The College of William & Mary
Counselor Education Program

Assessment of Graduate Preparedness for
Professional Counseling Practice
2005

A Report of Findings From
Surveys of Program Graduates in 2002, 2003, and 2004
and Their Current Employers
Introduction

In an ongoing effort to revise and refine our pre-service educational program to better meet the needs of professional counseling practice, the Counselor Education Program conducts a triennial survey of Program graduates' self-assessed readiness for their professional counseling roles. This report presents the findings of the survey that targeted graduates during the 2002, 2003, and 2004 academic years. The data regarding program effectiveness in preparing student counselors for practice as well as respondent recommendations for program revision and refinement were disseminated to the Program faculty for annual planning, to relevant academic leaders at both School of Education and College-wild levels for quality assurance monitoring, to future applicants for assistance in their academic decision-making, and to relevant members of the local professional community for reference as employers of our graduates. Additionally, the findings were dissemination to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for continued accreditation by that national accrediting body for academic programs in counselor education.

The Respondents

Two separate groups of respondents were targeted for participation in this study. One group was comprised of the 71 graduates of the Masters in Community Counseling, Masters in School Counseling, Masters in Family, and Doctorate in Counselor Education programs during the three-year period named above. Their names and addresses were provided by the William & Mary Alumni Association and verified by the Admissions Office of the School of Education. A second group of respondents was comprised of current employers of the above named respondent group. Employers were contacted only when permission and contact information were provided (as requested) by individual graduates in space provided on the Graduate Survey.

The Surveys

Separate but similar surveys were administered to program graduates and their employers.

Survey of Program Graduates

The survey administered to graduates addressed the following topics:

I. Demographics including year of graduation, program emphasis, current primary employment setting, current job location, and certificates-licenses awarded, and (optionally) name and contact information;

II. Self-assessment of perceived mastery in the following ten areas of professional competency: professional identity, counseling theory, counseling technique, human growth and development, group counseling, career counseling, appraisal, abnormal behavior, multicultural counseling, and counseling-related technology. Doctoral graduates were asked to rate themselves on four additional competencies including: theory and practice of supervision, instructional theory and methods, quantitative and qualitative research, and consultation and collaboration;

III. Self-assessment of perceived competence in four professional dispositions intrinsic to the School of Education’s conceptual framework including: professional knowledge and skill, reflective practice, collaboration, and leadership;

IV. Summative evaluations including:
   a. a self-assessment of knowledge students feel they acquired at William & Mary
compared to that of their professional peers;

b. a self-assessment of technical/clinical skills students acquired at William & Mary compared to that of their professional peers;

c. a self-assessment of abilities to anticipate and cope effectively with ambiguity and multi-tasking, and;

d. a self-assessment of the degree to which William & Mary prepared them to anticipate and cope effectively with requirements for multi-tasking and ambiguity in professional practice, and;

e. identification and description of specific changes needed in the Counseling and Counselor Education Programs to make them more effective at preparing students for professional practice.

Survey of Employers

Previous experience has shown us that employer responses to this survey are more likely and more candid when anonymity is assured. For that reason, minimal demographic data was solicited, and included only the nature of their place of employment and their professional credentials. Otherwise, their survey was identical to that sent to the program graduates with appropriate wording changes in the instructions to denote the shift from self to other assessment.

The Survey Procedure

Requests for participation in the Survey of Graduates and their Employers were emailed to the group of Program graduates named above. Those graduates who were interested in participating could follow a web link first to an informed consent request that, if provided, opened a second link to the survey form itself. In the final section of the Survey of Graduates, respondents were asked for permission to survey their employers regarding their perceptions of the quality of the graduates' preparation at William & Mary. Employers for whom such permission was received were subsequently emailed a request for their participation in the Survey of Employers following the same consent and completion protocol as did the Survey of Graduates.

Findings of the Survey of Program Graduates

Forty-seven percent (33) of the program graduates contacted for the Survey or Program Graduates elected to participate in the survey. Their responses are summarized in the following pages. From that group of respondents, 52% (17) of employers contacted elected to participate in the survey—a nearly 20% increase in employer participation over the previous survey. No employers for doctoral-level graduates were received, likely because all of the seven doctoral-level respondents were in tenure-line academic positions where a direct employer-employee relationship is less clearly specified. The findings of the graduate and employer surveys are reported below.

Ia. Demographics – Program Graduates

1. Program Representation- Graduates from all our degree-granting programs were represented in the respondent group. The specific breakdown of respondents by program
was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed. in Community Counseling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed. in School Counseling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed. in Family Counseling</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. in Counselor Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Academic Years Represented** - Graduates from all three years were represented in the respondent group. The breakdown by year is listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Employment Settings Represented** - The respondent group also represented a variety of work settings. They are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community agency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private practice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Certificates-Licenses Awarded** - The following certificates-licenses were held by the respondent group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification-License</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Professional Counselor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Certified Counselor</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Certified Substance Abuse Counselor  4  
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist  3  
Other  4  

Total  34  

Ib. Demographics -  

1. Employment Setting Represent – Employers represented the following employment settings:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community agency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total  17  100  

2. Professional Credentials: Employers possessed the following professional credentials:  

Certification-License  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification/License</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Professional Counselor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Certified Counselor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Substance Abuse Counselor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Marriage &amp; Family Therapist</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total  34  

II. Professional Competencies:

![Survey of Graduates & Their Employers
Professional Competencies graph](image)

From the chart, it can be seen that on a scale of 1-5, the respondents reported a favorable view of the program's quality in providing them with the basic competencies necessary for effective counseling practice. Regarding individual competencies, development of a professional counseling identity, a working theoretical orientation, and respect for diversity appear to be clear strengths of the current preparation program. Although well above average in their ratings, the graduates appeared to feel less competent in the areas of career counseling, appraisal, and counseling technology. The pattern of evaluations reported by employers was similar to that of the graduates, rating them highest in possession of theoretical knowledge, multicultural competence, and professional identity, and lowest in appraisal, followed by career counseling and technology. However, employers' ratings were lower than graduates' ratings in all but one category, and though still well above average, their appraisal or our graduates' competency in clinical appraisal received the lowest rating received on the survey.
IIb. **Doctoral Competencies:**

![Survey of Graduates & Their Employers: Additional Doctoral Competencies](image)

Given our strong emphasis on high-quality quantitative and qualitative research, it is not surprising that the doctoral-level respondents rated their mastery of that competency at 4.4 out of a possible 5 points. Our required supervision theory and practicum courses likely account for a 4+ rating of the Program in preparing them for academic and clinical supervision. Although ratings for teaching and advocacy/consultation competencies were nearly as high, they reveal a potential need for faculty attention. A recent relaxing of Institutional standards requiring courses to be taught only by those with terminal degrees will afford our doctoral students greater opportunities for direct experience in college teaching (formally only possible in the role of teaching assistant). The need for attention to the development of similar opportunities for promoting operational understanding and skills at advocacy and consultation are clearly indicated in this data.
III. Professional Dispositions

The faculty is gratified to see the high respondent and employer ratings of Program effectiveness in achieving these basic outcome objectives of both the School of Education and the Counselor Education Program. We are particularly pleased that our students are graduating with clear respect for Reflective Practice and Professional Collaboration that are shown by their own high ratings in those areas as well as the ratings of community professionals who, as direct employers, may in the best positions to offer candid, practical, assessment. Employer ratings were, once again, lower than graduate ratings in all categories, but no category in this section received less than a 4.0 rating. Providing students with increased opportunity for the development of leadership abilities must be a continued effort in the Program; that can be a challenging task given increasing, credentials-driven, demands for content mastery during a two-year program of study.
In comparison with their professional peers, our graduates perceive themselves to be well prepared for professional practice in terms of the theoretical knowledge gained, the clinical skills developed, and the ability to read and flex to an often changing, multiple-needs, and ambiguous work environment. Their employers appear to support this perception but, characteristically, not as strongly as the graduates themselves. Volunteered narrative comments paralleled the numerical findings, and useful recommendations for strengthening the Program effectiveness in the area providing relevant knowledge were provided. Emergent themes are reflected in the following sample narrative comments provided for each rating.

**Graduate**

1. **Relevant Knowledge**
   
a. **Endorsements:**

   - "I didn’t really appreciate how important being able to understand and articulate my clinical orientation was until I got out there—I thank W&M for enabling me to do that from the start of my professional career."

   - "From the outset, I have felt very confident in knowing what to do or in knowing where to turn for assistance if I am uncertain."

   - "At graduation, I feared I had learned too little to do well at this—on the job, I soon learned that I had learned so much—particularly as I look at some of those around me!"

**Employer**

1. **Relevant Knowledge**
   
a. **Endorsements:**

   - "As a graduate of the Program myself, I know what it takes to get in an succeed. Be it interns or employees, they are always well prepared."

   - "From the beginning, the employee had the skill we needed and the initiative to apply it. Initially, I would sometimes anticipate the need to provide assistance, only to find that he had worked out the problem very appropriately."

   - "It is clear to me form the employee’s performance that she got a good introduction into basic counseling theories during her training—keeps me on my toes with regards to my own understanding
• "There was careful attention paid not just to learning, but to learning what was really important. I can now appreciate the many exercises and papers that caused me to understand the topics and not just recite it them—this field is one that requires you to think on your feet, and W&M prepared me well to do that."

b. **Recommendations:**
   - "I could have benefited from a full course in psychopharmacology—I elected to take such a course elsewhere to complete my final course requirements for licensure."
   - "I would like to see greater instruction in supervision at the masters level—I was surprised how quickly I went from being a novice to becoming a supervisor of others!"
   - "I think that psychopathology should be a required course in the program."
   - "I would like to have had further instruction in conducting different kinds of groups. I graduated knowing what being in a group felt like, but was not really prepared for the teen groups that I now conduct."
   - "As a doctoral graduate, I would recommend more coverage of adult learning/teaching theories and methods—that’s the one area that I have felt under-prepared in since I left and became a counselor educator."

2. **Clinical Skill**
   a. **Endorsements:**
      - "I feel that I was as confident as possible with my clinical skills at graduation—knew then that the remainder could only be learned by working."
      - "The practicum and internship prepared me well for employment. I received honest, excellent feedback that allowed me to develop my skills."
      - "Without a doubt, W&M’s program develops competent professionals in the field that can conceptualize and articulate clinical cases professionally."
      - "I have found myself approached regularly by my peers for clinical feedback—I realized that I developed considerable skill in that area during my training."
      - "I had already been a practicing counselor when I entered the Program—realized while there that I had so much more to learn!"

b. **Recommendations:** There were no recommendations offered in this area.

3. **Multi-tasking**
   - "There is a limit as to what level of understanding of this work a person can receive in graduate school—real seasoning comes through actual practice. I think the employee has a most sufficient level of basic understanding for someone just beginning."
   - The employee is smart and very capable on her own, but she has always been receptive to my input and willing to learn new ways of doing things. When I’ve commented on her openness, she says that is the ‘way she was taught’—I appreciate that."

b. **Recommendations:**
   - "The employee and I both agree that some additional training in the area of the DSM-IV would have made things easier for her in the beginning."
   - "We’re beginning to see more and more families as a general rule. The more understanding that your students can get about family systems, the better, I think."
   - "The employee was a little surprised at first at how many of his clients required work with substance abuse problems. All new counselors should have a pretty sound understanding of this fact."
   - "Don’t be tempted by the competition to loosen up your academic standards—things are getting tougher out here, not easier."

2. **Clinical Skill**
   a. **Endorsements:**
      - "I wish we could take credit for his skill as a clinician, but he brought that with him when he was hired."
      - "Her greatest strength as a clinician has been her willingness to accept supervision and try different ideas. You seem to be preparing your students well in that area."
      - "We have a very challenging clientele—she has, I think, made a real difference with some that I would not have expected."
      - "It was her initial confidence in herself that I was most impressed with—she never went through the phase of self-doubt that so many of our new counselors seem to. That is a credit to good preparation."
      - "His conceptual abilities are outstanding. Others in our team regularly look to him for ideas about what is going on clinically and what to do about it."

b. **Recommendations:**
   - "It seems that generally our new employees are weak in the area of DSM assessment—would
a. Endorsements:

- "The M.Ed. program provided great opportunities to develop my professional identity which has been invaluable in anticipating and coping with the multiple, unclear challenges that present themselves regularly in this work."
- "I have always been a good multi-tasker. However, the challenges of balancing a demanding academic program, a graduate assistantship, and an outside life were a great supplement to my development of skills in this area."
- "I learned at W&M that an informed position requires looking at all aspects of a situation—that has helped me greatly in making the best decisions I can with regard to important aspects of clients’ lives."
- "Throughout the program at W&M, I was constantly reminded that counseling would never go ‘by the book’. I think that is credited to the professional experience of the faculty, and it has been a great comfort to me."

b. Recommendations: There were no recommendations offered in this area.

3. Multi-tasking

a. Endorsements:

- "I would say that a key measure of success or failure in this setting often rests with a person’s being able to deal with multiple demands—sometimes more than one reaching crisis proportions—that has been a real strength of the two W&M graduates that we have hired in recent years."
- "As a recent graduate from your program and first-time professional counselor here with us, I anticipated that the employee would need close supervision to navigate the complexities of the job. In more than one difficult situation, I’ve proactively intervened only to find that he had very effectively handled the situation—very impressive."

Recommendations: There were no recommendations offered in this area.

V. General Recommendations:

As requested in this final section, respondents volunteered the general recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the Counselor Education Program at preparing student counselors for the realities of professional counseling practice. Samples of graduate and employer recommendations that emerged as recurrent themes are presented below.

Graduate

1. "Perhaps offering a Part II of the Psychopathology course where we could focus more extensively on actual diagnosis would be useful. I would also benefited here from additional emphasis on Psychopharmacology and working collaboratively with psychiatrists."
2. "Continue to emphasize the importance of

Employer

1. "You may want to introduce students to cognitive behavioral as well as humanistic theory in their techniques training—it’s a struggle for them when they don’t realistically have time for the introspective work that they have been trained to provide. I say that as a graduate of the W&M program myself"
documentation, as I believe that most students seriously underestimate the amount of paperwork that is required. More time spent in the classroom on effective documentation methods and treatment plan development would be helpful.”

3. “Doctoral students would benefit from additional mentoring in clinical supervision and teaching as well as in the professional publication process.”

4. “School counselors would benefit from additional training with regard to the many systems that operate within a school system—for instance, learning how to effectively participate in a Child Study Team.”

5. “I wonder if there is a better way to practice the application of collaboration and understanding the mental health system (e.g., FAPT, funding sources, Medicaid, HIPPA, etc.).”

6. “I would suggest adding a component of instruction for counseling college students.”

2. “We’re moving quickly toward electronic record-keeping here. I think that is an area that students should be prepared for as a part of their basic preparation for clinical work in this day and age.”

3. “I’m aware of the difficult but ultimately successful lawsuit that you endured a few years ago after dismissing a student who was found to be unfit for practice. Thank you greatly for that effort to uphold the integrity of our profession—it is reassuring to know that that is happening.”

4. “Guidance and some administrative activities are an integral part of a school counselor’s job. Please do all you can to help school counseling students understand that so they are not surprised when they enter the job.”

5. “The schools are finally beginning to see the need to improve relations with students families. Any way that you can increase school counseling students’ skills at family work will be useful to them, I think.”

VI. Discussion and Proposed Action by the Faculty

The following actions are proposed in response to discussions held by the full Counselor Education Faculty at its Semester Review Meeting conducted on January 5, 2006.

1. Demographics
   Faculty agrees that efforts to enhance response rates from both students and employers would be beneficial. Strategies will be discussed with the Counselor Education Advisory Board.

2. Professional Competencies: Faculty addressed a number of points as listed below.
   
a. The low score from employers in Appraisal raised concern. Faculty recommends breaking down that broad category into more specific categories to better capture specific competencies.

b. Faculty proposes developing focus groups in the Advisory Board to explore both student and employer expectations and definitions for competencies in career counseling, technology, and appraisal.

c. Questions regarding any perceived gaps in overall student preparation (rather than only individual intern performance) will be added to interviews with and evaluation forms for site supervisors.

d. With regard to the somewhat low employer score on Psychopathology, the Program of Studies now requires ED 645 - The Counselor & Psychopathology for Family, Community, and Community & Addictions as of fall 2006. School Counseling students are required to take CRIN X47 - Psychopathology and Emotional Disorder of Children and Adolescents.

e. Faculty will examine the feasibility further integration of psychopathology into other relevant courses.

f. Faculty will remind students to make use of the Information Technology training opportunities (see http://www.wm.edu/it/workshops.php).
2. Doctoral Competencies: Faculty recommendations focused on the report related to teaching and advocacy & consultation. Recommendations are as follows:

   a. ED 764 – Seminar in Counselor Education will be substantially revised to address college level teaching. As noted earlier in this document, a change in University policies now allows doctoral students to teach classes at the master’s level. While these opportunities are not available to all students, the policy change does increase the potential for teaching experience.

   b. ED 765 – Doctoral Internship will now include one unit seminar on teaching preparation and practice.

   c. Faculty noted that ED 647 Doctoral Internship in Supervision does require all students to conduct a supervision group that includes didactic instruction for the first few sessions. This class has been formalized in the last two years and thus an increase in teaching competencies is anticipated.

   d. The Counselor Education Program will explore any possibilities available for our students to participate in other SOE doctoral program coursework related to teaching, if any exists.

   e. The topics of consultation and advocacy have been given added attention in the internships at both the masters and doctoral levels.

   f. Advocacy and consultation will be emphasized in ED 764 – Seminar in Counselor Education.

3. Professional Dispositions
   Faculty recommends emphasizing leadership development in all relevant class activities. Faculty also will discuss these findings with the Advisory Committee for clarification and recommendations, especially with regard to the broad category of Knowledge and Skills.

4. Summative Evaluations
   Recommendations include the following:
   A. As noted earlier, creating more specific categories within the topic of Clinical Skills would provide more specific information about employer perceptions and expectations.
   B. Faculty recommends ongoing communication with all site supervisors and potential employers to address the limits of preparation programs as well as our efforts to provide education preparation that is consistent with professional expectations.

Final comments:
   Faculty discussed the need for staying active in professional organizations that influence accreditations standards and licensure standards that are consistent with professional practice and that also address the parameters of educational settings. Remaining current in these areas is a commitment that we share. Ongoing advocacy at both the program level and national level for consistency, academic excellence, relevant professional preparation and adequate resources to meet standards is needed.