

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Masters Program (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a
specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy
Department of Counseling Psychology
School of Education
Spring, 2006

The School of Education invited two highly respected consultants from the field of Marriage and Family Therapy to act as external reviewers for the Masters Program in Counseling Psychology with a specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy. Dr. Amy Hittner is former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at San Francisco State University and Dr. Michael Carter is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Marriage and Family Therapy program at California State University, Los Angeles. Drs. Hittner and Carter reviewed the USF Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program during their campus visit from May 3-4, 2006. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were sent the Department's comprehensive self-study document. To further assist the team in their work, they were provided with copies of various documents that included, in part, sample course syllabi, program assessment questionnaires, registration statistics, the University of San Francisco's Mission Statement, the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and the USF Catalogue. The team met with the dean, associate dean, full- and part-time members of the faculty, staff, current students, and alumni.

This Executive Summary addresses six basic questions regarding the quality of the masters program in Counseling Psychology with a specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT). The MFT Program is offered on the main campus and at four regional sites in Sacramento, Santa Rosa, Cupertino, and San Ramon. The Program consists of 49 units of coursework, including two semesters of traineeship (15-20 hours per week of supervised community-based clinical experience). The narrative below reflects the external reviewers' assessment of the program.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the Marriage and Family Therapy program?

The external reviewers described the USF Master's degree program in Marriage and Family Therapy as having a "well-developed, cutting edge curriculum" that fulfills the academic requirements for the State of California Marriage and Family Therapy license and provides "excellent didactic and experiential experiences for students." Overall the external review committee rated the program as Very Good to Excellent based on the following four areas of program strength (A-D).

A). Curriculum. The external reviewers found the curriculum to be well-designed, challenging, and current to meet the needs of the students it serves. With regard to content, the program also effectively represents the “educational requirements and societal understanding needed for a well-prepared Marriage and Family Therapist in today's world.” The reviewers attribute the strong curriculum to three revisions since 1993 creating a cutting-edge focus: 1993 curriculum revised to include the guidelines of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT); 2001 program revision to integrate the two MFT programs; and 2003 MFT program revision to strengthen the Multicultural and Social Justice emphases.

B). Faculty. The external reviewers concurred with the students' and alumni's agreement that “the continuous faculty commitment to their academic, professional, and personal well-being” was one of the program's major strengths. They cited the positive faculty teaching evaluations and also noted that faculty “contribute to scholarly literature in a meaningful way.”

C). Program Design and Administration. The external reviewers indicated that the MFT program in the Department of Counseling Psychology has many areas of strength including: dedicated program administration including a new professional administrative position; appropriate class sizes; life span developmental perspective attention to older adult needs and concerns; time and attention to students; cohort model of training; encouragement of personal counseling; MFT information sessions; and excellent Student handbook, Fieldwork Manual, and Exit Manual (the later being unique to the external reviewers).

D). Student Enrollment and Satisfaction. The applicant pool has doubled over the last four years and faculty have reached out to design programs not only on the main campus but at all of the regional campuses since 1984. Eighty to one hundred percent of the students rated the program as meeting their needs well. Students and alumni particularly value the cohort model of training; encouragement of personal counseling; the MFT information sessions; graduate mentoring program; and the regional programs that serve older and experienced mental health professionals. As a result, the external reviewers noted the low dropout rate exemplifies the excellent education and faculty attention students receive (68% graduate within two years).

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

The reviewers identified two overall program challenges:

A). Curriculum. Some students have expressed a desire for more breadth in their clinical training with an even greater focus on multicultural, lifespan, and

family systems approaches. The external reviewers cited the following curricular issues as needing attention in the future: inconsistency in course content based on course instructor and section and a need for greater alignment among regional programs and the main campus in course delivery, consistency, and communication.

B). Faculty FTE. The number of students has doubled in the last few years, but the number of full-time faculty has not increased. The external reviewers stated: "As with most clinically driven professional programs, it is imperative that intensive supervision, consultation and management, and administration be a significant part of faculty responsibility. Unlike most University curricula, the MFT faculty must spend time monitoring students in their fieldwork placements, and address personal as well as professional issues that inevitably arise over the course of this type of graduate program." The increased numbers of students combined with faculty commitment to delivering a quality program have placed a strain on faculty resources.

3. What specific recommendations were made for improving the program's quality?

In response to the external reviewers' comments and recommendations, the faculty of the Department of Counseling Psychology has supported the following recommendations.

A). Curriculum. The Lifespan, Multicultural, and Family Systems emphases should be strengthened further within the curriculum. Faculty will need to develop core competencies for each course to standardize syllabi and ensure greater consistency across courses. A faculty administrator should be appointed to work collaboratively with the regional faculty advisors and field consultants to facilitate consistency in program delivery.

B). Faculty FTE. An additional tenure-track MFT faculty position needs to be added to the Department of Counseling Psychology. In addition, the external reviewers also recommended that two term-limited positions should be converted to permanent clinical faculty positions. At the time the reviewers wrote their report, the School of Education had just hired a new MFT faculty member, Dr. Christine Yeh, to support the MFT program. However due to program administration turnover, Dr. Yeh assumed the role of Coordinator of the School Counseling Program and will not be teaching in the MFT program.

C). Traineeship Sites. A protocol for a strong and consistent connection between field sites and the MFT program should be developed. The position held by Maggie Krier is recommended as the first point of contact to secure good university/field site communication.

4. Is the program following the University's strategic initiatives?

- **Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars?** The external reviewers stated that the faculty are “committed to the education and training of Marriage and Family Therapists, contributing to scholarly literature in the field in meaningful ways, making personal commitments to serve others less fortunate in a socially responsible way.” They also noted that the students praised the adjunct faculty as models for good counseling.
- **Enrolling, supporting, and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement and a concern for others?** The external reviewers emphasized that the faculty “makes a special effort to recruit students who represent the ethnic, religious and sexual orientation diversity in the San Francisco Bay Area.” The high graduation rate (68% of students graduate in a 2 year program) exemplifies the excellent education and faculty attention the students receive. All students are exposed to a curriculum emphasizing social justice, particularly in their traineeship experiences where they provide essential mental health services that would not otherwise be available to the client populations they serve.
- **Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning?** The faculty offer quality instruction and a high level of support to students in a rigorous program that is well-regarded in the State of California.
- **In what ways is the program contributing to the goal of making the University a premier Jesuit Catholic urban university?** The MFT Program is important to the future of the School of Education in two critical respects. First, the program accounts for almost a third of the student credit hours generated by the School of Education. Second, the MFT program is one of the premier programs advancing the University's social justice mission. The MFT Program educates students to work with at-risk children, adults, and families of all ages, ethnicity, and walks of life who suffer from abuse, oppression, and mental illness. They cited the Center for Child and Family Development and international projects (India and Mexico) as examples of successful community-based commitments.

6. What is the timetable for implementation of recommendations?

The most imperative recommendation addresses the need for faculty (and/or administrative) staffing of programs, suggesting the addition of new tenure-track MFT faculty and for the conversion of the two current term MFT positions into permanent positions. The implementation of this recommendation requires the support of the School of Education Department Chairs, the SOE Deans, and the University Leadership Team. The curricular and program

recommendations will be achieved, to a large degree, over the next two years.