September 2012

INTRODUCTION to ***Competencies in Professional Counseling and Related Human Services***

(Counseling Master’s Competencies Grid)

A working group was convened by the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs and co-sponsored by the Society of Counseling Psychology to develop a set of competencies that could be used to guide competency development at the masters-level for professional counseling programs (i.e., mental health counseling). The competencies were designed to be relevant for individuals who will enter professional practice as licensed professional counselors. Some but not all competencies in the constructed grid can be applied to other contexts such as school counseling. However, the group was aware that a different set of competencies would be needed for another master’s-level specialty such as in school counseling master’s training. The working group included Michael J. Scheel (co-chair), Nadya A. Fouad, James Lichtenberg (co-chair), and Margo A. Jackson. Each has been a training director in an APA-accredited doctoral program in Counseling Psychology and has also been involved in training master’s-prepared professional counselors. Their master’s programs varied by size of student cohort (from 12- 100), size of faculty (3-7), type of institution (public and private), region of country (Midwest and Northeast), size of city in which student are trained (90,000 to8 million) and type of practicum training available (in-house clinic to external practicum sites).

The group met for 2 ½ days in September 2011. Their charge was to draft master’s-level developmental competencies that would (a) capture the breadth of competency domains relevant to entry level practice as a professional counselor, (b) identify the core aspects of those domains and (c) identify the developmental trajectory for a master’s in professional counseling.

The group began by clarifying the following assumptions:

* Professional counseling includes psycho-educational interventions, psychotherapy, mental health counseling, systems change interventions, and career counseling and interventions.
* Professional counseling occurs in schools, hospitals, agencies, university counseling centers, organizations, or university student services.
* Professional counseling is distinct from professional doctoral-level psychology, and the professional socialization of counselors is also distinct.
* Interventions may be at the individual, family, group, or system level.
* The competencies students develop in their master’s program will prepare them for additional post-master’s supervised experience to be a professional counselor or for entry into a doctoral program in professional psychology
* The specific requirements of post-master’s supervised experience are determined by each state’s licensing or certification board.
* The master’s degree in professional counseling consists of at least 48 semester credit hours or 2 full time years of study/preparation.
* The master’s degree in professional counseling includes at least two semesters of supervised practicum in counseling, psychotherapy, or responsive services in schools, with appropriate supervision.
* The competencies are designed to be flexible, not to be proscriptive, and to be adapted for each individual program’s emphasis.
* The competencies focus on individual student learning outcomes, rather than on program accreditation. However, the competencies need to relate to accreditation standards. Thus the group decided to first delineate the competencies, and then evaluate how they related to the Master’s in Counseling Accreditation Program standards.
* The group decided to organize the benchmarks developmentally, with the first level to be assessed early in the program and the second level at the point of degree conferral. This was done for two reasons: (a) to provide mechanisms for annual evaluation and (b) to provide a timely means to intervene in any identified competency problem.
* Programs can set their own minimal expected level of competence for each competency domain as well as for overall performance.
* The ratings for each competency would be “lacking” “emerging” “proficient”
* Flexibility exists in determining the period of “early” development and should be determined by individual programs. The “exit” stage is intended to be assessed at the end of the master’s program of training.
* Although many of the competencies are identified discretely, they are in fact, integrated and infused throughout the curriculum.
* The competencies form the basis for general training in professional counseling and should not be identified as competencies specific to counseling psychology. That said, some core values of counseling psychology such as social justice and an emphasis in training on diversity and multicultural competence are evident in a review of the MA competencies. .

Process.

The domains identified at the doctoral level provided a starting point from which the group could determine a) the appropriateness of the competency for professional counselors at the master’s level, b) the appropriateness of the benchmark of each competency for early development and entry to post-master’s supervised experience, c) the appropriateness of the behavioral indicators at the master’s level, d) other needed domains of competency not covered by the 2009 Competency Benchmarks, and e) linked each MCAC professional domain standard (8a-8k) to one or more of the competencies.

We submitted this draft in September 2011 for comment to CCPTP, SCP, and other relevant training groups with the following questions (and asking respondents to keep in mind that professional counseling is broadly defined as delineated in the above assumptions):

1. Are there any missing competency domains?
2. Are any of the competencies not needed or not essential for entry-level supervised professional counselors?
3. Are there additional behavioral examples?
4. Are the examples appropriate for each stage (early and exit)?
5. How well do the MCAC professional domain standards align with the competencies and are there suggestions for better alignment?
6. Other feedback?

In June 2012, the working group reviewed feedback and comments collected, further edited the master’s competencies grid, and now disseminates these documents as resources that may be used for adaptation by counseling master’s training programs.

September 2011

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***Competencies in Professional Counseling and Related Human Services***

key to Counseling Master’s Competency Grid:

**5 CLUSTERS (IN BOLD CAPS**)

🡪***11 Core Competencies (in Bold Italics)***

🡪Essential Components

🡪Indicators

🡪Examples

Added column on left for proposed alignment with MCAC accreditation standards]

1. **PROFESSIONALISM**
2. ***Professional Values and Attitudes***
3. Integrity
4. Deportment
5. Accountability
6. Concern for the Welfare of Others
7. Professional Identity
8. ***Individual and Cultural Diversity***
9. Self as Shaped by Individual and Cultural Diversity and Context
10. Others as Shaped by Individual and Cultural Diversity and Context
11. Interaction of Self and Others as Shaped by Individual and Cultural Diversity and Context
12. Applications based on Individual and Cultural Context
13. ***Ethical/Legal Standards and Policy***
14. Knowledge of Ethical, Legal and Professional Standards and Guidelines
15. Awareness and Application of Ethical Decision Making
16. Ethical Conduct
17. ***Reflective Practice/Self-Assessment/Self-Care***
18. Reflective Practice
19. Self-Assessment
20. Self-Care
21. Participation in Supervision Process
22. **RELATIONAL**
23. ***Relationships***
24. Interpersonal Relationships
25. Affective Skills
26. Expressive Skills
27. **SCIENCE**
28. ***Scientific Knowledge and Methods***
29. Scientific Mindedness
30. Scientific Foundation of Professional Counseling
31. Scientific Foundation of Professional Practice
32. **APPLICATION**
33. ***Evidence-Based Practice***
34. Knowledge and Application of Evidence-Based Practice
35. ***Assessment***
36. Knowledge of Measurement and Psychometrics
37. Knowledge of Assessment Methods
38. Application of Assessment Methods
39. Diagnosis
40. Conceptualization and Recommendations
41. Communication of Assessment Findings
42. ***Intervention***
43. Intervention Planning
44. Skills
45. Intervention Implementation
46. Progress Evaluation
47. **SYSTEMS**
48. ***Interdisciplinary Systems***
49. Knowledge of the Shared and Distinctive Contributions of Other Professions
50. ***Advocacy***
51. Empowerment
52. Systems Change