Program Evaluation
Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s Program
University of Kentucky

Submitted by:

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I. Overview and Purpose of the Program Evaluation

The purpose of the program evaluation is to review and assess the overall strengths and areas for growth and improvement for the Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s program at University of Kentucky (UK) with a specific focus on the Distance Learning program. This evaluator was charged with providing an external assessment of the program [on-campus and Distance Learning (DL)] to generate insights and recommendations for program development. The evaluation process included a two day on campus visit to meet and interview faculty, administration, and program stakeholders, follow up phone interviews with University resource staff, and review of program documentation and materials, and DL courses.

II. Description of Programs (On-Campus and Distance Learning)

The Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s program is the only Rehabilitation Counseling graduate program in the state of Kentucky. It is seen as the “Crown Jewel” in the UK College of Education. Since its establishment in 1962, the program has provided a necessary professional education program to train and prepare graduate students to assist and counsel individuals with disabilities to achieve personal, social, career, and independent living goals. As a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited program, graduates are prepared to become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) and licensed as Professional Counselors. There are two concentrations within the program: Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling and Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling with Mental Health focus. The program is offered as an on campus or an accelerated 16-month Distance Learning (DL) program. The overall Rehabilitation Counseling program is housed in the College of Education and falls under the Department of Early Education, Special Education, and Rehabilitation Counseling.

The program’s addition of Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling with Mental Health focus is a required concentration for the expanding practices of rehabilitation counseling in the field. With national and state level changes for professional counselor qualifications, the move by both the on campus and DL programs to offer this concentration is an effective strategy to ensure the growth of enrollment. The program also has an endorsement with Kentucky State University (HBC) of a 12 credit certificate program which leads to students entering the 60 credit Rehabilitation Counseling graduate program at UK.

III. Curriculum (Courses and Fieldwork)

The program follows a 60 credit curriculum which includes 48 credits of coursework and 12 credits of required field work (practicum and internship). The curriculum follows the Rehabilitation Counseling standards of CORE. In preparation for application to the conversion option under CORE and Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) dual accreditation, the program recently aligned its curriculum with the Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Counseling specialty standards under CACREP.
Coursework includes coverage of the required content areas for both accreditation bodies such as: Counseling Theories and Techniques, Group and Family Counseling, Principles of Rehabilitation Counselling, Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability, Case Management, Job Development and Placement, Multicultural Counseling, research, and Human Growth and Development. There are additional courses depending on which track students choose that include Chemical and Drug Dependency, Mental Health Diagnosis and Treatment, Psychopharmacology, Ethics, Assistive Technology or Rehabilitation in Business and Industry. On campus courses are offered in 16 week semesters whereas the DL program offers courses in 8 week modules within the semesters. Courses are offered throughout the year including summer sessions.

Fieldwork requirements include a 200-hour practicum and 600-hour internship within community programs and agencies serving individuals with disabilities. Students completing fieldwork requirements are clinically supervised by both program faculty and on site supervisors who are CRCs or under supervision of a CRC faculty member. Students complete field work experiences is a variety of settings such as State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP), community mental health and substance abuse treatment programs, hospital, and rehabilitation facilities.

The on campus program takes fulltime students on average 3 years to complete. In 2004, in order to meet a growing need for qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, the DL program was established and has grown to be the largest distance education graduate programs at the University of Kentucky. As an accelerated 60 credit program with the same curriculum which serves students from around the country, the program is specifically designed to provide students with the necessary educational requirements and clinical training for entry level Rehabilitation Counseling or building professional qualifications to the Master’s level as required by their employers. The program presently has a five-year long term training grant for student funding through the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

Upon review of one of the DL program’s courses (RC 750 Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Research and Program Evaluation) on CANVAS (UK’s online learning platform) showed weekly on line audio-lectures lectures with PowerPoint slides, weekly on line discussion boards, and rigorous course requirements and assignments. During the site visit, observation of an online practicum class was completed. There were several technical glitches with Zoom but it was the first week of classes and students and faculty instructor were new to the technology. The distance nature of connecting students to faculty and students to students is difficult but it appears that using technology to provide instruction and supervision to students around the country is a strength of the program. Students were pleased with the ability to see their classmates every week and provide a needed sharing and “cross fertilization” of fieldwork placement and employment experiences.
Several stakeholders (students, graduates, site supervisors, employers, and part-time faculty) commented on the intensity of the DL program in terms of compressing a 60-credit program with fieldwork into 16 months. Site supervisors and employers reported that there can be a disconnected between what is learned in 8-week courses and if it is enough time to sufficiently absorb and prepare a student for application in the field. Conversely, students in DL program who are already working in the field appear to thrive and able to integrate what they have learned into their work settings. A possible remedy to this challenge could be to develop an additional track for the DL program for students not working in the field and can be integrated into on-campus classes through technology such as Zoom. It is common to many DL programs to combine on-campus and distance students. This alternate DL track could follow the regular 16-week semester format not the 8-week format.

Another area for consideration noted was the need to develop and manage field placement sites in other states. Due to distance, it is difficult for the DL Director to conduct outreach to other potential placement sites for students in other states. Much of the time, students who are working in the field utilize their employment setting as a practicum and/or internship site. But there appears to be many students who need help identifying and securing placements. It was reported that there have been instances that students find placements on their own and then the placements fall through. The program had a part-time instructor to work specifically with Kentucky-based students but at present DL Director is responsible to remedy these critical situations. Consideration should be given to dedicated effort and time to developing formal affiliations with field placement sites outside Kentucky could benefit the program and its students.

IV. Faculty (Full Time and Adjunct)

The full-time faculty are dedicated and established leaders, educators, and scholars in the Rehabilitation Counseling profession and are committed to the success of the program. At this time, there are five full-time faculty which include Program Director, Dr. Ralph Crystal, who is an Endowed Professor in Rehabilitation Education at the University. The program recently added two new Assistant Professors; one for the graduate program and another to develop the undergraduate program in rehabilitation services. Faculty teach on-campus courses and have on average 7-8 advisees from the on-campus Master's program. Full-time faculty have developed online course content but do not usually teach courses in the DL program as part of their regular semester course load. Full-time faculty do, however, teach DL summer courses. In addition, the faculty also have responsibility for scholarship and the Doctoral Program in Rehabilitation Counseling. The program has established a collegial environment and support which is apparent for new faculty. With the loss of one tenured faculty due to administrative reassignment, the full-time faculty are stretched regarding teaching, scholarship, and program administration (recruitment, admissions, advising, program
development). Concerns about leadership succession planning within the program were also mentioned.

As a Clinical Associate Professor, Dr. Jackie Rogers serves as the Director of the DL program. Dr. Rogers is responsible for advisement and management of up to 100 students in the DL program. Well qualified part-time faculty and course facilitators (including UK Doctoral Students as Teaching Assistants) supplement the teaching and supervision of DL graduate students and provide a necessary professional perspective from the field. Part-time adjunct are professionals with many years of experience in the rehabilitation counseling field and represent counselors, administration, and supervisors in Kentucky’s Vocational Rehabilitation program, community rehabilitation providers, and other agencies which serve individuals with disabilities including mental health services.

There was much discussion by several stakeholders, administration, and faculty about the workload of the DL Program Director and if re-evaluation of the responsibilities and distribution of effort are warranted. At the present time, the program is short staff which has not impacted quality but there are many goals for growth and continued development. Specialized certificate or professional development courses were mentioned but due to lack of time and resources have not been implemented. There were comments from stakeholders about “just keeping heads above the water” while in a response mode and felt it prevented a proactive management approach. This will be addressed further in Director and Opportunities section of report.

V. Students and Graduates

A strength of the program is students enrolled in the Master’s program (both on campus and DL program) represent a variety of diverse cultural and personal backgrounds. Both the on campus and DL program students and graduates provided positive feedback about their experiences in the program including quality of coursework, field work, and faculty commitment. Presently there are approximately a total of 106 in all the Master’s programs: 22 on-campus, 84 in the DL program, and six students in the DL graduate certificate program.

DL students indicate that the flexibility of the program is a needed component for working professionals. Current students in DL program and recent graduates reported on the intensity of the accelerated program, while there were advantages for some students to be able to finish their degrees quickly; others commented that collapsing a 60 credit degree including fieldwork, was difficult to maintain. There was question about the ability of students to fully digest course content (8 week modules) and then integrate knowledge and skills into practice in a 16-month timeline. It was also reported that many on campus students would prefer taking DL courses as part of meeting the on campus program requirements which may be an issue for on campus student enrollment.
VI. Site Supervisors of Fieldwork Placements

Though review of materials and interviews with site supervisors, state training director, and employers, the UK Rehabilitation Counseling program is highly respected in the State of Kentucky. It is known for producing qualified graduates and it is hard to find a rehabilitation counselor in Kentucky who is not a UK graduate. Through interviews with site supervisors, it was reported that the strengths of both programs include high quality of faculty, strong connections and relationships with the field, effective communications between program and site supervisors, and the program’s ethical practice orientation. They feel for the most part UK students are prepared for learning in their field work placements.

Areas of improvement noted by site supervisors include: development of critical thinking and writing skills, increasing professional confidence of students, strengthening placement, employment, disability benefits, and vocational assessment competencies, and community resources course content. In addition, related to critical thinking and writing skills, site supervisors questioned the screening process and admissions requirements for program applicants for both on campus and DL students. It was recommended that the screening process be improved to assess the readiness of potential students. It was reported that screening admissions process could also include evaluation of professional attributes and skills necessary for the field including a writing sample. It was also noted that the compressed nature of the DL program might be a factor in the quality of student learning outcomes. Nevertheless, overall the site supervisors were highly complementary of the program and stated it is seen as a cornerstone in the Kentucky rehabilitation counseling community. UK graduates are highly sought after by employers.

VII. Administration of the Program

The program has one dedicated administrative assistant who is responsible for all program administrative duties including admissions processing, enrollment management, website maintenance, University reporting, and RSA grant management. The program also has support from the College of Education’s Sponsored Programs office. Along with the Program Director, administrative support oversees student awards, grant administration and budgeting, payback reporting and annual reports on current RSA scholars. Currently, there are three closed RSA grants which require ongoing graduate follow up and reporting and one active RSA grant.

Through the interviews and descriptions from staff, the processes in place for administrative aspects of the program are good and the team within the office assure that the programs run well.
VIII. Program Resources- Disability Resource Center, Technology, and E-Learning

Supports and resources within the University and College of Education for the program, its faculty, and students are sufficient. Related to the Rehabilitation Counseling program, the UK Disability Resource Center, who is Director is a graduate of the Rehabilitation Counseling doctoral program and an adjunct faculty member, is well staffed and provides excellent base of services and facilities for serving students with disabilities. UK Technology and Distance Learning (or E-Learning) provides support for website management including accessibility compliance.

There are several new technologies which UK has adopted and both the on campus and the DL programs are utilizing. An overall switch from Blackboard to CANVAS was made just recently as the distance learning platform at UK. Technology support was instrumental in helping to migrate the Rehabilitation Counseling program courses. Zoom is a new synchronous web based meeting platform for UK is now used in distance courses for face to face instruction and supervision of students. The College of Education has one-part time Instructional Designer (10 hours per week) who is available to work with faculty and DL Director on course development and revision but admittedly, as a 10 hour a week employee, the designer is stretched in her responsibilities for the entire College of Education.

There is peer support as well as training available to faculty for teaching, designing and tech support with the University E-learning Center. In the Center, there are three fulltime instructional designers to work with faculty to build, develop, or revise course content. There are stipends for faculty to update courses also. In addition, a valuable resource, Quality Matters (QM) Rubric which has established national quality standards for distance learning, is offered through the E-learning office. The QM rubric and process can be applied to any course at UK to assess that the course meet the standards. Any faculty can request a QM review of their courses or participate in faculty training to apply the QM rubric in the development or evaluation of their courses. According to records, no DL program courses have been developed or internally reviewed using the QM process and rubric. As the program’s course were developed prior to QM, it is suggested that the QM review process and rubric be required in the updating and revision of existing courses.

In conversation with the Director of E-learning for UK, it was reported that they interact with the DL program as troubleshooters for technical glitches and problems with courses and student issues. There was also mention of the accessibility of courses through captioning. Captioning of DL courses was a consistent issue raised by faculty, students, Disability Resource Center, and technology support staff. Accessibility of online courses for students with visual or other disabilities is an accommodation issue.
IX. College of Education Administration

Interviews were conducted with several administrative leaders in the College of Education and the Department. These included the Chair of the Department of Early Education, Special Education, and Rehabilitation Counseling, Associate Provost, Dean of the College of Education, and the Associate Dean of the College of Education who is responsible for accreditation. It was apparent through these conversations that the Rehabilitation Counseling program and its faculty are valued, supported, and viewed as critical UK and College of Education “citizens”. Program faculty are seen as leaders not only in their field but as leaders in research and service within the University and College. It was highlighted that the Program Director is an Endowed Professor. The strengths mentioned were high quality curriculum, ongoing CORE accreditation, strong state and local community relationships, support of its Professional Advisory Committee, and diversity of faculty and students, development of the Undergraduate program, and pursuing CACREP accreditation of the Doctoral program. Specific to the DL program, it was noted that the Rehabilitation Counseling program is the first distance program at UK. Administration also noted several areas for improvement and future growth. These include program communication and research with other related disciplines, and distribution of DL program possibilities among all faculty.

X. Review of Program Processes

i. Admissions

The programs accept applications year-round and accept new students in Fall and Spring (for DL program) and Fall, Spring, and Summer (on-campus). On average the programs combined receive about 90 applicants per year and accept approximately 80. However, this varies from year to year. The admissions administrative process is standard for most graduate programs: applicant must first meet UK Graduate School requirements including a 2.7 GPA, then provide three recommendations for the Rehabilitation Counseling program and a group interview (face to face for on campus and telephonic for DL program). GRE scores are not required for admission. Admission decisions are made by the entire faculty and accepted students are assigned to advisor within the program. At this time, the faculty have approximately 8-10 on-campus advisees and the Director of the DL program is responsible for 84 DL advisees. The program administrative assistant handles all admission processes including communications with applicants and faculty, processing applications and documentation, setting up interviews and working with graduate school admissions.

As previously mentioned, the program is the only Rehabilitation Counseling program in the State of Kentucky. The addition of a Mental Health counseling concentration to serve the growing need for cross trained counselors in both rehabilitation and mental
health counseling is necessary and advantageous for increasing enrollment in both the on campus and DL programs

ii. Enrollment and Advisement - On Campus and Distance Learning Programs

As mentioned, the DL program presently has 84 part-time and full-time students. This is in strong contrast to the 22 on campus students. Many potential and current students are living and working in states or in areas of Kentucky where travel to campus is difficult. The appeal of the DL program is that it is designed for working professionals and students who may not otherwise seek a graduate degree. The flexibility it provides to students is popular and meets a growing need for accessible graduate education.

Despite limited resources, the program is commended for its efforts to increase enrollments. However, with pressure to continue growth through more enrollments, serving additional students has the potential to create added workload and quality challenges especially for the DL program. Special consideration is warranted on the capacity of the program to grow enrollment while trying to function with strained resources. This will be addressed further in Opportunities and Recommendations section of this report.

The program provides group orientation for all students upon admission to the program. Students are also provided a student handbook and have access to advisors for planning programs of study. For the DL program, orientation is provided at a distance through technology such as Zoom. The DL Director is solely responsible for advising the 84 DL students and frequently provides both group and individual advising. There is a lack of balance in the distribution of advises among faculty. Several DL students indicated although they have access to DL Director for questions and concerns, it would be helpful to have more one-on-one interaction with faculty advisor as needed.

iii. Student Support and Resources

The Rehabilitation Counseling program has been fortunate in obtaining external funding for students in the program. The program has been successfully awarded four Rehabilitation Services Administration ((RSA) Long Term Training grants. Three of these grants are now closed but still require payback follow up with graduated scholars. There is one active RSA grant which is specifically for DL students. Dr. Rogers is Principal Investigator (PI) for this grant. This grant is available and funds students who are seeking Master’s degree as part of their employment as state Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. Obtaining one Long Term Rehabilitation Counseling training grant is a significant accomplishment in Rehabilitation Counselor Education (RCE), however, four over the last decade is notable and has resulted in over 4 million dollars of student funding.

The federal grant awards demonstrate quality educational programs focused on RCE values to prepare graduate for serving individuals with disabilities. Leadership and
collaboration in administration of these grants is rigorous. From student recruitment, scholar application processes, management of scholars and awards, and ongoing monitoring and coordination of scholars in program, past graduation payback monitoring and ongoing reporting to RSA are extensive and demanding.

XI. Role and Responsibilities of DL Program Director

Dr. Rogers is the Director and Administrator for the DL and Graduate Certificate programs. Her responsibilities include student recruitment, admissions duties, advisement, oversight of all part-time DL instructors, and quality assurance of academic and professional development programs, and supervision, training, and coordination with distance instructors and Doctoral Student instructors. For the DL program, Dr. Rogers must also outreach and coordinate with over 46 states regarding student training. Under her leadership, the DL program has grown from serving 2 states to 46 and has transformed into a national program with over 450 graduates around the country.

Dr. Rogers is also the Assistant Director of Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Studies. She performs administrative responsibilities including recruitment, admissions reviews and decisions, and student service activities. Dr. Rogers also has teaching, supervision, and heavy advisement responsibilities in addition to the administrative and coordination duties within the DL program. As mentioned, she is presently the PI for a 5 year RSA Master Long Term Training Grant in Vocational Rehabilitation. Additionally, as past PI for other RSA grants, she still has ongoing responsibilities for monitoring of graduates and reporting to RSA.

In her numerous roles, Dr. Rogers has focused on student recruitment into the DL program and Graduate Certificate Program. The growth of the DL program is a manifestation of Dr. Rogers strong student recruitment efforts. Through interviews with stakeholders, Dr. Rogers has developed strong relationship with many State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies who rely on UK’s DL program to assure their counselors and new hires are appropriately trained to serve their citizens with disabilities.

Another essential undertaking for the Director is development and coordinating fieldwork placements for distance education students out of state. As mentioned previously, this is a time consuming activity. Dr. Rogers had received some assistance from a part time faculty member but now the bulk of the work falls on Dr. Rogers. It was apparent more attention, effort, and time is needed to develop formal affiliations with field placement sites outside Kentucky for program enrollment and growth.

Other areas of responsibility that have increased are the technical aspects of running the DL program. Although the University and College have technology and E-Learning support, the Director is increasingly spending more time performing technical and instructional design tasks such as assuring courses are running correctly online, overseeing the transition of courses from Blackboard to CANVAS, troubleshooting technical issues for students and instructors, captioning courses for accessibility, and
completing ongoing updates for course content, instructional materials, course activities, and current course technology.

Through interviews and review of DL program, additional issues were identified for consideration are course management, course facilitator and student management, and a closer examination of DL program management, logistics, and processes.

With successful DL program growth, the growing responsibilities and tasks have resulted in several program challenges which need attention and discussion about the distribution of effort. Specific suggestions for approaching this issue will be addressed the Opportunities and Recommendations section of this report.

Program Strengths and Highlights

- UK’s Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program is the only graduate program in Kentucky which prepares graduate students to assist and counsel individuals with disabilities to achieve personal, social, career, and independent living goals.

- The program is a considered cornerstone in the Kentucky Rehabilitation Counseling field and valued by the University and College of Education for its quality curriculum, strong faculty teaching, leadership, scholarship, and service, and proven relationships with the state and community agencies.

- The program has dedicated and committed faculty who are invested in the improvement and advancing of the program.

- Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program with Mental Health focus to cross train student for increased enrollment and provide training to Rehabilitation Counselors seeking Professional Counselor licensure in the state.
The program is accredited by CORE and seeking dual accreditation for Clinical Rehabilitation and Clinical Mental Health Counseling through CACREP.

The cultural diversity and employability of its students and graduates who are highly sought after by employers.

The flexibility and accelerated DL program for working students and those who might not otherwise be able to seek a Master’s degree due to location.

Five 5 year RSA grant for funding students in DL program.

University support services including Disability Resource Center, Technology, Sponsored Programs, and E-Learning.

Opportunities and Recommendations for Program Growth and Improvement

The following recommendations are opportunities identified as a result of the program evaluation which warrant consideration for further program improvement, management, and growth.

DL Program Director Roles and Responsibilities

Restructuring the role and responsibilities of the DL Director to allow for more balance in program administration, student management and advisement, fieldwork placement development, affiliations, and management, DL course administration, course instructor management, and technical tasks.

Add dedicated Clinical Instructor/faculty to delegate, support, and share DL advisement, teaching, and DL program processes.
Curriculum and DL Course Delivery

Strengthen curriculum content areas related to job placement techniques, employment/job development, disability benefits, vocational assessment techniques, and community resources.

Consult with Instructional Designer for creative ways to deliver DL course content for vocational assessment which allow for more hands on experiences equivalent to on campus course (e.g. testing administration, community based assignments, instructional videos demonstrating assessment and testing techniques)

Utilization of the Quality Matters (QM) process and rubric for all DL course development, existing course updates, revisions, and quality assurance (e.g. required faculty training in QM rubric, and institute a QA program for internal evaluation of DL program courses by E-Learning staff against quality standards).

Identification of obligated funding sources for captioning of all DL course as a priority for the DL program in order to be compliant with ADA.

Consider dedicated Instructional Designer support for DL program to streamline maintenance and updating of courses and to serve as resource to faculty and course instructors. (e.g., a part time or shared dedicated Instructional Designer for the program).

Admissions and Enrollment

Improve screening and assessment of applicants for critical thinking, writing skills, and professional attributes for counseling field (e.g., required writing samples as part of application).

Add dedicated Clinical Instructor/faculty to delegate, support, and share DL advisement, teaching, and DL program processes to address expectations for increased enrollment.

Consider capping admission to DL program until there are faculty and DL program support resources

Development of additional non accelerated DL Master’s program track for students who are not working in the field and link to the on campus program.

Develop a plan to increase recruitment for students in the on campus program.

Develop specialized professional development courses to be offered to Rehabilitation Counseling professionals via DL program.
Student Advisement
Consider DL advisee load to be distributed either between full time faculty or additional full time Clinical Instructor dedicated to DL program.

Fieldwork Placement
Prioritize the undertaking of developing and securing formal fieldwork placement affiliations with sites and in states where DL students are working and living to assure consistency in placements and adequate supervision.

Provide proactive orientation, advisement, and guidance for DL students for secure fieldwork placements.

Other Program Opportunities
Evaluate integration of student knowledge and skills for entry level employment—is 16 months too fast for a 60 credit program?

Succession Planning for program leadership.