



# CACREP Guiding Statement

## Guiding Principles for Program Evaluation and Student Assessment - Section 4 of the 2016 CACREP Standards

Section 4 requires counseling faculty to thoughtfully consider how they wish to collect data about their program's mission, objectives, curriculum, students, and student learning outcomes; how they analyze the data; and how they use the data to make improvements in the overall program and individual student learning. This Section is meant to provide an overall framework for program evaluation and student assessment to be implemented in the context of the program's mission and objectives. Rather than being comprehensive or directive, Section 4 outlines **minimum** data that must be collected and areas that must be reviewed. The process includes: 1) planning how to evaluate; 2) implementing the plan, including what data to collect and how they will be reviewed and analyzed; 3) improving the program using the gathered evidence; and 4) reporting the data and program changes to stakeholders.

Section 4 contains two distinct, yet interconnected components: Evaluation of the Program and Assessment of Students. A third component, Evaluation of Faculty and Supervisors, is included in Section 4. The process of faculty and supervisor evaluation is required to be performed by the program but no data is required to be reported in the Annual Report.

### Evaluation of the Program

The faculty are expected to design a formal evaluation plan which includes the components outlined in Standard 4.A. as they relate directly to the program objectives. Requirements for program objectives are outlined in standard 2.B. Components of this evaluation plan include "(1) the data that will be collected, (2) a procedure for how and when data will be collected, (3) a method for how data will be reviewed or analyzed, and (4) an explanation for how data will be used for curriculum and program improvement." The Standards require that each of the data points outlined in 4.B be addressed. At a minimum, the intent is that programs provide data related to "(1) aggregate student assessment data that address student knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions; (2) demographic and other characteristics of applicants, students, and graduates; and (3) data from systematic follow-up studies of graduates, site supervisors, and employers of program graduates." Once data have been collected and analyzed, an annual, formal report shall be generated, as outlined in Standard 4.D.

The data points should be connected with one or more of the program objectives. For example, if a program objective is to "provide counselor education training for a diverse student body," then it would be expected that demographic and other characteristics of students would be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program in achieving that objective. Many programs have objectives consistent with student learning, such as: "Students will gain the knowledge and skills associated with professional orientation and ethics in counseling." Aggregate student learning data can be used to demonstrate outcomes specific to each program objective. It is expected that data for at least some program objectives be validated or cross-validated with data from follow up studies of graduates, site supervisors, and employers of program graduates.

It is also expected that faculty will use this data to make program improvements, as outlined in Standard 4.C, and will document these improvements in the program's annual report required in Standard 4.D. At least annually, faculty members will review the data collected, discuss it in relation to the overall program objectives, and determine what, if any, changes need to be made to the program. This report should include the results of the evaluation, subsequent program changes, and any other changes (such as those required by licensing or certifying bodies). Program changes should be clearly articulated and connected to outcomes of program evaluation where applicable. This report needs to be purposefully made available on the program website and program stakeholders should be notified that the report is available.

In addition to the annual report, a supplementary statistical report must be completed each year. This report is outlined in Standard 4.E. and includes the following components: "(1) the number of graduates for the past academic year, (2) pass rates on credentialing examinations, (3) completion rates, and (4) job placement rates." While this information can be included in the annual report, it should also be posted separately on the program website in an easily accessible location.

## Assessment of Students

The program's plan for assessing students should be designed by the program faculty and include "(1) identification of key assessment elements, (2) measurement of student data, and (3) review or analysis of data", as outlined in Standards 4.F. and 4.G. respectively. While this section of the Standards speaks to the assessment of **individual** students, the same data and processes can be used in aggregate to meet program evaluation requirements outlined under Standard 4.B.

Sampling is an acceptable way of conducting student assessment for program evaluation purposes. While program curricula must address all standards in Section 2.F, the Standards allow programs to develop key performance indicators that are based on a sampling or compilation of standards from each of these eight core areas, the specialty area(s), and the doctoral core (Section 6.B) that they believe represent a mix of important knowledge and skill measures at multiple points throughout the program. These key performance indicators are often based on program objectives. Key performance indicators might incorporate concepts or wording from specific curricular standards, or programs could develop indicators that clearly reflect one or more standards. For example, to assess student learning in the COUNSELING AND HELPING RELATIONSHIPS common core area, programs might choose to use Standard 2.F.5.g - "essential interviewing, counseling, and case conceptualization skills" as a performance indicator, or they might create the following performance indicator: "establish and maintain an effective counseling relationship" with the idea that the latter example reflects the content in multiple standards in Section 2.F.5.

Assessment of student learning requires programs to identify a minimum of 9 key performance indicators for students in entry-level program specializations: (1) at least one knowledge or skill for each of the 8 core areas, and (2) at least one knowledge or skill for the specialty area. Doctoral programs must identify at least one knowledge or skill for each of the 5 doctoral core areas.

Beyond the minimum outlined in the Standards, decisions regarding the number and type of indicators are to be made by program faculty based on what they believe would best enable them to comprehensively assess student learning in each area. The Standards do not dictate what proportion of indicators must focus on knowledge versus skills. However, programs must include a **combination** of knowledge and skill performance indicators in their assessment of students. For example, an entry-level Clinical Mental Health Counseling program might decide to use key performance indicators to assess

knowledge from six of the eight common core areas and the CMHC specialty standards, but assess skills from the COUNSELING AND HELPING RELATIONSHIPS and GROUP COUNSELING AND GROUP WORK common core areas. Assessment of both knowledge **and** skills in each core and specialty area is not required, though program faculty may consider this **good practice**.

In addition to identifying a minimum of one knowledge **or** skill performance indicator in each core and specialty area, programs must use “multiple measures” (at least two different types of assessment methods) across “multiple points” (across at least two points in time for each area). The intent of using **multiple measures** is so that programs can cross-validate student outcome data related to each area. For example, a program might assess a key performance indicator for a skill in the COUNSELING AND HELPING RELATIONSHIPS common core area by using a case conceptualization **and** a role play, allowing faculty two different methods of assessing student skill.

Gathering assessment data at **multiple points in time** allows programs to monitor student learning over time. To fulfill the “multiple points” in time requirement, programs should be able to identify relevant points throughout a student’s program of studies where assessment applicable to each area would be most beneficial. Programs might have different expectations for student outcomes early in the program versus during their internships or at the end of their programs. They might also want to monitor specific skill or knowledge development over time. For instance, regarding the GROUP COUNSELING AND GROUP WORK common core area, programs might assess a knowledge indicator during a group counseling course and then again at the end of the program as part of a comprehensive exam – expecting to see advancement in knowledge over time.

Program approaches to student assessment will vary in sophistication, not only in the use of multiple measures over multiple points in time, but in the number of key performance indicators used. For example, suppose a program has identified a knowledge performance indicator for the PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICE common core area. The program might choose to incorporate two measures: (1) a multiple choice exam in an ethics course to assess early learning, and (2) a portfolio entry demonstrating knowledge of ethics at the end of the program. This approach would **minimally** meet the requirements for a key performance indicator in a core area being assessed “via multiple measures and over multiple points in time.” Using another example, suppose a program has identified 4 performance indicators for the PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICE common core area, – 2 knowledge and 2 skills. To fulfill the “multiple methods” (or a minimum of 2 methods) requirement, the program might choose to incorporate three measures: (1) a multiple choice exam in the ethics course to assess both of the knowledge indicators, (2) a role play in the counseling skills course where students demonstrate skills in applying ethical standards with a suicidal client (one of the skills indicators), and (3) a site supervisor evaluation incorporating items related to student skills in applying ethics with clients (addressing the final skills indicator). This approach would be **good practice** for meeting the requirements for a key performance indicator in a core area being assessed “via multiple measures and over multiple points in time.”

In addition to the requisite knowledge and skills, counseling students must have, or have the ability to develop, the dispositions necessary for effectiveness as counselors. Section 4.G requires that “the counselor education program faculty systematically assesses each student’s professional dispositions throughout the program.” The assessment process includes the following: “(1) identification of key dispositions (2) measurement of student dispositions over multiple points in time, and (3) review or analysis of data.” Again, faculty are expected to define these dispositions, collect data at program-identified points throughout each student’s program of studies, and then review and analyze the data for each individual student to determine areas where remediation might be needed. For example,

openness to feedback might be assessed for each student as part of the application process and again at the completion of practicum. Programs must **also** review and analyze the data in the aggregate (across all students) to identify possible admission or programmatic changes that may be needed. Results arising from the aggregate analysis should be part of the program evaluation annual report, as required in Standard 4.D.

## **Evaluation of Faculty and Supervisors**

No substantive changes were made to the standards in this section. These standards were revised to place greater emphasis on the evaluation of practicum and internship supervisors with the understanding that specific requirements regarding the evaluation of faculty (Section 4.I-J) are likely to be dictated by university policy and procedure.

## **Documentation and Evidence**

There are many methods for documenting assessment processes and providing evidence of the implementation of these processes; not every method is appropriate for every program. Below are some suggested forms of documentation and evidence that may be helpful to programs.

## **Evaluation Plan**

Standard 4.A. requires that programs provide a formal plan that documents their systematic approach to evaluation in the program. As noted in Standard 4.B., program evaluation **and** student assessment are part of this plan; and this plan becomes part of the annual report required in Standard 4.D. Likewise, it is important that programs clearly connect their assessment and evaluation processes to program objectives and student learning outcomes. Tables are often used to summarize key assessments and their components, as outlined in Standard 4.A. Results should be linked to program improvements.

## **Curriculum Matrix**

A curriculum matrix can be a useful tool for summarizing where each standard is covered in the curriculum. For example, a program might have a matrix demonstrating where each common core area and specialty standard is addressed in the curriculum. A similar format can be used to demonstrate where and how key performance indicators are assessed across the curriculum. While not required, curriculum matrices may be a good practice because they allow program faculty and reviewers to quickly identify gaps in course delivery and assessment.

## **Syllabi**

Standard 2.D. provides guidance on elements that should be included in each syllabus. These elements include: (1) content areas, (2) knowledge and skill outcomes, (3) methods of instruction, (4) required text(s) and/or reading(s), (5) student performance evaluation criteria and procedures, and (6) a disability accommodation policy and procedure statement. Syllabi can articulate the relationship between course objectives (knowledge and skill outcomes) and the associated learning activities. CACREP reviewers use syllabi to verify that curriculum is taught. Because syllabi are required to include knowledge and skill outcomes, these may be linked to key performance indicators that document student assessment. The link to aggregate student assessment and program evaluation does not need to be included in each course syllabus, but it must be communicated to CACREP as part of the self-study. Though not required, many programs use tables to articulate the relationships between course objectives, learning activities, and assessment of learning in self-study materials that are submitted.

## **Assessment Tools**

Many programs use copies of their assessment tools as documentation of their evaluation processes. For example, for program evaluation, copies of graduate, employer, and site supervisor surveys can be helpful. For student assessments, copies of assignment descriptions, sample exams, and sample student review forms can be helpful.

## **Assessment Data**

Many programs use assessment data as evidence that assessment processes have been implemented. For example, for program evaluation, copies of aggregate graduate, employer, and site supervisor survey data can be utilized. For student assessment, it is important that programs redact any personally identifying information from any materials submitted for review. When providing evidence to support program improvement based on aggregate student assessment data, many programs include copies of meeting or retreat minutes where changes were implemented.

## **Relationships among Standards**

It may be helpful to integrate related standards outside of Section 4 when developing a plan for program evaluation and student assessment. With planning and thoughtful consideration, it is possible to meet multiple standards using a single process. For example, a program might use the assessment of program applicants outlined in Standard I.L. as part of their assessment of student dispositions and other characteristics, as outlined in Standard 4.G. Each program is unique and will identify different sets of related standards, depending on the needs and design of the program. The remainder of this section includes commonly related standards. However, this list is not all-inclusive.

## **Mission and Objectives**

Program objectives (as outlined in Standards 2.A. and 2.B.) are the foundation of program evaluation and are likely to influence the development of key performance indicators and student assessments. Depending on the nature of a program's objectives, different assessments may play a greater role in program evaluation than others. For example, a program whose objectives are tied heavily to student learning outcomes may find that their student assessment processes are central to their program assessment, while data on student demographics may appear to be less relevant. Likewise, a program whose objectives are tied to graduation rates or diversity might find data on student demographics and characteristics critical to their program evaluation process. Regardless of the perceived relevance, all elements outlined in Standard 4.B. should be addressed in the program evaluation plan.

2.A. The counselor education program has a publicly available mission statement and program objectives.

2.B. The program objectives (1) reflect current knowledge and projected needs concerning counseling practice in a multicultural and pluralistic society; (2) reflect input from all persons involved in the conduct of the program, including program faculty, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies; (3) address student learning; and (4) are written so they can be evaluated.

## **Admissions and Measurement of Dispositions**

Standards 4.B. and 4.G. speak to assessment of professional dispositions. Programs may find it helpful or efficient to include their admissions process as part of the “multiple measures over multiple points in time” requirement for student assessment of professional dispositions.

1.L. Entry-level admission decision recommendations are made by the academic unit’s selection committee and include consideration of each applicant’s (1) relevance of career goals, (2) aptitude for graduate level study, (3) potential success in forming effective counseling relationships, and (4) respect for cultural differences

6.A.3. Doctoral program admission criteria include (a) academic aptitude for doctoral-level study, (b) previous professional experience, (c) fitness for the profession, including self-awareness and emotional stability, (d) oral and written communication skills, (e) cultural sensitivity and awareness, and (f) potential for scholarship, professional leadership, and advocacy.

## **Student Assessment for Retention/Remediation Purposes**

As indicated in standard 4.H., program faculty should have “a systematic process in place for the use of individual student assessment data in relation to retention, remediation, and dismissal.” It may be helpful for programs to think simultaneously about the structure of their student retention, remediation, and dismissal policies and their student assessment processes when designing these systems.

1.O. Counselor education programs have and follow a policy for student retention, remediation, and dismissal from the program consistent with institutional due process policies and professional ethical codes and standards of practice.

## **Curriculum and Assessment**

The Entry-Level Specialty Standards (Sections 5.A.-G) and the Doctoral Level Core Curriculum (Section 6.B) each require that programs must document where each of the lettered standards is covered in the curriculum. In addition, Standard 2.D. requires that programs include content areas, as well as knowledge and skill outcomes in their syllabi. Curriculum Matrices can also help document the relationship between content areas and specific aspects of the curriculum.

As indicated earlier in this document, course syllabi can be powerful tools for demonstrating compliance with the student assessment requirements found in Standard 4.F. Programs may also want to consider ways of integrating the formative and summative evaluations of student’s counseling performance into their overall student and/or program assessment plan.

2.D. Syllabi are available for review by all enrolled or prospective students, are distributed at the beginning of each curricular experience, and include (1) content areas, (2) knowledge and skill outcomes, (3) methods of instruction, (4) required text(s) and/or reading(s), (5) student performance evaluation criteria and procedures, and (6) a disability accommodation policy and procedure statement.

3.C. Formative and summative evaluations of the student’s counseling performance and ability to integrate and apply knowledge are conducted as part of the student’s practicum and internship.

## Glossary Terms

The following terms can also be found in the CACREP glossary:

Glossary term	1st time listed	Definition
Common Core Areas	II.F	eight areas of curricular experience required by CACREP to prepare all counselors: (1) professional counseling orientation and ethical practice, (2) social and cultural diversity, (3) human growth and development, (4) career development, (5) counseling and helping relationships, (6) group counseling and group work, (7) assessment and testing, and (8) research and program evaluation. The common core areas represent knowledge areas that are fundamental to the counseling profession.
Empirically-based plan	IV.A	systematic approach to program evaluation based a regular review of measurable outcomes and goals
Evaluation	II.D	the collection and interpretation of information to make judgments about individuals, programs, or processes that lead to decisions and future actions (from NCDA Career Counselor Assessment and Evaluation Competencies, 2010)
Evidence-based Counseling Practice	Doc II.1.d	interventions and other practices whose effectiveness is documented by research.
Formative and Summative Evaluations	III.C	Formative evaluation examines the development of professional competencies with a focus on identifying strengths and deficiencies and corresponding learning interventions. Summative evaluation focuses on outcome and is used to assess whether desired learning goals are achieved consistent with a professional standard.
Key Performance Indicators	4.F	Student learning outcomes that are connected to the required curriculum and that program faculty have chosen to represent student knowledge and skills related to program objectives
Multiple Points	IV.F	collected at two or more points in time throughout students' program of study
Professional Dispositions	IV.G	the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors that influence the counselor's professional growth and interactions clients and colleagues
Student Learning	II.B; III.T	measurable acquisition of knowledge or skills

Systematic	I.K	a regular, ongoing, and comprehensive.
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