

Arcadia University's Graduate Program in Counseling Annual Alum Survey for the 2022-23 Academic Year

Description of Assessment

Each year, the Graduate Program in Counseling (GPC) surveys “recent” alums to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting its programmatic mission and objectives and in preparing graduates for the counseling field. This survey also collects information regarding alums’ progress obtaining licensure and other relevant credentials, as well as their employment experiences. Notably, the GPC does not survey all program alums every year. Rather, to minimize burden on alums, they are surveyed until they report earning their license or other relevant credentials. Alums are also provided the option to opt out of future surveys. This survey was developed by the GPC’s core faculty and reviewed by the Master of Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council (MPCAC) during the program’s most recent reaccreditation cycle.

Summary of Findings

In total, 28 alums completed this survey and reported graduation dates ranging from 2017 to 2022. Results for the 2022-23 academic year indicate that a reasonable portion of our recent graduates (nearly 2/5) have obtained licensure, primarily in Pennsylvania, and a majority of recent unlicensed graduates are preparing to attain licensure within the next three years. Additionally, our graduates continue to find employment across a wide range of counseling settings and specialty areas. Overall, alums reported receiving strong training in our essential qualifications of professional counseling, as well as three general areas: evidence-based practice, multicultural practice, and social justice and advocacy. However, approximately half of the alums reported room for improvement in the areas of self-care and career development. Most alums also agreed that our program’s mission and objectives are well suited to meet the needs of the counseling field. Alums also provided valuable open-ended feedback. For instance, they reported strengths in our instructors, course offerings, multicultural training, role-play opportunities, and the program’s culture of feedback. Alums also reported some room for growth in terms of course instruction, assignments, and class discussion. Specifically, certain assignments were experienced as triggering to some students, and other students felt silenced by peers’ comments during multicultural discussion. In terms of suggestions, alums comments reflected several themes, including offering greater education in clinical documentation and the business of counseling, as well as continuing our efforts to assess whether our curriculum is following a trauma-informed approach.

Planning & Modifications

Based on the results of this evaluation:

1. Feedback about specific courses will be provided to the instructors.
2. When the core faculty reconvene for the Fall 2023 semester, they will discuss ways to strengthen our integrated curricula in self-care and career development. Modifications could be made to courses, orientation for new students, and internship seminar presentations.
3. The GPC will continue to assess whether the curriculum follows a trauma-informed approach and modify course content, assignments, and learning activities as needed. In addition, the orientation for new students will include a module discussing trauma to provide students with clearer expectations for their counselor education and training to be better prepared for challenging experiences and proactively consider how they might address them.

4. Since clinical documentation policies and procedures vary so widely across external training sites, the core faculty do not plan to make any immediate modifications to address this comment. However, during the Fall 2023 semester, the core faculty will discuss whether our education and training in clinical documentation could be improved in terms of teaching general principles (rather than any specific models).
5. The core faculty agree that the GPC could better graduates regarding some business aspects of counseling. Similar to clinical documentation, relevant business information varies widely across different clinical settings (e.g., community agencies, specialized health clinics, schools/colleges, hospitals, private practices, etc.). Accordingly, the core faculty need time to thoughtfully consider what information could be provided and where this information could be delivered within our curriculum. This will likely be a long-term project; thus, no immediate changes are likely to occur for the next academic year.

Detailed Results

Degree/Certification Completed

- 96% of alums reported completing an MA in Counseling. One alum (4%) reported graduating with a MA in School Counseling. Of note, the GPC's School Counseling program was discontinued, and the GPC is not planning to reinstate it.

Licensure Rates

- 54% of alums currently hold a position that requires a professional license or certification.
- 38% of alums (graduated 2017-20) reported being licensed to practice professional counseling.
- 83% of licensed alums are licensed in the state of Pennsylvania.
- 17% (one alum) reported being licensed solely in New Jersey.
- 89% of unlicensed respondents plan to seek licensure within the next 3 years.

Certification Rates

- The one alum who reported graduating with an MA in School Counseling reported receiving certification as a School Counselor in Pennsylvania, and one other alum reported planning to obtain School Counselor certification in the next 3 years.
- One alum reported having certification as a BCBA in Pennsylvania, and one other alum reported planning to obtain a BCBA in the next 3 years.

Places of Employment

- Alums reported working in a variety of settings, including a residential treatment center, a substance use disorder facility, community behavioral health clinics, a private practice, and an interdisciplinary practice, a high school.

Training in Essential Qualifications

- Alums rated their preparation for our essential qualifications of counseling as follows:
- *Written communication*: 93% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Public speaking*: 75% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Participation*: 82% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Analytical Skills*: 89% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Counseling skills*: 100% rated the training as excellent or good.

- *Self-awareness*: 93% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Receiving & Utilizing Feedback*: 93% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Professional Behavior*: 96% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Interpersonal Skills*: 89% rated the training as excellent or good.

Training in Integrated Curricula

- 85% of alums rated their training in *evidence-based practice* as excellent or good.
- 85% of alums rated their training in *multicultural practice* as excellent or good.
- 59% of alums rated their training in *self-care* as excellent or good.
- 48% of alums rated their training in *career development* as excellent or good.
- 74% of alums rated their training in *social justice & advocacy* as excellent or good.

Program Mission & Objectives

- 85% of alums reported that the program's mission statement and objectives fit with the needs of the counseling field very much or extremely well.

Most Positive Aspects of the GPC

- Excellent instructors teach their specialties and are open and available to students
- Wide range of courses offered in curriculum
- Different learning opportunities included across coursework
- Multicultural education and training, especially the emphasis on self-awareness
- Brave spaces cultivated that encourage students to share their unique experiences
- Program's emphasis on learning to receive and provide feedback effectively
- Valuable feedback from instructors
- Mentoring meetings to discuss student progress
- Research opportunities offered by program
- The sequence of courses, specifically completing internships during the final year
- Collaboration with other students in the program
- Multiple role-plays to practice various counseling skills
- Community that includes a diverse peer student body
- Trauma concentration courses and topics covered on trauma
- Education on navigating ethical dilemmas, as well as transference and countertransference
- Great preparation provided for doctoral training

Suggestions for Modifying Program Mission and Objectives

- Consider incorporating greater focus on business and marketing in counseling as part of the career development objective
- Even more focus on trauma-informed care could be helpful across the curriculum, including a trauma-informed review of the curriculum (e.g., courses materials, activities, & assignments)
- Devote more attention to counseling Black people
- Consider adopting a stronger community systems perspective, especially for youth
- Provide greater coverage on "nontraditional" relationships, including polyamory
- More in-depth training in certain modalities (e.g., ACT, DBT, & EMDR)
- Strengthen preparation in insurance credentialing, documentation, and referral systems

- Offer even more direct training in applying self-care

Least Valuable Aspects of the GPC

- Didactic instruction in certain courses could be strengthened
- The transition to remote learning required by the University during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Excessive number of journaling assignments across courses
- Too much emphasis on “memorizing” the DSM
- Certain assignments and course activities were triggering
- Valuable emphasis on multicultural training; however, class discussions occasionally included inappropriate comments about majority groups that went unaddressed by instructors and peers

Please share any additional comments that you would like to offer Arcadia’s Counseling Program.

- More creative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., utilizing outdoor spaces on campus)
- More opportunities to practice writing progress notes, including DAP notes
- Provide more training in the business and marketing in counseling
- Encourage personal counseling to process family dynamics, grief, trauma (rather than via course assignments or class activities); set clear and reasonable expectations about maintaining personal and professional boundaries in any assignments of this nature
- Would like to see instructors address inappropriate comments about cultural groups