

**Policy Handbook
And
Description of the Master of Arts Program
In
School Counseling**

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Policy Handbook and Description of Master of Arts Program in School Counseling

University of Connecticut
Department of Educational Psychology

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The Department of Educational Psychology offers a program in School Counseling that leads to the Master of Arts Degree in School Counseling. The program is designed to prepare school counselors to meet the needs of a diverse population at all developmental stages and its main emphasis is preparing school counselors to work with poor and minority youth. The program has integrated multicultural and gender information at all levels of training and education and fulfills all of Connecticut's requirements for certification as a school counselor. The program emphasizes integration of theory and research and subscribes to the American School Counseling Association's (ACSA) National Model for School Counselors.

This program is designed to prepare highly skilled and qualified school counselors to practice in school settings. It emphasizes self-understanding and self-development through individual and small group activities and stresses an ecological, multi-system intervention perspective to promote effective interventions in a school setting at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Counseling in the schools denotes a professional relationship that involves a trained school counselor, a student, and significant others: parents, siblings, peers, and teachers/administrators in the student's life. The focus of such relationships is personal development and decision-making based on self-understanding and knowledge of the environment. Services provided by school counselors are comprehensive and developmental in nature. The school counselor possesses knowledge and skills that enable delivery of an effective program that includes attention to cultural diversity and special needs of children.

The program is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE] and the State of Connecticut and it provides knowledge and skills that can lead to national certification as a professional counselor by the National Board of Certified Counselors [NBCC] and/or licensure as a professional counselor [LPC] in the states that currently license professional counselors.

The School Counseling program includes four full-time professors who teach core courses. Additional faculty in the Department of Educational Psychology teach core courses in the areas of research and evaluation, consultation, and special education. All faculty members in the program are productive researchers providing reference to relevant research findings in instructional experiences, counseling supervision, and collaborative involvement of students in program faculty research activities.

Listed below are the primary faculty who comprise the School Counseling Program along with the institution from which they received their highest degree, and their research interests.

PROGRAM & ADJUNCT FACULTY:

Robert Colbert, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology.

Research Interests: School counseling and education reform, increasing academic achievement in urban schools and cross-cultural counseling.

Orv C. Karan, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison, Professor and Program Coordinator, Department of Educational Psychology.

Research Interests: Transitions for special needs students, program development, and program/clinical consultation.

James M. O'Neil, Ph.D. – University of Maryland, Professor, Department of Educational Psychology.

Research Interests: Gender role transitions over the life span and human development.

Rachelle Pérusse, Ph.D., Virginia Tech University, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology.

Research Interests: Closing the achievement gap, school counseling reform and school counselor education.

SELECTION OF STUDENTS

The School Counseling Program, Department of Educational Psychology, has a once a year admission policy. The deadline for application for admission for the subsequent fall semester is February 15. Students are notified concerning their application status by April 15th. Students are required to respond to the program's offer of admission by May 1st.

The applicant pool for the School Counseling program based on applications received for the 2007-2008 academic year consisted of 42 individuals. From this pool a total of 21 (i.e. 50%) were accepted into the program.

Because the focus of the program is to prepare school counselors to work with poor and minority youth, we are attempting to attract a student body of graduate students that matches the diversity of the student bodies found within urban public schools. Once a student is admitted to the program, the attrition rate is lower than 5% and is generally due to a student's change of aspirations, career goals, or personal reasons.

The Department of Educational Psychology has a limited number of graduate assistantships and tuition waivers for School Counseling students, and occasionally students are able to secure paid internships during their final year in the program.

Each student, upon formal admission to the program, is assigned an advisor who assists the student in developing his/her plan of study. During the second semester in the program, students select an advisory committee consisting of two associate advisors and the major advisor, to advise and direct their course of study. Students are at liberty to change their advisory committee, if the committee as set up is not viable for the student to achieve his/her goals.

Students are evaluated throughout the program using a variety of methods and a formal evaluation is conducted before the student is admitted to formal candidacy in the graduate program [formal assessment is discussed further in this document]. Other evaluative methods include: grades and the student's progress as determined through feedback from practica and internship supervisors. An annual faculty review of the student's progress is conducted. The students are also given comprehensive examinations at the end of their program. These examinations are described in subsequent sections of this document.

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

The mission of the school counseling program is to prepare professional school counselors to work in elementary, middle, and secondary school settings as: educational leaders; advocates for all students, with special emphasis on poor and minority youth; users of school data to effect systemic change; providers of individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom guidance services; and collaborators with faculty, parents, and community agencies. Our mission is set within the American School Counselor Association's National Model for School Counseling and incorporates the domains of academic, career and personal social development.

Students who graduate from the program will have the necessary skills to: demonstrate effectiveness by assessing and evaluating their school counseling programs; actively advocate for educational equity, work to close the achievement gap for poor and minority youth; and promote academic achievement for all students.

Embodied in the program philosophy, curriculum, and content of its course offerings is an emphasis and focus on a developmental approach in the delivery of counseling and educational services that recognizes the needs of a multicultural society and the concerns and consideration of all persons for which specialized counseling, educational and developmental skills are required.

I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Students' professional activities are expected to conform to the ethical principles of counseling and the code of conduct outlined by the American Counseling Association. In addition, the students' professional activities are expected to be characterized by:

- A. Professionals that exhibit a democratic attitude that respects the dignity, uniqueness and worth of each individual, and potential for growth and change.

- B. Professionals who respect cultural and gender issues, and understand the diversity inherent in the United States.
- C. Professionals who can function independently and collaboratively, and who are caring, sensitive, and competent.
- D. Professionals who are stable, ethical and understand the boundaries of privileged information and confidentiality.
- E. Professionals who are well versed in the practice and research of the field of School Counseling, and able to use advanced technology in the services they provide.
- F. Professionals who are productive, motivated, independent, and adaptable and can serve as effective role models.
- G. Professionals who have a commitment to professional growth, and have an ongoing involvement with professional associations for School Counseling.

II. ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE

The program of study leading to a degree in School Counseling is guided by the Standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling Related Programs (CACREP, 2001) and by the State of Connecticut. The curriculum is designed to ensure that students acquire and demonstrate substantial knowledge and competence.

Formal Evaluation and Admittance to Candidacy

Upon enrollment, students will undergo mid-point or process screening leading to retention (i.e., candidacy), or non-retention in the program. Process screening occurs during the first and second semesters of full-time study, or in the case of part-time study, during enrollment in at least six (6) semester hours of coursework up to a maximum of twelve (12) semester hours. Criteria for retention in the program include satisfactory academic performance, satisfactory progress as a counselor in-training, and supportive recommendations of the faculty. Implied in these criteria is the notion that some individuals may not possess the attributes or characteristics necessary for successful functioning as a professional school counselor.

Criteria for evaluation retention (candidacy) include more than satisfactory academic performance. Adherence to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Professional Ethics will be employed in informing, explaining, and advising those students who are not recommended for retention (candidacy) in the program due to unsatisfactory performance in regard to academic and/or non-academic criteria.

Time Limits

Students' progress toward meeting program requirements is reviewed annually. Students who are admitted are expected to complete all requirements within six years from the first semester of enrollment. Students are expected to pass the comprehensive examination within two years of admission. Students may enroll on either a full-time or part-time basis, but all students must complete a full-time 10-month internship within a public school setting (except those that are certified teachers with at least 30 months of teaching experience who must complete a 600 hour internship instead). The student's advisory committee must approve exceptions.

ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM

General prerequisites for graduate study in the Master of Arts Program in School Counseling include undergraduate and/or previous graduate preparation in psychology, counseling education, or related disciplines. Regular admission to the program requires a cumulative undergraduate GPA of 3.0, a GPA of 3.0 for the last two undergraduate years, or their equivalency. In addition, three letters of recommendation, official transcripts and a personal statement are required. Finalists participate in personal interviews which are conducted by at least one faculty member.

Program admissions may require prerequisites in the behavioral sciences to accommodate for individual differences in student competencies and understandings acquired prior to entering the program. Thus, students not possessing a Bachelor's degree in education, psychology, sociology, human development, anthropology, or related areas may be required to enroll in appropriate background courses in the behavioral science. These pre-requisite courses will not be included as part of the credit hours required for graduation.

Application Procedures

1. Submit a completed GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION, with official transcripts to the Graduate Admissions Office by February 15th.
2. Submit a PERSONAL STATEMENT concerning prior educational/life experiences, professional research/presentations, interest in and commitment to the profession, career goals and projected work setting upon completion of the program.
3. Submit three (3) LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION.
4. Submit official transcripts from all previous undergraduate/graduate institutions.
5. Submit evidence of either passing scores on the Praxis 1 Exam or SAT scores of 1100 or above.
6. Participate in PERSONAL INTERVIEW, for those applicants who appear to meet the admissions criteria.

The first step in the application process is to either request an application form, graduate school bulletin and financial aid information from:

Graduate School Admissions Office
The University of Connecticut
438 Whitney Road Ext. U-6
Storrs, CT 06269
Telephone: (860) 486-3617

Or: Complete the online application at: www.uconn.edu

Upon completion of the graduate school application material and requirements, the complete application file (i.e., letters of recommendation, official transcripts, Praxis 1 or SAT scores, and personal statement) must be sent to the above address, and then will be forwarded to the Graduate Admissions Office of the Neag School of Education and the Department of Educational Psychology for the review and determination of status by the program faculty. A personal interview may be required of the applicant during this process. The Program Coordinator will make a recommendation to the Dean of the Neag School of Education concerning each applicant. There is one application period per year for admission to the School Counseling Program. The application deadline is February 15th of each year, with the decisions reached and applicants notified by April 15th.

Criteria for admission into the program include:

1. Ability to do graduate level work, as established by the Graduate School.
2. Evidence of educational and work experience, which demonstrates interest and motivation in working in school counseling.
3. Personal characteristics considered to be important qualities in counselors including the ability to understand self and interpersonal effectiveness with others.
4. Commitment to the profession as indicated in the personal statement.
5. Passing scores on the Praxis 1 examination or SAT scores of 1100 or above.

Information concerning fellowships and other types of financial assistance may be obtained from the Graduate School Bulletin and/or by contacting the Graduate School Office at the above address and telephone number. In addition, work-study opportunities and limited assistantships are available through various departments and programs of the Neag School of Education based on additional sources of funding obtained via research or training grants. This information is made available to students as additional funding exists. It is important to note that graduate assistantships are very competitive and funds are limited.

PROGRAM EMPHASIS, OBJECTIVES and CURRICULUM

Program Emphasis

The school counseling emphasis is comprised of two (2) full academic years, defined as four (4) semesters of approved graduate-level study with a minimum of 48 semester hour credits. Embodied in the school counseling philosophy, curriculum, and content of course offerings is a focus and emphasis on environmental and specialized studies that include:

- A. Meeting the needs of a diverse population at all levels in urban schools;
- B. The American School Counseling Association's (ACSA) National Model for School Counseling
- C. The National Transitioning School Counseling Initiative (The Education Trust, Inc.)

Objectives

The objectives of the Master's Degree Program in School Counseling are intended to prepare students that will:

1. Possess the ability and demonstrate the skills, characteristics and attributes to meet State and national standards for certification as a school counselor by successfully completing a core curriculum that includes 10 content areas, i.e., *Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Career and Life Style Development, Appraisal, Research and Program Evaluation, Professional Orientation, Foundations and Contents of School Counseling and Collaborating/Consulting*; a progression of supervised experiences in counseling and guidance; and a course of study in special education thereby enabling them to practice as a school counselor for grades pre-K through 12.
2. Demonstrate knowledge about the history, philosophy, and current trends in school counseling and educational systems.
3. Apply both developmental and intervention models to the total development of students as unique individuals within educational settings.
4. Use school-based data to design comprehensive programs to meet specific school counseling program goals, including action plans for implementation and evaluation.
5. Develop mechanisms for referral, collaboration and public relations.
6. Become leaders in the school and advocates for educational equity for all students.
7. Be aware of current ethical and legal issues, laws and both federal and state regulations relevant to school counseling.

8. Apply current and emerging technological resources to: 1) enhance counseling and guidance planning, and 2) promote informed academic, career and personal/social choices.
9. Demonstrate accountability by using outcome-based data to effect systemic change.

Curriculum

To meet state and national standards for certification as a school counselor, the curriculum is divided into 10 content areas:

1. Human Growth and Development
2. Social and Cultural Diversity
3. Helping Relationships
4. Groups
5. Life Style and Career Development
6. Appraisal
7. Research and Evaluation
8. Professional Identity and Ethics
9. Foundations and Contents of School Counseling
10. Collaborating/Consulting

Practica and Internship

Students are expected to participate in both practicum and internship assignments. The practicum consists of 15 weeks within a public school setting for an average of 10-12 hours per week. In most cases, students complete their practica in public school sites within Connecticut. However, students are allowed to complete their practica outside of Connecticut provided that the school site is within close enough proximity to the UConn Storrs campus that they will be able to attend an accompanying practicum group supervision course in-person at the UConn Storrs campus for the duration of the semester in which they are participating in the practicum.

For internship, students who are not certified teachers with at least 30-months of teaching experience must complete 10 months (190 days) of full-time work within a public school setting as a school-counseling intern. Typically, a public school work-week is 32.5 hours. Throughout the internship period students are expected to document at least 360 hours devoted to direct service to students.

Students who are certified teachers and have taught for a minimum of three years with that status are required to still complete a 600 hour internship.

Matriculation Requirements

Student progress within the program is monitored by each student's major advisor on a semester by semester basis to insure that the student is successfully completing the scheduled array of required coursework, and fieldwork experiences. The successful completion of all work is a fundamental prerequisite for the conferring of the degree. In addition to completing the requisite credit hours of course work with a minimum 3.0 GPA, each student must successfully complete and pass a comprehensive examination, administered in the Spring semester of each year or complete a Master's research project (see next page: Comprehensive Exam Option: Social Advocacy Project).

Upon completion of all degree and program requirements and the conferring of the degree, graduates of the school counseling program are recommended to the State of Connecticut for certification as a school counselor. Names, addresses, and contact sources for each of the 50 state certification boards for school counseling can be accessed at www.schoolcounselor.org. In addition, the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) also provides review of school counselor applications, and examination, for national certification as a professional counselor – usually 1500 hours following the completion of the degree. However, through special arrangements with NBCC, UConn students may sit for the National Examination at the end of their program of study, otherwise allowing our students to take the exam while the material is still relatively fresh rather than waiting to complete the typical 1500 post-degree hours. Two years of experience as a counselor (under the supervision of either: a licensed professional counselor, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or registered nurse) are required to obtain licensure as a professional counselor (LPC). The criteria for application and licensure as a professional counselor may vary from state to state. However, each student is given information and contact sources for each state currently licensing professional counselors.

Comprehensive Examination

Students enrolled in the program must take a final examination prior to being awarded the degree/certificate. The Comprehensive Examination is administered in the Spring Semester for second year students.

Comprehensive Exam Option

Social Advocacy Project. This option consists of both a project and a presentation. For this option, students will investigate an issue that needs change at their practicum or internship site. Students will design an instrument that they will use to collect data at their site and develop a plan of action based on the needs and the data. Students will provide their advisory committee members with the results from their assessment and, if approved, will follow through on implementing the advocacy project. Once the project is complete, a post-implementation assessment will be conducted on site to show the effect of the advocacy project. The project presentation will consist of: a rationale for the project, the needs assessment data, a complete description of the implementation, and results from the post-implementation assessment.

References

American Counseling Association (2005). Ethical Standards. (Revised edition).
Alexandria, VA: Author.

CACREP (2001). Standards for Accreditation of Counseling Related Programs. Alexandria, VA:
Author.

State of Connecticut Current Certification Regulations (2001). Section 10-145d-556. Initial
Educator Certificate Requirements, Hartford, CT.