

Arcadia University's Graduate Program in Counseling Annual Alum Survey for the 2023-24 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, 15 additional alums completed this survey and reported graduation dates ranging from 2016 to 2023. Results reflect the inclusion of these 15 alums for a total of 115 alums having completed the survey as of February 2024. Results indicate that a reasonable portion of our recent graduates (50%) 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, self-care and social justice and advocacy. However, 9% of the alums reported room for improvement in the area of 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, multicultural training, role-play opportunities, and the program’s culture of feedback. Alums also reported some room for growth in terms of career guidance, shifts in course content and assignments. Specifically, a few alums suggested more conversations about the pre-license years, support around job hunting, and having more multiple choice exams to prepare for the NCE.

Planning & Modifications

Based on the results of this evaluation:

1. When the core faculty reconvene for the Fall 2024 semester, they will discuss ways to strengthen our career development curriculum. Modifications could be made to courses, orientation for new students, and internship seminar presentations.
2. The core faculty agree that the GPC could assess consistency across internship sections now that only core faculty will be teaching the course. We can better prepare graduates through more consistency across internship classes regarding how to job hunt and assess what is a good employer, how to find a supervisor for LPC supervised hours if a job does not provide it, and what to expect in pre-license years.
3. The director and associate direct will discuss ways of creating more alumni involvement in the program whether by assigning an alumni mentor earlier in the program or by creating a

community where recent unlicensed graduates could connect with licensed alums for supervision of pre-licensed hours.

4. Individual course feedback will be provided to course instructors regarding group projects and including lifespan information in the trauma courses.
5. The support plan process will be re-evaluated. In some ways, steps have been taken to build more of a connected relationship between mentors and mentees through separating the career guidance mentorship from the general mentoring process. We will continue to evaluate if this process is effective in supporting students who are working on areas for growth.
6. The core faculty will also evaluate how to prepare students for taking exams. Exams occur in the program, but not heavily. It is something we will consider as a faculty.

Detailed Results for all 115 alumni who completed the survey

Degree/Certification Completed

- 89% of alums reported completing an MA in Counseling. Six alums (5%) 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

- 61% of alums currently hold a position that requires a professional license or certification.
- 50% of alums (graduated 1999-2021) reported being licensed to practice professional counseling.
- 88% of licensed alums are licensed in the state of Pennsylvania.
- Two alums reported being licensed solely in New Jersey.
- 76% of unlicensed respondents plan to seek licensure within the next 3 years.

Certification Rates

- Ten alums reported receiving certification as a School Counselor and 8 of them are certified in Pennsylvania. Of the 6 alums who reported having a MA in School Counseling, 3 are certified school counselors in PA.
- Two alums reported having certification as a BCBA in Pennsylvania, and 5 alums reported planning to obtain a BCBA in the next 3 years.

Places of Employment

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

Training in Essential Qualifications

- Alums rated their preparation for our essential qualifications of counseling as follows:
- *Written communication*: 95% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Public speaking*: 86% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Participation*: 90% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Analytical Skills*: 94% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Counseling skills*: 98% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Self-awareness*: 98% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Receiving & Utilizing Feedback*: 95% rated the training as excellent or good.
- *Professional Behavior*: 97% rated the training as excellent or good.

- *Interpersonal Skills*: 95% rated the training as excellent or good.

Training in Integrated Curricula

- 93% of alums rated their training in *evidence-based practice* as excellent or good.
- 95% of alums rated their training in *multicultural practice* as excellent or good.
- 79% of alums rated their training in *self-care* as excellent or good.
- 64% of alums rated their training in *career development* as excellent or good.
- 86% of alums rated their training in *social justice & advocacy* as excellent or good.

Program Mission & Objectives

- 91% 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 (From 2024 respondents)

- Multicultural training that supported students in becoming more culturally aware and competent
- Having multicultural concepts integrated into all classes
- Getting more comfortable with public speaking and taking feedback.
- Role plays and getting live and specialized feedback from classmates and professors
- Alum received positive feedback from supervisors about their self awareness and ability to lean into feedback.
- Professors were very accessible, provided individual attention, and open to answering questions without judgment.
- Discussions were encouraged and all viewpoints were respected, even if they were challenged.
- Feeling like I had the necessary professional and personal support from faculty/professors and other students to succeed.
- Ongoing opportunities for feedback and self-reflection.
- Emphasis on evidence-based practice and multicultural competence
- Exploring multiple treatment modalities, discussion-based learning, research, guest speakers.
- Willingness to accept non-traditional students and their schedules/personal needs
- The multicultural labs were very useful to be able to explore and learn more about specific populations
- Rapport built with both my classmates and the core/adjunct faculty

Suggestions for Modifying Program Mission and Objectives (From 2024 respondents)

- More support around career/employment expectations and job hunt post-grad, especially if graduates do not continue working with their internship

Least Valuable Aspects of the GPC (From 2024 respondents)

- Learning a little more about theories and important people who have pioneered these theories only because it is relevant to the NCE
- Having more realistic discussions around what our field looks like to work in during the pre-licensed years (contract jobs, low salary, inconsistent pay from insurance, etc.).
- Group projects given the difficulty of coordination when working full time

- Lengthening the course about psychotropic medications could make the course more valuable in the program, as it is difficult to remember much from that course since it was more of a seminar class and shortened.
- Having a peer mentor: an alumni mentor throughout the entire program would have been more helpful.
- More conversations about what to expect from different jobs in the field. For example, it would have been helpful to learn that in group private practice there are "splits" and you have to take your own taxes out and just having a better understanding of how that will affect your take home pay. What to expect from a group private practice job versus your own private practice, what that entails...CMH jobs, hospital jobs, etc. How to look out for green/red flags in CMH agencies, etc.

Please share any additional comments that you would like to offer Arcadia's Counseling Program. (From 2024 respondents)

- Whenever I discuss my grad program I have nothing but extremely positive things to share. I'm very grateful for my learning and experiences at Arcadia.
- I will always be grateful to Arcadia! It was the only university that supported me in taking one class at a time and made it possible for me to complete my Masters Degree!
- The only suggestion I would make is to consider including more test/exam based assessments in core courses. I think this would be helpful to future students/graduates as they look to take the NCE. While in the course of my 3 years of study in the counseling program, I cannot recall one exam we took. I think this potentially does a disservice to some students as they end up out of practice in not only general test taking skills, but are not able to build up study materials along the way for the NCE. I know this may be a controversial suggestion, but I truly think it would have been helpful for my style of learning as well as helped myself and others begin the process of preparing for the NCE long before graduation. This is also not to say that written assignments, projects, presentations, and role plays were not beneficial, but that a little less emphasis on those to allow for some testing would be helpful in the future.
- The way support plans are handled and reviewed by all core faculty members. Suggesting more of a one-on-one approach rather than a major process. Wished there was more support from advisors.
- Granted, I graduated a while ago and finally just got my license, so I'm not sure how relevant this feedback is now - but I don't remember there being a lot of info provided on seeking out and tracking licensure-eligible supervision and how to go about the actual LPC application process. It might be helpful for there to be more resources on this (even post-graduation) for students/alumni.
- I personally felt that the trauma courses could have used more full lifespan exploration as a lot of it focused on treatment of younger populations like children. I think additional in depth treatment planning assignments would have been useful as a part of every course, even if it was an in class exercise as that is the area I have felt the least prepared for in my first year post graduation.
- Thank you for everything. Seriously, this program changed my entire life and gave me the opportunity to pursue my dream and finally feel fulfilled in my career. Thank you.