

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR PORTFOLIO

A requirement for Counseling Program Master's Degree Students

Department of Counseling and Human Services

I. Introduction

- A professional counselor portfolio is a collection of experience-based materials and reflective information that demonstrates various dimensions of the counselor's work, philosophy, abilities, and attitudes. The goal is to demonstrate how diverse activities and insights have contributed to the professional counselor's development.
- The development of the professional counselor portfolio begins as the graduate student enters a counseling program, and continues throughout his/her program of study.
- A session will be held with all graduate students during their first semester of coursework to review the process of portfolio preparation.

II. Statement of Purpose: The portfolio will be developed in an ongoing manner throughout the graduate counseling program, and is used periodically as a tool for reflection, evaluation, and feedback. The overall purpose is to collect and combine examples of experience and mastery with reflection on their meaning or significance. The process of developing a professional counselor portfolio has several purposes:

- A. Portfolio development is designed to facilitate a thoughtful and intentional entrance into graduate studies. As students begin preparation in a professional career, it is important that they actively engage in each step of their learning. Reviewing one's strengths and "growing edges", setting goals for needed learning, pursuing a learning strategy, and regular evaluation of progress are all important steps in engaging with the learning process at the graduate level. Developing a portfolio is a vehicle for this engagement.
- B. The process of portfolio development also provides opportunities for regular faculty evaluation and feedback for each student in a manner which includes dialogue between faculty member and counseling student. Ongoing preparation for a profession is best accomplished with the guidance of professionals who can serve in the roles of consultant, teacher, mentor, and supervisor. Active dialogue enables the student to shape and modify his/her learning with attention to personal needs and professional requirements. The portfolio development process provides for dialogue and feedback throughout the course of study.
- C. Successful completion of the assessment components of the portfolio process serves as "marker events" in the course of graduate study.
- D. The portfolio assists with the professional counselor's job search process. A completed portfolio demonstrates proficiency and mastery and can be used as an employment tool.
- E. These purposes reflect the development of a student's portfolio as a process. Counseling program requirements focus elements of the portfolio into a coherent process that (1) facilitates students' intentional shaping of their learning, (2) provides for regular faculty feedback, (3) serves as "marker events" in the course of graduate studies, and (4) provides a format for presentation of professional qualifications.

III. Portfolio Structure

Physically, a portfolio should be a well-organized, attractive presentation of professional materials. Typically it is organized in a three-ring binder with tabs, table of contents, etc

A guiding principle in deciding on entries is to ask "What will be added to the description of my knowledge, skills, and character by adding this entry?" A second guideline is to think about the primary message you want to convey via your portfolio and to ask "Have I selected the entries which most accurately and completely demonstrate my message?" Be sure to include experiences and learning that occur outside the formal academic program, such as participation in volunteer activities.

Each entry should be accompanied by a reflective statement, which might consist of a paragraph. Reflective statements explain why each entry is included and why it represents you as a counseling professional. In writing reflective statements, ask "What did I do? What does it mean? How did I come to be this way? How might I do things differently? and, What have I learned?" The entry is then made meaningful and placed in the context within which a student wants it to be understood.

The content of the portfolio is largely left to you. Some components are required as a part of the portfolio assessment process (see Section IV below). Other considerations for entries could include:

- 1) Professional orientation and background information:
- 2) professional resume
- 3) statement of philosophy of counseling (and perhaps education for those in school counseling)
- 4) statement of professional goals
- 5) professional development activities (e.g., conferences and workshops attended)
- 6) evaluations/feedback received from supervisors

B. Skill/content mastery:

- 1) reproductions or representations of activities, such as videotapes or journals
- 2) papers, projects, independent study or research
- 3) program designs, publications, presentations
- 4) evidence related to a specific area of focus within counseling

C. Organization and management:

- 1) analysis of interpersonal professional relationships
- 2) examples of problem-solving strategies used with a real problem
- 3) other relevant experiences not discussed elsewhere.

IV. Portfolio Assessment Process: Selected elements of the counselor's portfolio will be completed during a specific time frame over the course of graduate study. These components will be evaluated by counseling faculty with feedback given to students.

A. Statement of Professional Preparation and Goals

Time frame: Conclusion of the first semester of study

- Compose a Statement of Professional Preparation and Goals that outlines how you intend to utilize the counseling degree, and how you intend to gain the competencies necessary to fulfill the program objectives of your counseling program.
- Consult the published objectives of your program (see specific program sections of the Program Manual and the Fitness for Profession Document), and evaluate the strengths and growing edges you bring to graduate study, and construct a concrete action plan for graduate study including proposed course selections over a set time frame. The statement should also include a plan for other learning and professional experiences that you intend to pursue as part of your overall preparation: e.g., professional memberships, credentialing requirements, ongoing professional development outside the classroom, research involvement, areas of interest you may pursue in research papers, reading, etc.
- This Statement should be reviewed with a faculty mentor and/or the instructor of your Professional Issues course, with one faculty member "signing off" on the document (see attached form).

B. Pre-practicum Submission of Professional Counselor Portfolio

Time frame: Review of portfolio with faculty member by October 1 or March 1 of the semester prior to practicum. Your professional counselor portfolio will be submitted prior to registering for the practicum course. Elements of the portfolio at this stage of preparation include:

- 1) What you have done
 - a) courses taken and grades
 - b) professional development activities (e.g., workshops/conferences attended, professional memberships, journals read regularly)
 - c) research involvements
 - d) listing of topics of major papers written in connection with coursework.
- 2) Self-evaluation
 - a) Revised statement of professional preparation/goals and review of progress in realizing previous goals (reference previously written Statement of Professional Preparation/Goals)
 - b) Re-assess strengths, growing edges, continuing needs, and continuing goals
 - c) Plan of action
- 3) Documentation
 - a) writing sample, a copy of one of your best papers written thus far.
 - b) workshop/conference brochures from gatherings you attended or presented.
 - c) copy of supporting materials verifying membership in professional organizations, subscriptions to professional journals, participation in other related professional activities.

Two copies of your portfolio will be submitted to your mentor or Program Director, who will review the portfolio with you (see attached form).

The portfolio will also be reviewed by a second faculty member selected by the counseling program faculty. Thus, your portfolio will be reviewed by two members of the graduate counseling faculty. This team will make a recommendation regarding your readiness for practicum to Department Chair. Reaction and/or reflection to feedback received during this process is an appropriate future entry in the portfolio.

C. Comprehensive Examination Component of the Portfolio

Time frame: November 8 or April 8 prior to completion of the counseling practicum course (i.e., COUN 590, 591, 592, or 593). While enrolled in the counseling practicum course, add a written reflection on your growth to your portfolio in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Comprehensive Examination in the Counseling Programs (see attached form). This reflection should discuss growth and gains toward achieving the program objectives of your counseling program (program objectives are enumerated in the specific program sections of the Program Manual). After briefly reviewing each program objective, for this written reflection:

- 1) Select three (3) objectives of your choice that you feel are your strengths at this time, and answer the following for each objective:
 - a) What have you learned in this area?
 - b) What learning experiences were particularly meaningful?
 - c) Which of the competencies, experiences, and skills relative to this objective do you consider most valuable?
 - d) In what settings have you used and do you plan to use this objective.

Note: Maximum 1-2 pages for each objective.

- 2) Select three (3) additional objectives of your choice that you feel are your weaknesses at this time, and answer the following for each objective:
 - a) What have you learned in this area?
 - b) What additional information do you need to increase your competence in this area?
 - c) Briefly outline a plan to achieve your desired competency level.

Note: Maximum 1-2 pages for each objective.

Submission of Professional Counselor Portfolio for Completion of Internship

Time frame: November 8 or April 8 prior to the end of the counseling internship course (i.e., COUN 595, 596, 597, or 598). While enrolled in the counseling internship course, submit your professional counselor portfolio for final review and feedback from faculty. Development of the portfolio during internship typically involves reviewing the formative process that you have undergone during your graduate program and recording significant events and learning that occur during the internship. Other primary components of this portfolio update include a revision of items previously discussed in portfolio and inclusion of entries deemed appropriate for use in the job search process or summarizing your role as a professional counselor (e.g., a formal resume).

Your professional counselor portfolio will be submitted to your internship instructor (see attached form). It will also be reviewed by your Program Director.