the effectiveness of various courses within the counseling program. During these semesters, faculty members engaged in detailed discussions on courses across key performance indicators (KPIs), focusing on ensuring that the curriculum effectively supports student learning and professional development.

In the Fall 2023 review, the faculty found no need for changes in most courses discussed, indicating a strong alignment with program goals and standards. However, specific attention was given to *COUN 580: Crisis and Trauma*, where adjustments to instructions and the rubric were planned to address issues identified in suicide assessment assignments. This adjustment aims to ensure consistency across the curriculum in teaching suicide assessments, reflecting a proactive approach to addressing student challenges and enhancing curriculum effectiveness. Additionally,

concerns were raised about the Action Research Project (ARP) in *COUN 660: Research and Program Evaluation*, with plans to pilot group ARPs to address challenges faced by students and faculty. Lastly, faculty will reassess the difficulty level of the group proposal assignment in *COUN 680: Group Counseling* to ensure it adequately evaluates student learning and competency.

In the Spring 2024 review, faculty discussed the transition of *COUN 712: Research Methodology II* to focus on qualitative research methods, necessitating the development of a new KPI aligned with this curriculum shift. *COUN 750: Psychopharmacology* was suggested to be moved to an elective status, reflecting its appropriateness for the doctoral program. The review of *COUN 595: Testing and Assessment* affirmed the current assignment's alignment with its KPI, while *COUN 695: Counseling Internship* highlighted the need for better KPI alignment with CACREP standards, prompting discussions for the upcoming departmental retreat. Plagiarism concerns in *COUN 540: Counseling Theories* were noted, emphasizing the importance of strengthening academic writing skills among new students. Pilot testing of group ARP projects in *COUN 660: Research and Program Evaluation* yielded positive feedback, with further deliberation planned on its continuation. The faculty's proactive engagement and comprehensive review reflect a commitment to continuous improvement and maintaining high academic standards.

In the Summer 2024 review, the faculty collectively determined that no major changes were necessary across most courses, indicating strong consistency with program goals and standards. However, a few areas were identified for enhancement, including the addition of a video and skill component to *COUN 675: Counseling Techniques*' KPI to bolster practical application. Additionally, in *COUN 695: Counseling Internship*, Skill Set 3 was updated to a written case study to better assess student competencies. A potential adjustment in rubric clarity was considered for *COUN 680: Group Counseling*, ensuring the assessment criteria are transparent and aligned with learning objectives. These discussions reflect the faculty's ongoing commitment to refining the curriculum and maintaining high academic standards.

Overall, these KPI evaluation results demonstrate the program's commitment to continuous improvement, responsive curriculum development, and the effective preparation of students for the counseling profession. Through targeted adjustments and ongoing assessments, the program aims to uphold high educational standards and support student success.

Student Academic Progress

In alignment with CACREP 2024 standards, our faculty conducted an in-depth review of individual student academic progress during the Spring 2024 semester. This review focused on key performance indicators (KPIs) and grade point average (GPA) to evaluate each student's academic performance comprehensively. Our assessment process for each student is designed to be comprehensive and reflective of their academic and practical competencies within the counseling program. We utilize a three-tiered evaluation system based on key performance

indicators (KPIs) and cumulative grade point average (GPA) to categorize student performance as follows:

- Exemplary: Students achieving this level demonstrate outstanding performance, with KPI scores above 90% and a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher.
- Satisfactory: To be considered at a satisfactory level, students must attain KPI scores above 80% and maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher.
- Developmental: Students falling into the developmental category have KPI scores below 80% and a cumulative GPA of less than 3.5.

This structured assessment approach ensures a clear, objective, and supportive framework for monitoring student progress, providing targeted feedback, and fostering academic and professional growth in alignment with the counseling profession's standards.

Following the evaluation, results were communicated to students via email and saved in their student files for future reference. Students whose academic performance fell below expectations had a follow up meeting with their faculty advisor to discuss the results and identify pathways for improvement and/or were placed on a Professional Development Plan (PDP). This process ensures that students receive constructive feedback on their academic progress, facilitating open dialogue, and support between students and their advisors.

Below are results from the Counselor Education Department's Spring 2024 Student Academic Progress Evaluation.

| Program | CES | CMHC | SC |
|---------------|-----|------|------|
| Exemplary | 57% | 58% | 100% |
| Satisfactory | 36% | 25% | 0% |
| Developmental | 7% | 17% | 0% |

The Spring 2024 Student Academic Progress Evaluation highlights the strong academic achievements and proficiency of students within the Counselor Education Department's CES, CMHC, and SC programs. With a substantial proportion of students attaining exemplary and satisfactory standings, these results underscore the effectiveness of the curriculum and the dedicated support provided by our faculty. The commitment to academic excellence and professional readiness is evident, as reflected by the low percentage of students requiring developmental attention. This robust performance serves as a testament to the department's success in nurturing competent, ethical, and highly skilled counseling professionals.

Key Professional Dispositions (KPDs)

Each year, the Counselor Education Department rigorously evaluates students on ten critical dispositions, essential for ensuring their readiness and suitability for the counseling

profession. This Key Professional Disposition (KPD) assessment gauges students' self-awareness, multicultural competence, ethical decision-making, flexibility, professional communication, and psychological fitness, among other vital traits. Through this comprehensive evaluation, we aim to identify and nurture the foundational qualities necessary for effective counseling practice, supporting our students' development into well-rounded, ethical, and competent professionals equipped to meet the diverse needs of their future clients.

Our Key Professional Dispositions (KPDs) assessment utilizes a nuanced rating scale designed to precisely evaluate students' readiness for the counseling profession across ten critical areas. The scale categorizes students based on the number of dispositions rated below expectations:

- Students with "0 dispositions below meets expectations" are considered fully prepared in all evaluated areas, showcasing exemplary readiness;
- students with "1-2 dispositions below meets expectations" indicate minor areas for development but overall strong professional potential; and
- Students with "3+ dispositions below meets expectations" highlight significant areas needing improvement and development.

This scale allows us to tailor support and interventions effectively, ensuring each student can achieve the highest standards of professional competence and ethical practice in the counseling field.

Following the evaluation of student KPDs in the Fall 2023 semester, results were communicated to students via email and saved in their student files for future reference. Students whose academic performance fell below expectations had a follow up meeting with their faculty advisor to discuss the results and identify pathways for improvement and/or were placed on a Professional Development Plan (PDP). This process ensures that students receive constructive feedback on their academic progress, facilitating open dialogue, and support between students and their advisors.

Below are results from the Counselor Education Department's Fall 2023 Key Professional Disposition Evaluation.

| Program | CES | CMHC | SC |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 0 dispositions below | 77% | 89% | 100% |
| 1-2 dispositions below | 23% | 8% | 0% |
| 3+ dispositions below | 0% | 3% | 0% |

The Fall 2023 Key Professional Disposition Evaluation for the Counselor Education Department reveals exceptional achievements among students in both the CES, CMHC, and SC programs. A significant majority of students in the CMHC program (89%) and the CES program (77%) demonstrated exemplary dispositions, with none rated below expectations in the SC

program, indicating their preparedness for the counseling profession. Only a small fraction of students had 1-2 dispositions below expectations, highlighting minor areas for growth. Remarkably, the CES program had no students with 3 or more dispositions below expectations, and only a minimal 3% in the CMHC program fell into this category, underscoring the department's success in fostering well-rounded, competent, and professionally ready counseling professionals. These results reflect the department's commitment to high standards of professional disposition and the effectiveness of its educational approaches in preparing students for their future roles.

Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE)

All master's students within our program are required to take the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) prior to graduation. This critical assessment serves not only as a benchmark for students' readiness to enter the counseling profession but also as an invaluable tool for our department. By comparing our students' scores against national averages across the eight core areas/domains, we gain insightful feedback on the effectiveness of our teaching and curriculum. This comparative analysis helps ensure that our educational practices are aligned with national standards and are effectively equipping our students with the knowledge and skills they need to excel in their future roles as counseling professionals. Through this process, we continually assess and refine our program to maintain the highest standards of excellence in counselor education. Below is a comparison of the Counselor Education Department student scores compared to the national averages across the 8 core domains.

| Section | CPCE Exam | Viterbo University (n=11) Mean | National Average (n=1533) Mean |
|--|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| C1: Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice | | 13.2 | 11.9 |
| C2: Social and Cultural Diversity | | 10.2 | 9.8 |
| C3: Human Growth and Development | | 12.2 | 10.8 |
| C4: Career Development | | 10.4 | 10.6 |
| C5: Counseling and Helping Relationships | | 11.8 | 10.8 |
| C6: Group Counseling and Group Work | | 11.5 | 10.8 |
| C7: Assessment and Testing | | 10.0 | 9.8 |
| C8: Research and Program Evaluation | | 11.5 | 10.3 |
| Total | | 90.7 | 84.9 |

During the Spring 2024 review of the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) results, Viterbo University's faculty noted that their students consistently outperformed the national average across almost all sections. Viterbo students demonstrated particularly strong competencies in areas such as Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, Human Growth and Development, and Research and Program Evaluation,

achieving mean scores well above the national benchmarks. However, the Career Development section was identified as an area requiring improvement, with students scoring slightly below the national average. Faculty attributed this to the *COUN 550: Career Development* current textbook's insufficient coverage of theoretical foundations and have decided to seek a more comprehensive, theory-focused textbook for future courses. Additionally, considerations are being made to balance the course structure, potentially shifting from a weekend format to weekly sessions to enhance learning outcomes. These steps reflect the faculty's proactive approach to continuous improvement and commitment to academic excellence.

Annual Surveys

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in counselor education, our department conducts an annual comprehensive program evaluation through surveys distributed to key stakeholders. These surveys are sent to our alumni, current students, faculty, site supervisors, and employers. This broad-based feedback mechanism is designed to gather diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of our program, the quality of our curriculum, and the preparedness of our graduates for the counseling profession. By analyzing responses from these various groups, we can identify strengths, uncover areas for improvement, and ensure that our program remains at the forefront of counselor education, consistently meeting the needs of our students and the communities they will serve. This annual evaluation process underscores our dedication to fostering an environment of excellence and accountability. Below is a summary of results from each survey launched and analyzed during the Summer 2024 term.

- **Current Student Survey:** The MS students reported positive experiences in their academic journey, particularly highlighting the flexibility of course scheduling and the quality of faculty instruction. However, areas for growth include improvements in the consistency of advising and better organization of Moodle sites, as students noted that sometimes syllabi and Moodle materials did not align. To address these, faculty are considering advisor training and standardizing advising meetings across the program. Additionally, efforts are being made to work with the university's Instructional Support Services to ensure all Moodle sites are well-organized and that course expectations are clearly communicated from the outset. EdD students expressed satisfaction with the depth of their curriculum and overall faculty support, though they pointed out that communication regarding course scheduling and grading rubrics could be improved. Faculty are responding by reviewing curriculum KPIs and ensuring that rubrics are aligned with the new CACREP (2024) standards. Furthermore, faculty have committed to sending out timely email updates to students enrolled in courses whenever schedule changes occur. Additionally, comprehensive exam expectations are under review to provide more clarity and alignment with program standards.
- **Faculty Survey:** The faculty survey results reflect a generally positive experience, with faculty expressing satisfaction in key areas such as autonomy and academic freedom and

support from the department for teaching responsibilities. Faculty members appreciated the collaborative environment and the department's commitment to maintaining multicultural and diversity-related content in the curriculum. However, they also identified areas for improvement, particularly around workload management, with some faculty feeling that the balance between administrative tasks and teaching responsibilities could be better addressed. Additionally, faculty expressed a desire for more structured support for advising, clearer expectations in areas like dissertation supervision, and greater consistency in evaluation processes across clinical courses. Faculty also suggested enhanced mentorship opportunities and additional professional development resources to strengthen their roles as advisors and researchers. Overall, these insights point to both strong departmental support and a desire for improved clarity and resources in specific areas.

- **Alumni Survey:** Alumni generally felt well-prepared for professional practice, particularly praising the program's focus on counseling skills and ethical standards. However, they expressed that additional training in documentation and administrative skills could better prepare them for real-world challenges. In response, courses covering documentation will be reviewed by faculty to ensure students feel more confident and prepared in this area. Additionally, the department is working to enhance communication with clinical sites and the professional sequence to better support the development of documentation skills and the use of Electronic Health Records (EHRs), ensuring students are well-equipped for their future roles.
- **Site Supervisor Survey:** Site supervisors praised the Counselor Education Department for its commitment to professional standards and overall student preparation, but also identified two specific areas for improvement. Specifically, they requested more consistent communication and training to help them better understand their roles and how to assess students effectively. In response, the department has implemented a communication strategy where clinical faculty will engage with site supervisors at least three times per semester when students are placed at their clinical sites. Supervisors also suggested clearer evaluation rubrics for student assessments, which the department is reviewing, along with providing training on evaluations to ensure clarity in expectations.
- **Employer Survey:** Employers expressed high satisfaction with the clinical and interpersonal skills of graduates, noting that they are well-prepared to handle the demands of the counseling profession. However, they suggested that incorporating more training on self-care, burnout prevention, and administrative tasks would benefit graduates in their long-term professional success. The department is taking this feedback seriously, planning to integrate these topics into more courses, ensuring students are prepared not only clinically but also in terms of sustainability and self-care practices.

Program Modifications

In response to comprehensive program evaluation feedback, the counselor education department at Viterbo University has enacted several significant program modifications during the 2023-2024 academic year to enhance student experience and align with best practices:

- **Transition to Electronic Documentation:** The department transitioned to electronic documentation and paperwork processes, specifically within the professional sequence. This change streamlines paperwork, reduces errors, and improves access to necessary forms and records for both students and faculty. The shift enhances efficiency and ensures all documentation aligns with current technological standards.
- **Partnership with the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC):** The department re-established its partnership with the NBCC, allowing MS in Clinical Mental Health students pursuing the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential to benefit from a head start in the application process, with many students opting to complete the National Counselor Examination (NCE) prior to graduation. For the program, the partnership allows for the collection of aggregate score information on student examination performance, enabling the program to compare results with national benchmarks and drive curriculum improvements.
- **Play Therapy:** The department has updated two key courses, transitioning from Counseling Children and Adolescents to Counseling Children and Adolescents through Play. This change emphasizes the importance of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based approaches to play therapy, which research has shown to be highly effective when working with younger populations. The revised courses focus on play therapy techniques that align with the developmental needs of children and adolescents, preparing students to use these therapeutic interventions in a way that fosters emotional, cognitive, and behavioral growth in young clients. This update ensures that our graduates are well-equipped to employ innovative and effective strategies in their counseling practice.
- **Internship Course Revision:** The department updated the MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling internship structure, transitioning from a two-course sequence to a single, repeatable internship course. This change allows students to take variable credits (1-3 per semester), providing more flexibility and helping them complete clinical hours more efficiently. This improvement better aligns with students' professional needs and academic progression.

Departmental Updates

In our pursuit of academic excellence and in response to the evolving landscape of counselor education, our department has implemented several updates. These adjustments reflect our ongoing commitment to enhancing our curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and clinical training opportunities to better serve our students and align with the latest industry standards and best practices.

- **Successful CACREP Reaffirmation:** In May 2024, the Counselor Education Department successfully completed its CACREP site visit, leading to the reaffirmation of CACREP accreditation through 2032 for the MS in Clinical Mental Health and the EdD in Counselor Education & Supervision programs. This achievement highlights the department's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of counselor education and ensures that each program continues to meet the rigorous requirements set by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP).
- **Leadership Transition:** In November 2024, Dr. Cameron Houin became the new Director of the Counselor Education Department. Dr. Houin brings a wealth of experience and fresh vision to the department, ensuring a smooth transition and ongoing innovation.
- **Coordinator Roles:** The department restructured key coordinator roles to enhance leadership:
 - Dr. Carol Klose Smith is now the CACREP liaison and the Clinical Coordinator for both the MS in School Counseling and the EdD in Counselor Education & Supervision Programs.
 - Dr. Brittany Massengale Houin serves as the Clinical Coordinator for the MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program and the Assessment Coordinator for the department.
 - Dr. Cameron Houin also took on the role of Admissions Coordinator for the Counselor Education Department.
- **National Search for 5th Faculty Member:** The department has initiated a national search for an additional full-time faculty member to support the growing demands of the program, enhance faculty-to-student ratios, and bring in new expertise.

Conclusion

The 2023-2024 academic year marked another successful chapter for the Viterbo University Counselor Education Department, highlighted by significant program modifications, reaffirmation of CACREP accreditation, and continued commitment to excellence in counselor training. Our successful CACREP site visit in May 2024, which resulted in the reaffirmation of accreditation through 2032, underscores our steadfast dedication to upholding the highest standards in counselor education. This achievement reflects the collective efforts of our faculty, staff, and students to maintain a rigorous, ethical, and professionally aligned curriculum that meets the evolving needs of the counseling profession.

Key program modifications, such as the transition to electronic documentation processes and the revamped partnership with the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), demonstrate our proactive approach to enhancing both the student experience and the operational efficiency of the program. Additionally, leadership transitions and a national search for a fifth faculty member signal our continued focus on growth and innovation within the department.

As we move forward, the department remains committed to continuous improvement, as evidenced by faculty review of course structures, efforts to address student and alumni feedback, and the integration of employer suggestions for preparing students in areas such as self-care and administrative skills. With these strategic enhancements, we are confident that our graduates will continue to thrive and lead in the counseling profession, equipped with the knowledge, skills, and ethical grounding necessary for success.