

Program Outcomes Report for 2023-2024 Academic Year

Mission

Our mission, as a Christ-centered program, is to educate invested and caring individuals who will serve in a variety of settings as counselors characterized by integrity, humility, skillfulness, and understanding. We desire that these professionals will be leaders who facilitate healing, growth, reconciliation and spiritual well-being for diverse people.

I. Program Updates:

The 23-24 Academic Year concluded with the successful hiring of three new Clinical Mental Health Counseling faculty members. Krista Kirk, Christian Donnelly and Kendra Jackson bring to our program a wealth of knowledge in different areas as well as experience as clinicians, supervisors, and instructors. You can read their bios on our faculty page <https://www.messiah.edu/info/21272/faculty>

This past year CACREP published the new 2024 Standards, which are streamlined and updated from the 2016 Standards, under which we are currently accredited. Messiah's counseling program will begin work to move to the 2024 Standards by July 2026. One addition to the CACREP 2024 Policy document is a requirement that all programs have at least 2 in-person experiences for students to learn from and be evaluated by faculty. Although we do currently offer two courses in intensive on-campus format, we also offer them in an online format, meaning that students can complete the entire program online. Students entering in July of 2026 or after will need to have two-in person experiences so the program is exploring ways to do this.

Our faculty continue to be active in professional organizations and are publishing and presenting in a variety of counseling venues.

Duncan, T.M. (2023). Entry: Assessment of racial microaggressions. *Encyclopedia of Multicultural Counseling, Social Justice, and Advocacy*. Sage.

Moultet, K. R., & Duncan, T. M. (2023, November). *Preparing families for the holidays: Stress, strengths, and forgiveness* [Webinar]. International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors.

Moultet, K. R., & Duncan, T. M. (2024, June). *Bridging the gap: Considering the transition from classroom to field experience while navigating student preparation and wellness*. Education session presented at the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling Virtual Conference.

Giovanetti, M., **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.**, & Burden, A. (2023, October 11–15). *Lessons learned: Effective teaching strategies in racially homogeneous classrooms* [Conference session]. Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, Denver, CO, United States.

Sandifer, M., **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.**, & Gibson, E. M. (2023, October 11–15). *A collaborative training model for school counselors as culturally affirming leaders: Implications for counselor educators* [Conference session]. Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, Denver, CO, United States.

Gibson, E. M., Sandifer, M., **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.**, & Thompson, J. (2023, July 14–18). *Culturally affirming shared leadership* [Conference session]. American School Counselors Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, United States.

- Gibson, E. M., **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.**, & Sandifer, M. I. C. (2023, December 7–8). *Become a transformational leader* [Pre-recorded virtual conference session]. ASCA@Home, Virtual, United States.
- Gibson, E. M., Sandifer, M. I. C., & **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.** (2023, December 7–8). *Move beyond awareness to action* [Pre-recorded virtual conference session]. ASCA@Home, Virtual, United States.
- Gibson, E. M., Thompson, J. M., Cook Sandifer, M. I., & **Brant-Rajahn, S. N.** (2024, May). *Transformational leadership together. Kentucky School Counselors Association: Counselor News.*
- Georgieva, M.**, DePalmer, S., & Mandia, L. (2023). *School counselor and clinical counselor collaboration: Ethics and best practices* [Conference presentation]. Pennsylvania Counseling Association Conference, Pennsylvania, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.**, **Georgieva, M.**, & Toler, M. (2024). ACPE's Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy (SIP) Training Program: Clinical Competencies for Integrating Religion and Spirituality in Counseling, *Journal of Faith Integration Counseling (JFIC)*: 1(1).
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2024, May 22). *Religious and spiritual implications in functional anger* [Conference presentation]. ACPE Annual Spring Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2024, May 21). *Ethical spiritual assessment* [Conference presentation]. ACPE Annual Spring Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2023, November 16). *Confidentiality in the Zoom world of cybersecurity* [Virtual conference presentation]. Alliant University, Virtual.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2023, November 3–4). *Art, dance, play! Interventions for angry clients* [Conference presentation]. Association for Creativity in Counseling, Melbourne, FL, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2023, November 3–4). *Leashing your anger beast intervention* [Conference presentation]. Association for Creativity in Counseling, Melbourne, FL, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2023, October 19–21). *Spirituality in the virtual world of videogamers* [Conference presentation]. Association for Clinical Pastoral Care, Atlanta, GA, United States.
- McGinnis, C. Z.** (2023, October 12). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy* [Conference presentation]. Inspirit Retreat, Baltimore, MD, United States.
- Moultet, K.** (February, 2023). *Facilitating resilience in graduate counseling students learning how to integrate theory.* Educational session at the International Association of Marriage, Couple and Family Counselors, St. Petersburg, FL.
- Moultet, K.** (2024, February). *Mirror, mirror on the wall: Helping couple and family counselors-in-training develop strategies for relational wellness in the face of client relational complexities* [Conference presentation]. International Association for Marriage and Family Counseling (IAMFC) Conference, St. Petersburg, FL, United States.
- Clarke, L. K.** (2023, Fall). *Addiction as ambiguous loss* [Conference presentation]. Pennsylvania Counseling Association Conference, Pennsylvania, United States.
- Clarke, L. K.** (2024). Alternative assessment (ungrading). *Effective alternative assessment practices in higher education.* Emerald Publishing Limited.

II. Student Data/Vital Statistics

CMHC = Clinical Mental Health Counseling (MA)

SCH = School Counseling (MA)

MCFC = Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling (MA)

CAGS = Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (not CACREP accredited)

A. Enrollment (End of Academic Year 23-24 Snapshot)

CMHC	SCH	MCFC	TOTAL
185	37	24	246

B. Graduates (December 2023 to August 2024)

CMHC	SCH	MCFC	TOTAL
52	17	17	86

C. Completion Rate* (Master's students who completed the program)

CMHC	SCH	MCFC
68.5%	78.2%	69.5%

* 3-year average of completion rates for students who began in 2015, 2016, and 2017 fiscal years

D. National Counselor Exam (NCE) 2023-2024 Academic Year

Historically, students in all three tracks of the Counseling program have taken the National Counselor Exam before graduation.

	Tested	Passed	Pass Rate
Fall 23	39	38	97%
Spring 24	15	14	93%

Pass rates by track: School Counseling 4 of 4 (100%), Marriage Couple and Family Counseling 8 of 8 (100%), and Clinical Mental Health Counseling 44 of 46 (96%)

E. Praxis II

Professional School Counselor exam required of School Counseling students in order to become certified school counselors in Pennsylvania.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, 100% of the students who took the Praxis II exam passed.

F. Job Placement Rate for graduates of Master's programs 6 or more months after degree completion in counseling positions (based on 2024 Alumni Survey). Excludes those not seeking counseling positions.

Clinical Mental Health Counseling N= 87	School Counseling N=40	Marriage Couple and Family Counseling N=20
100%	100%	100%

III. Demographics

A. Counseling Student by Gender and Ethnicity, snapshot at the end of 2023 academic year (Master's only):

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	
GENDER	
Female	202
Male	44
ETHNIC BACKGROUND	
Asian / Asian-American	6
Black / African-American	28
Hispanic, Latino/a, inc. Spain	26
Multi-Ethnic / 2 or more races	8
White / Non-Hispanic	171

B. Geography: The Counseling Program has students in 32 U.S. states. Pennsylvania has the most students with 160. Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Washington, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas have the next most students.

IV. Program Learning Outcomes

Every year the program evaluates student learning outcomes in the areas outlined in our Program Objectives. Each of these objectives is aligned with a Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLO) defined by Messiah University. **Action steps noted in bold.** Note that not all objectives are assessed every year.

Program Objective 1. To provide students with the specific knowledge and skills required of clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, or marriage, couple and family counselors as delineated by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

For 23-24 in PLO 1 we assessed the areas of Helping Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, and Assessment and Testing.

In the area of Helping Relationships, students generally report feeling competent in their understanding and application of counseling theories. This self-assessed competence is supported by their performance on the National Counselor Examination (NCE), where scores reflect a strong grasp of theoretical foundations. However, some challenges were observed in the fall semester, potentially due to a larger number of transfer students who had taken different foundational courses. Efforts are also being made in foundational courses such as COUN 501 to ensure reflection forms are completed appropriately within the course structure, rather than through remediation.

There is an ongoing discussion about refining assessment methods, particularly regarding whether case presentations or video submissions in field experiences would provide a more accurate evaluation of student

competencies than supervisor evaluations. Although current clinical skills development plans indicate that videos are to be graded, this is being done only indirectly. **There is a recognized need to refocus efforts on directly grading these submissions and to ensure consistency in evaluation practices across tracks.** For example, the Marriage, Couple, and Family (MCF) track requires three video submissions with an accompanying rubric, whereas the Clinical Mental Health (CMH) track does not, and the School (SCH) track also uses a rubric. A consistent rubric-based assessment across tracks would enhance fairness and clarity. In addition, faculty have noted differences between what is reported on student surveys and what is communicated directly by site supervisors. This suggests a need for triangulating data sources to capture a more complete picture of student development, as well as providing training to supervisors on feedback practices.

COUN 528: Career Counseling has evolved over time, and its current role in evaluation of counseling skills may need reconsideration to determine whether it is the most appropriate place to assess certain competencies. **COUN 541: Assessment Techniques has been suggested as a possible alternative, particularly for evaluating initial or intake interviewing skills.** The Somers-Flanagan textbook has good information as well as assessment tools that could be used.

For the Group Counseling objectives it was determined that the reflection paper that connects the group counseling class to the COUN 501 class could be reworked so that it would ensure students reflect at a deeper level.

In the area of Assessment, curricular changes combined what were previously track-specific sections into a single course for all counseling students. While this unified structure allows for consistent content delivery, it also means that the course now covers a broad range of material. One of the strengths of the course is the use of quizzes, which have been helpful in preparing students for the National Counselor Examination (NCE). **However, these quizzes are currently open book and may need updating to better reflect current standards and expectations.**

Faculty noted that the intake interview has not been emphasized as much as other components of the course. Additionally, while students are asked in their reports to consider how to explain assessment results to clients, there is a need for greater emphasis on the delivery of results. **In particular, students should be encouraged to not only explain challenges but also highlight client strengths. A stronger focus on helping students understand how to communicate results in a client-centered, constructive manner is recommended.**

There were also suggestions to reorganize some course content for better flow and effectiveness. **Moving the multicultural component from week five to the beginning of the course would allow students to apply a cultural lens from the outset. Similarly, positioning the ethics content earlier in the semester would underscore its foundational importance.**

Another key area identified for improvement is teaching students how to select appropriate assessments and effectively present results. With evolving best practices around assessing risk and intervention planning, there is a growing amount of information that may be too extensive to include in this course alone. We can consider distributing this content across multiple courses to ensure comprehensive coverage without overwhelming students.

Additional experiential components were also discussed. For example, incorporating case studies or role plays into field experience courses could help reinforce risk evaluation skills from the assessment course. Specifically, in the School track, it may be worth reconsidering where assessment content is placed. **The suicide assessment assignment in Practicum could be an appropriate context for deeper engagement with assessment material, potentially shifting some content from the current course into that setting. Finally, faculty suggested the development of a shared module for all field experience courses, which would include evidence-based practices and a unified model of suicide assessment.**

Program Objective 3 - State licensure To prepare students to meet the educational requirements for state licensure as a licensed professional counselor (LPC) or as a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT), or for certification as an elementary and secondary school counselor.

In the area of licensure knowledge, the program has experienced an influx of transfer students whose previous institutions may not have covered licensure requirements as they were not required to by CACREP. A newly hired staff member in the Provost's office dedicated to licensure is actively working to update and centralize licensure information. **Some field experience (FE) courses have also begun revisiting licensure, these efforts could be broadened.**

Regarding exams, students in the Marriage, Couple & Family (MCF) track performed exceptionally well on the National Counselor Examination (NCE), reflecting strong preparation in core content areas. However, obtaining data for the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE) remains a challenge due to the small number of students taking the exam, which prevents the testing service from releasing results. Despite this, historical performance on the NCMHCE has been strong. Anecdotally, students report using case studies from the Psychopathology course to help prepare for the exam, suggesting this course plays a key role in exam readiness.

Exam scores for the NCE research section have raised some concerns, as scores in this area appear inconsistent. One potential explanation is that the Research course is frequently transferred in from other institutions, which may impact overall student preparedness. The program may want to **consider informing transfer students that additional study in research methods may be necessary to ensure they meet expected competencies in this domain.**

Program Objective 5 - Ethical practice: To guide students toward an ethical practice of counseling that is grounded in professional and spiritual values.

Ethics remains a central focus throughout the counseling program, with faculty expressing a desire to integrate it more intentionally across the curriculum in future planning. Given that ethical considerations appear in numerous courses, one suggestion was to **incorporate a final discussion in each class focused on identifying and applying relevant ethical standards.** This approach is already emphasized in School Counseling courses, where ethical decision-making is particularly critical.

In COUN 501, faculty noted variability in how students complete the ethics-related assignment—some engage deeply with the content, while others appear to complete it perfunctorily. To ensure more consistent engagement, there is discussion about separating this component into its own assignment. **Additionally, the potential to embed ethical decision-making into the Spiritual Formation course was raised,** as it offers a space for students to apply ethical reasoning within the context of personal and spiritual values.

Critical-Competency Evaluations (CCEs) related to ethics are not submitted as frequently as those for other content areas. Upcoming guidance from the Provost regarding artificial intelligence, academic integrity, and plagiarism is expected to provide additional clarity, and the program is preparing to integrate these updates into relevant coursework and policies.

The values assignment in COUN 537: Spiritual Formation may need to be supplemented by additional reinforcement in other courses such as COUN 510 or COUN 541. **For example, using a values sort in 541 (Assessment)** or COUN 510 (Lifespan). Faculty are also considering how to more explicitly educate students about plagiarism, APA style, and the use of tools such as Turnitin as part of academic integrity education.

Program Objective 6 – Intercultural Competence To help a diverse student body become self-reflective leaders who understand and address how issues of discrimination, privilege and oppression impact the practice and policies of counseling in a multicultural society.

Based on the most recent exit survey, students report a strong sense that diversity is respected within the counseling program. They feel culturally affirmed and recognize that the curriculum incorporates a range of diverse perspectives. These findings reflect positively on the program's commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment. However, faculty have noted that essay exam scores which relate to cultural competence in COUN 501 are comparatively lower. This course often serves as students' first formal introduction to multicultural competence within the counseling profession, which may contribute to the initial challenges reflected in their written responses. In contrast, students have demonstrated strong performance on the advocacy project in field experiences, indicating their ability to engage with and apply concepts of diversity and social justice in meaningful ways.

To further support multicultural development, the program has launched an affinity group initiative led by Dr. Sarah Brant-Rajahn. This group creates additional space for cultural dialogue and reflection, and the anonymized ideas collected from these meetings will continue to be reviewed and applied to inform curricular and pedagogical decisions. Non-white students make up 28% of the counseling program and men make up 18%, which has been fairly consistent in the last few years.