



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program Georgian Court University Annual Report 2019-2020 Academic Year

The Clinical Mental Health Counseling is a 60-credit program intended for those who wish to pursue advanced studies in the counseling profession. Emphasis is placed on the development of knowledge and skills that will allow students to seek licensure as a Licensed Associate Counselor (LAC), and then a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) upon completion of post-Masters' supervised hours, and/or to enter into a doctoral program in Counselor Education. Students can also opt for an Addictions Track, which involves taking four specified courses within their 60-credit course of study which enables them to be eligible for an additional license as a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor (LCADC).

In addition to the MA program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, a Professional Counselor Certificate (PCC) Program is offered which allows students who have completed a Masters' Degree in Counseling or a closely-related field, but do not have the required credits or courses in all of the areas specified by the State Board to take additional courses upon advisement to enable them to be eligible for licensure as an LAC/LPC.

The Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program is accredited by Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The Addictions Track is certified by the Addiction Professional Certification Board of New Jersey.

The core faculty of the CMHC program continues to be Joseph Springer, PhD (Professor, Program Director), Sherritta Hughes, PhD (Assistant Professor), Lori Nixon-Bethea (Assistant Professor) and Marni Elson-Victor, MA, (Practicum Coordinator). Ms. Elson-Victor also teaches courses in addiction in the graduate program. Dr. Springer is a Licensed Psychologist and an Approved Clinical Supervisor through that National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC). Drs. Hughes and Nixon and Ms. Elson-Victor are Licensed Professional Counselors and Approved Clinical Supervisors. Ms. Elson-Victor is also a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor. Wanda Quezada, EdD returned from the previous year to teach two courses as an Adjunct Professor During the Fall, 2019 semester.

In March of 2020, all courses were moved to a virtual format due to the COVID pandemic. The pandemic also affected operations in a number of other areas, to be discussed below.

We are thankful to the field placement supervisors, our partners in preparing professional counselors. Ms. Elson-Victor traditionally makes site-visits to the organizations and agencies where our students are placed for their Practicum/Internship experiences, and typically goes during the spring semester, in order to allow supervisors ample time to become very familiar

with our students. This past year, Ms. Elson-Victor was only able to visit two sites due to COVID restrictions, which contrasts with the 18 site-visits she did the previous year. We will be planning on having virtual site-visits during the spring of next year if restrictions continue.

Dr. Sherritta Hughes has been spearheading our application for re-accreditation by CACREP. We have been granted an extension on submission by CACREP due to the challenges and disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, however we expect to have it completed by the end of 2020.

The program faculty have continued to be active outside of Georgian Court. Dr. Hughes was the Keynote Speaker at the American College Counseling Association conference in Washington, D.C. She is the Historian for the North Atlantic Region of Counselor Educators and Supervisors, and presented at the Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors in Seattle, Washington. Dr. Nixon-Bethea's book *Riley's Worry Away: A Children's Book About Worrying* was featured in the publication *Counseling Today*, and she did a talk on the book at Barnes & Noble. She was interviewed by *The Asbury Park Press* for an article about teen suicide and the impact of social media on mental health, and she was interviewed about her book for an article in Georgian Court's Magazine entitled *Helping Children Through Words and Pictures*. Ms. Elson-Victor completed virtual and youth mental health first aid instructor training and is a member of the Howell Alcohol and Drug Alliance. Dr. Springer continued to provide training in Psychopharmacology for the NJ Department of Human Services Doctoral Internship in Clinical Psychology and the NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

We did not have a Community Advisory Board meeting this past year, as we have traditionally held them in the spring, and we were still on "the learning curve" regarding hosting virtual meetings. We plan to re-instate our Community Advisory Board meeting in the coming year now that we are more up-to-speed regarding hosting such meetings.

The majority of students in the Internship courses were not able to complete their required 600 hours by the end of Internship II in the summer due to COVID restrictions. We will be running an Internship Continuation course for these students to allow them to meet their hourly requirement. There will be no cost to the students for this course.

The CMHC program admitted 14 students for the Fall, 2020 semester. We also have 5 Professional Certificate students. The CMHC program graduated 17 students during the 2019-2020 academic year (13 in December, 4 in May). The total number of students in the program (CMHC and PCC combined) was 42 full-time and 15 part-time in Fall 2019 for a total of 57 Full-Time Equivalents, and 29 full-time and 14 part-time in Spring 2020 for a total of 43 Full Time Equivalents. The reduction in number between the Fall and Spring semesters is accounted for by the relatively large number of graduates in December, 2019.

We are anticipating that instruction will continue in a virtual format during at least the Fall semester of 2020, with a re-evaluation for the Spring 2021 semester.

One of our outcome measures for student learning is the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), which is a nationally-administered examination administered by the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE). CCE provides national normative data on the test, which is used by over 400 Counseling programs in the United States. Passing the CPCE is an exit requirement for the CMHC program, with a passing score cutoff as being better than one standard deviation below the national mean, which is the generally-accepted industry standard. The pass-rate for Georgian Court CMHC students for the past academic year was 15 out of 16, for a pass rate of 94%. It will be noted that four students passed on a re-take after not passing on their first attempt. Nevertheless, the national passing rate based on the established cutoff score is approximately 84%, and we are quite pleased to have a pass-rate that is above the national norm. In October, 2019, Dr. Springer conducted a full-day Saturday workshop to help our students prepare for the CPCE, as we had noticed somewhat of a drop-off in performance for several of the previous cohorts as compared to the performance of our students over the longer-term. The most recent results suggest that this was helpful, and the plan is to continue to make this available to our students.

Another outcome measure is student performance on the National Counselor Examination (NCE). This is not a requirement for graduation from the program, however it is a requirement for licensure. Students can take the exam after they complete the program, however we also offer students the opportunity to take the exam prior to graduating from GCU through an arrangement with the National Board of Certified Counselors, in which students also apply for a National Certified Counselor credential. This allows us to assess the performance of these students, as the results are sent to GCU. During the Fall 2019 and Spring semesters, 11 out of 13 students who took the NCE at Georgian Court passed, for a pass rate of approximately 85%.

As we head into the 2020-2021 academic year we will attempt to be as flexible as we can with our students to assist them in completing their studies in the current challenging environment. We also plan to complete the following goals:

- Reinstigate the Community Advisory Board possibly with a virtual-meeting format
- Submit our application for re-accreditation for CACREP
- Develop and distribute a satisfaction survey for our current students
- Develop and distribute a satisfaction survey for graduates from the CMHC program

Conclusion: The CMHC program was significantly affected by the COVID pandemic as has been the case with the administration and delivery of academic services in general. There was a significant learning curve as we adapted to the realities of the situation, and we will be better-positioned to address these challenges as they continue. Nevertheless, the program has been able to continue to offer a quality educational experience for our students, and we have attempted to be flexible in accommodating our students' needs. We were also able to have a cohort start in the fall that is only slightly smaller than the typical cohort we have had over the years (average size has been approximately 18-20), however given what appears to be a decline overall in student attendance nationally due to the COVID situation, we see ourselves as being in a good position to "bounce back" to a cohort size that is more consistent with our average cohort sizes over the long-term once the pandemic has ended.