NIU Rehabilitation Counseling Program Annual Report

Introduction

The information contained here is an annual report that includes a summary of the program evaluation results, subsequent program modifications, and other substantial program changes. This report is disseminated to all key program stakeholders including students currently in the program, alumni, program faculty, institutional administrators, and personnel in cooperating agencies (e.g., employers, site supervisors).

The Northern Illinois University (NIU) Master of Science Graduate Degree Program in Rehabilitation Counseling (RC) prepares students to make a difference by enhancing the lives of adults with disabilities, typically through employment or independent living goals. The RC program has been training NIU students for over forty-five years. Throughout the two-year program, students complete practicum and internship experiences, in addition to the academic curriculum. Classes are small; with cohorts generally fewer than 20 students. Prior to graduation, students are required to complete the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) and the national Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) examination. Graduates will have the knowledge, professional dispositions, and skills necessary to work in a variety of settings and be eligible to pursue additional professional counseling licenses and certifications. The program is accredited by the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Mission

The NIU Rehabilitation Counseling program prepares graduate students for assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve employment, independent living, and personal goals in integrated settings. Coursework emphasizes culturally sensitive interventions and integration of evidence-based practices to provide top-level support to people with disabilities.

Vision

The NIU Rehabilitation Counseling program aims to be a leader in providing quality preparation for certified rehabilitation counselors in public and private settings.

Student Learning Objectives
Graduates of the Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling program will:

1. Demonstrate effective communication (e.g., written, verbal, and nonverbal) in all areas of rehabilitation counseling (e.g., Public, Private Non-Profit, Private for Profit) and clinical mental health counseling settings.

2. Demonstrate understanding of rehabilitation counseling concepts
   a. CACREP common core domains (8 total): Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Counseling and Helping Relationships,
Group Counseling and Group Work, Assessment and Testing, Research and Program Evaluation

b. CACREP Rehabilitation Counseling Specialty domains (3 total): Foundations, Contextual Dimensions, Practice

3. Apply effective clinical skills for successful rehabilitation counseling practice.

4. Apply effective critical thinking skills necessary to solve problems in rehabilitation counseling settings.

5. Demonstrate understanding of multicultural competencies necessary for successful rehabilitation counseling practice.

Summary of Program Evaluation Results

Our systematic evaluation plan includes numerous assessment methods including: Course embedded assessments, Student Professional Disposition evaluations, External Site Supervisor Evaluations, Scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), Scores on the Certified Rehabilitation Counseling (CRC) exam, Anonymous Student Evaluations of Faculty in the Program, Student Self-Evaluation Reports, Student Exit Surveys, Alumni surveys, and Employer Surveys.

- Course embedded assessments indicated that on average, students are performing well on key course assignments related to the following areas:
- Students, employers, and alumni believe the program is meeting the five broad student learning objectives outlined above. External site supervisors for practicum and internship rate our students as successful on midterm and final evaluations. Students are scoring at the national average or better on comprehensive exams (i.e., CPCE and CRC).
- The number of graduates for the past academic year (2018-2019): 11
- Pass rates on credentialing examinations (2018-2019): 60% for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Examination. From 2014-2019, NIU student pass rates on the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam were above 80%, which is significantly higher than the national average. For example, CRC exam national pass rates were 55% in 2019.
- Job placement rates (2018-2019): 95%.
  - All employers rated alumni as “good” or “outstanding” related to the student learning outcomes. All employers were “extremely satisfied” with their employees who graduated from the NIU RC program.

Recent Program Modifications and Changes
In July 2017, the NIU Rehabilitation Counseling accreditation moved from the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). At the time, the program was 48 credit hours and is required to move to 60 credit hours before Fall 2023. Program faculty immediately began reviewing the 2016 CACREP standards and identifying areas that needed to be addressed. For example, a curriculum map was established using CACREP Common Core curricular standards and faculty subsequently developed course content on emergency preparedness, trauma counseling, family systems, diagnosis, substance abuse and crisis management.

Effective Fall 2018, the program added 6 additional credit hours of required courses: CAHC 565 Multicultural Counseling and CAHC 510 Counseling Interventions across the Lifespan. Through regular and ongoing assessment of student outcomes, faculty concluded that multicultural counseling and human growth and development were not sufficiently covered in the curriculum. Adding these courses ensured that these content areas are adequately covered and that the program meets accreditation standards related to these contact areas. REHB 628 Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of disability had been taught as a 4-credit course. Student outcomes indicated that the content did not fit in a 4-credit course and needed to be expanded to 6 credits. Therefore, instead of one 4 credit course, effective Fall 2018, the content from REHB 628 was taught in 2 courses (REHB 627 and REHB 628) at 3 credits each. REHB 628 is now titled Psychosocial Aspects of Disability.

Faculty continue to review assessment data from our systematic evaluation plan and will continue to make programmatic and curriculum improvements. A curriculum map is also used to make curriculum modifications. Based on student feedback and direct assessment, faculty are working on addressing the following gaps in the RC program curriculum: Case Management, and Group and Family Counseling. Students do complete a Group Counseling course (i.e., CAHC 540). REHB 777 was revised in Fall 2019 to include more content related to family systems and case management. Case Management has also been discussed as a potential new course offering by Fall 2023.

Faculty in the program are assigned student mentees and meet with each student at least once per semester to provide academic advising, check on academic progress, and help identify and address any academic barriers (e.g., financial).

Dr. Nahal Salimi will join the faculty as a tenure-track Assistant Professor beginning Fall 2020.

Beginning Fall 2020, students will be required to take the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE). Results of this exam will be used to inform curriculum decisions and provide feedback to students at an individual level. Further, this exam will help prepare for the National Counselor Examination, should that be required for counselor licensure in other states.