Results from the Stakeholder Survey of AY 2014-15

Executive Summary

On a regular basis, the Department of Pastoral Counseling conducts surveys of its key constituencies: Supervisors, Faculty, Alumni, and current students in our MS and PhD programs. The goals of this effort include: 1) obtaining evidence of the effectiveness of our program in training and producing high quality counselors; 2) determining the level of satisfaction students are experiencing in the program; 3) determining the level of preparedness graduates felt they received when they moved into their professional roles; and 4) making decisions related to program improvement. This document provides an overview of the results of these various surveys and a brief interpretation of their meaning.

Supervisors and Faculty Responses

A total of 32 Clinical and on-site Supervisors provided responses while 13 full-time and affiliate faculty also provided ratings to the same set of questions. Unless otherwise indicated, responses to each question were given on a 1 “weak” to 5 “strong” rating scale. The two groups seem to have many common points to their ratings. Supervisors provided uniformly high ratings of students’ abilities in the clinical context of their internships. All ratings were uniformly above 3.5, suggesting a perception of our students as being quite competent in these different skills areas. However, faculty did identify one training issue in need of examination: Particularly low ratings were given to item 7, “Organization and development counseling” (mean rating = 2.60). This was a content area where faculty felt more instruction and training should be implemented. Supervisors did not see a weakness in this area. Faculty approach these questions from a curriculum perspective, while supervisors are more concerned with students’ abilities to practice with clinical competence. These ratings suggest that whatever curricular issues faculty may feel need to be addressed, our students appear to be operating at a high level of competence.

Faculty were also asked to evaluate how well the program prepared students across 19 different content areas, reflecting the various courses that are offered in the program. Faculty seem satisfied with most of the courses and how well they prepare students for clinical work; all but one of the ratings were above 3.50. The Family Counseling course was rated the lowest with a mean score of 3.38 (which is soundly in the “Proficient” range). From a curriculum perspective, faculty determined that a review of the curriculum was needed to ensure that content related to family counseling was addressed in the program.

Findings from Alumni

A total of 72 Alumni provided responses to the survey. These individuals represented a span of time, with graduation dates ranging from 1986 to 2013 (median was 2004). Thus, a wide range of perspective are being included here, from long-term reflections to more immediate experiences. Approximately 78% of these respondents were currently employed, with 93% indicating that their current position was related to the degree they earned at Loyola.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which various elements of the program were sufficient for entry level master’s work as a professional counselor. Overall, the ratings were uniformly quite strong (overall mean rating: 4.17). No item had a mean rating below 3.5.
A final question asked of alumni was whether during their program of study they were encouraged to become involved in professional activities/organizations such as ACA. Of the 65 respondents, 82% (53) replied in the affirmative. Fostering professional contact and membership in professional organizations is an essential responsibility of graduate faculty.

Results from MS/CAS Students

Current students were queried about their perceived levels of satisfaction with the training they are experiencing. The first set of questions asked them to evaluate the level the program sufficiently prepared them in the various courses they are required to take. Ratings were very strong, with no rating below 3.5 (mean rating: 4.22). Overall, students appear to be experiencing a high level of satisfaction with their training in these different courses.

Students were also asked to rate a variety of program elements and whether they were sufficient for entry into master’s work as a professional counselor. Overall mean rating across all items was 4.01, indicating students’ perceived value of these program elements in forming their professional capacities. Only one item was below 3.5: item 17, the Cost effectiveness of the program (mean rating: 3.37). This score may indicate that students are finding the financial cost of the program to be somewhat high.

Results for Doctoral Students

A total of 20 doctoral students completed the survey. Students were asked to evaluate the level they felt the PhD program sufficiently prepared them in specific areas. All responses were on the same five point Likert-type scale. All ratings were relatively strong (overall mean rating: 4.02) and only one item (#1: Organizational Systems) had a score below 3.5 (mean rating: 3.15) and suggests the related content in the program be examined. In considering scores for the academic courses, all of the ratings were above 3.5. [Note that a change in the CES program was made to strengthen this aspect of professional development.] Overall students feel that their courses are preparing them well for their professional work.

Loyola University Maryland Learning Aims

An important aspect of our self-evaluation is an assessment of how well we are reaching all of our learning aims. The department has developed a set of learning aims that are congruent with the overall educational mission of the university and the profession. A series of 11 questions were posed that examined the key elements of these Learning Aims and the extent to which students have advanced on these dimensions. Current students responded to these items, yielding between 109 and 118 responses to each item. All responses were very strong, ranging from mean ratings of 4.40 to 4.63 on the five point scale.

It is clear that students firmly believe that the program addresses these ultimate pedagogical values espoused by the university. The values of being an active, on-going learner who is well informed, ethically aware, and constructively engaged with others are clearly evident in the program. These values form the foundation and architecture for the work done in the pastoral counseling department. These ratings show that not only do students recognize the presence of these values, but they themselves have also come to embrace them as well.

Pastoral Identity

One of the pressing issues in the department concerned the idea of “pastoral identity.” What does this mean? How do students express this quality in their professional lives? Within
the department, issues have been raised as to whether the term “pastoral counseling” accurately reflects the type of training we are providing or if it carries too much surplus meaning to be appropriate for our usage. One emerging question from this debate was whether we should drop the term “pastoral” from the name of our department.

The first question asked was, “Do you consider yourself a pastoral counselor?” Of the 147 respondents, 67% said “yes.” Accordingly, 33% said “no.” While the majority of students do identify with the term, there is a substantial minority who do not.

The first open-ended question asked, “What does being a pastoral counselor mean to you?” A wide range of answers emerged. For most responses, the salient issue was the ability to integrate psychology and religion into a single therapeutic modality. For others, it was a way of being, while still for still others, it was a sense of their own faith and spirituality. A diverse array of definitions for pastoral counseling were given. For many, the term carried very clear understandings and values.

Students were also asked “What about pastoral counseling keeps you from identifying with it?” A number of issues came out. For some, the concept of pastoral counselor has not crystallized for them. The underlying theme from these responses was that there is too much confusion over what the term really represents: there is no consensus around its meaning.

Students were asked whether they department should consider a change in name other than the ‘Pastoral Counseling Department’? Of the 140 respondents, 56% said “no.” While two thirds of the students noted that they identify as pastoral counselors, there was less clear of a consensus in terms of whether to keep the name.

Findings suggest to the faculty that, at a minimum, we need to provide more clarity about the meaning of pastoral as it applies to professional counseling. Rather than change the name of the department, the faculty took steps to address the meaning and integration of Pastoral and spiritual in the early Fall, 2015 meetings. Despite whatever issues graduates may face in their professional undertakings, there is a very strong reservoir of appreciation and support for the pastoral aspects of their training. It was what led them to the program in the first place. While some may choose to drop the title and just apply their pastoral skills as required in treatment, many others seem to revel in and openly embrace the term, whatever it may mean.