

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

Date: February 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Gloria Eldridge, Professor
Eric S. Murphy, Director & Professor

Cc: John M. Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean’s Recommendation

Program/s in this review: MS in Clinical Psychology

Program Response to Dean’s Findings

While the CAS Dean’s recommendation to delete the MS in Clinical Psychology (MSCP) was made in good faith to address an urgent budget shortfall in CAS, it was based on a flawed understanding of (1) the mental health crisis in Alaska, the centrality of the MSCP to mental health workforce development in Alaska, and the integration of undergraduate and graduate programs in the department of psychology; (2) a **false equivalence between the MSCP and the MSW** at UAA; and (3) **a flawed analysis of MSCPs ability to cover its costs**. We thank him for his recognition of the quality of the MSCP and its contribution to the Alaska mental health workforce, but disagree with his recommendation. **We will show that, rather than being deleted, the MSCP should be ENHANCED.**

Mental Health Crisis and Centrality of MSCP

In January 2020 the State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority published *Strengthening the System: Alaska's Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program Plan 2020-2024*. In regards to workforce, the report states **"Alaska has a known workforce shortage across many health- and behavioral health-related disciplines. Without a capable and competent workforce, the continuum of services and care is at risk of not being able to meet the needs of the most vulnerable Alaskans."** (DHSS, 2020, p. 46). The report estimates the need for an **additional** 800 jobs for Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors or Mental Health Counselors by 2026, **providing further evidence for continuation and enhancement of the MSCP**. Of interest, the report details a separate need for social workers, indicating that **mental health and social work disciplines are separate and meet different treatment needs in Alaska**.

The MSCP is a health-related program situated in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and is central to the UAA mission as a health campus. The MSCP trains students to **meet the clinical needs of Alaska mental health service settings and conforms to master's licensing requirements** in psychology and counseling in Alaska. The MS was developed in 1971 to meet training needs for the behavioral health workforce in Alaska and has continuously adapted to meet new workforce demands and licensing opportunities. The Psychological Associate (LPA) license was approved in 1974 and the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) license was approved in 2000. MS graduates currently seek both of those licenses for independent practice. A new license – the Licensed Behavior Analyst (LBA) – was approved in 2016. **Master's level clinical practitioners**

are the backbone of the behavioral health workforce in Alaska, providing the majority of professional behavioral health services in the state. The MSCP at UAA is the only master’s degree in clinical psychology in Alaska. If the program is eliminated, students will be forced to go out of state for training and many will not return to the state. As noted by one of largest community mental health agencies in the state “We hire and employ more graduates from the Master of Science in Clinical Psychology Program at UAA than from any other graduate program inside or outside Alaska. Our experience has been that the program provides a solid educational foundation and excellent clinical training, to future master’s level practitioners.”

Interrelationship among Programs in the Psychology Department

MS and PhD in Clinical/Community Psychology. The Dean’s review of the PhD in Clinical/Community Psychology noted that “as to efficiency, the program’s tuition falls far short of the instructional costs by far more than the average among CAS’s graduate programs” and concludes that because of budget constraints on hiring, “reassigning departmental faculty from one program to the PhD program should be considered.” He presents this in support of eliminating the MSCP; however, eliminating the MSCP would only **exacerbate challenges to the sustainability of the only PhD at UAA.**

The PhD was originally a joint UAA/UAF program; some courses were offered at UAA and some at UAF. No courses were shared with the MS program, even when the course content was identical. Since UAF withdrew from the PhD program, all courses are offered by UAA faculty. The MSCP has been essential in this transition to UAA. **The MSCP and PhD share seven courses required by both programs** (introduction to clinical skills, diagnostics and psychopathology, ethics and professional practice, human development, research methods, and two terms of clinical internship in the community) and there is potential for additional course sharing to reduce costs. If the MSCP is deleted, instead of having these courses filled with 10 to 15 students, each course will be filled by only five PhD students (the cap on yearly admissions to the PhD), substantially decreasing PhD program efficiency. In addition, the **Psychological Services Center (PSC), the UAA training clinic for the MSCP and PhD, will become unsustainable.** The PSC’s presence as a community referral clinic depends on having adequate numbers of student clinicians to serve community need and to maintain year-round operations. With only five PhD students per year, the clinic will not have sufficient student clinicians to provide timely services and will not be able to remain open during the summer months. **The likelihood of the PSC closing is very high, which will have disastrous implications for APA accreditation of the PhD program.**

The Dean advocated reallocating faculty from other psychology programs to the PhD program. **The psychology department is already completely integrated and faculty from the undergraduate program and MSCP already teach shared MSCP and PhD courses and serve on dissertation committees.**

The MSCP has long been a conduit for students into the PhD. Sixteen PhD students have come from the MSCP and as this report is being written, two MSCP graduates are being interviewed for admission to the PhD. Some entered the MSCP and became interested in PhD training; some used the MSCP to enhance their competitiveness for admission to the PhD; others applied to the PhD as seasoned mental health professionals. **Deleting the MS program would remove those avenues into the PhD and would affect the nature of the students in the PhD.**

MSCP and BA/BS in Psychology. Deleting the MSCP will reduce undergraduate enrollment at a time when enrollment is already declining. Other than the small number who might be admitted to the PhD, **BA/BS students would be forced to seek graduate training in clinical psychology outside the state, and many would not return to Alaska, accelerating the Alaska brain drain.** MSCP faculty teach undergraduate courses and provide the mentoring and guidance that encourages students to seek graduate training in psychology. If the MSCP is eliminated, opportunities for psychology training in Alaska will be dramatically reduced, which will reduce undergraduate enrollment even further. In addition, the Psychology Department has developed a major, minor, and concentration in Applied Behavior Analysis, **an opportunity for training that exists nowhere else in Alaska. A revenue-generating proposal to add a second track to the MS program for graduate training in Applied Behavior Analysis (and eligibility for the new LBA license in Alaska) has been in the CAS Dean’s office since Fall of 2019, awaiting approval.** Eliminating the MSCP will eliminate the opportunity for students to seek graduate training in Applied Behavior Analysis, an area of high workforce demand in Alaska (see section below for details).

False Equivalence between the MSCP and the MSW degrees at UAA

The Dean’s recommendation for elimination of the MSCP is partially predicated on: (1) the fact that UAA has a distance delivered MSW with increasing enrollment, (2) his assumption that the MSCP and MSW are interchangeable in serving the mental health needs of the state; and (3) his assumption that psychology undergraduates can and will enter the MSW program rather than going out of state for graduate training in clinical psychology.

The MSW and MSCP degrees **are not interchangeable.** The MSCP is a **clinical mental health degree.** MSCP graduates are trained in assessment, diagnosis, case conceptualization, treatment planning, and treatment delivery for people experiencing mental health disorders. The MSW is an advanced **generalist** social work degree (and not a clinical social work degree). Their program website makes it clear that their goal is to train for **generalist social work practice** with a range of individuals experiencing “discrimination, economic deprivation, and/or oppression.” While it is true that many of these individuals also experience mental health disorders, **the aim of generalist MSW practice is different from the aim of MSCP practice,** which focuses directly on treatment of mental health disorders. Both disciplines are essential to providing services for individuals with mental health disorders in Alaska, but they are complementary disciplines and not interchangeable disciplines. Agencies seeking to hire an LPA or LPC **will not** hire an MSW graduate – the skills and training and scope of practice are simply different. A respected member of the Social Work faculty at UAA noted “Both of our programs help to address the mental health workforce needs in the state, but together we still do not meet the need. I do not at all consider our programs as duplicative.”

Opportunities for Psychology undergraduate students to seek graduate training will disappear. Some psychology students may be interested in the practice of social work and may apply for the 62-credit hour MSW, but **students who want to practice at the master’s level in clinical psychology will be forced to leave the state for training and many will not return.**

Declining Enrollment in the MSCP

One of the Dean’s arguments for eliminating the MSCP is that enrollment has declined over the past five years since teaching assistantships were eliminated. He argues that since these assistantships will not return, enrollment numbers will remain low, and the MSCP should be terminated. We are well aware that in the current budget climate, teaching assistantships will not return and we have adapted to that new reality and made adjustments to the MSCP. We are currently in the admissions

application period for the MSCP and, despite the disruption caused by the Expedited Program Review and the Dean’s recommendation, **our applications for admission have rebounded to levels prior to the reduction in assistantships.** At this moment, we have 14 applications from highly qualified UAA psychology students and double that number from applicants outside UAA. All these are from applicants who are well aware that we cannot provide funding; **we anticipate filling our entire class of 12 to 14 students for AY 2020-2021.**

As described in the MSCP expedited review, the American Psychological Association (APA; the body that accredits the PhD) just approved a resolution for accreditation of Master’s Level programs in areas already accredited by the APA at the doctoral level. The MSCP is strongly positioned for APA accreditation because of our PhD accreditation. **UAA will be the only university in Alaska with APA accreditation at the MSCP and PhD levels.** This will increase MSCP enrollment because of the significant licensure and employment advantages to graduates of accredited programs.

In addition, we have, waiting in the CAS Dean’s office, a **revenue-generating proposal** to add a second track to the MSCP to train graduate-level Applied Behavior Analysts. The LBA license was approved in 2016 in recognition of the rapid growth in and demand for master’s level Applied Behavior Analysts in Alaska. **There are no in-state training programs for Applied Behavior Analysts in Alaska and practitioners must be brought in from out of state or local students must seek training in the Lower 48 that does not address critical practice needs in Alaska.** The proposed track, which requires **no new resources** and projects an additional yearly tuition revenue of approximately \$60,000 (on top of the \$233K that the MSCP already generates), capitalizes on the BCBA credentials of existing Psychology faculty, will share courses with the MSCP and PhD, and will include graduate courses already offered in Psychology. This is a time limited opportunity to address an urgent workforce need in Alaska and substantially increase enrollment in the MSCP. **UAA has the opportunity to become the only program in Alaska to train Licensed Behavior Analysts for the unique demands of practice in urban and rural Alaska.** The proposed new BCBA track only awaits UAA approval to begin admitting students from the long waitlist of potential students waiting for the track to be approved.

A Flawed Analysis of MSCPs Ability to Cover its Costs

The **CAS Dean falsely claims** that “instructional costs routinely exceed the instructional revenues by a considerable amount.” As indicated in our EPR, the **MSCP covers its instructional costs** and it has mean efficiencies (since AY 2015-2016) of 1.32 (100% efficiency) and 1.06 (80% efficiency). The CAS Dean was incorrectly using the “total faculty cost” to calculate the salaries required to deliver the program. This is a misapplication of this measure because the Department of Psychology faculty teach across our three major programs (i.e, BA/BS, MS, & PhD). That is, the faculty are **integrated** across the department. Therefore, total faculty cost artificially inflates the overhead costs associated with delivering the MSCP because components of a faculty member’s workload are associated with the other programs. The accurate way to estimate the faculty overhead for the MSCP is by using “instructional costs.” Instructional costs use the proportion of a faculty member’s salary (plus benefits) associated with delivering a course. Additionally, the CAS Dean’s analysis relied on aggregate data provided by UAA’s Office of Institutional Research (IR). As already acknowledged by IR, the data miscalculates the workload allocation for independent studies (e.g., PSY A698), theses (PSY A699), and dissertations (PSY A699D). Typically, a 3-credit course is the equivalent of 10% of faculty member’s salary. However, faculty receive virtually no credit on their workloads for supervising these high-impact courses. Therefore, we removed these courses from our instructional cost estimate; however, we counted the revenue generated by them.

The CAS Dean also claims “CAS’s shrinking budget is especially challenging for programs that rely on state financial appropriations through CAS because the programs have a gap between (a) the total costs of everything the program does and needs, and (b) the tuition CAS receives to cover those costs.” Furthermore, the Dean states “Although unfortunate, CAS likely cannot sustain this program beyond its current cohort of students.” **The MSCP does not rely on state appropriations to cover its costs** because, as noted above, the program covers its instructional costs by the tuition it generates. Furthermore, the MSCP is administered through the Department of Psychology. As mentioned in the psychology BA/BS, MS, and PhD EPRs, the **Department of Psychology generates over \$2.9 Million dollars in revenue compared to \$2.0 Million dollars in total faculty costs.** That is, the Department of Psychology **does not rely on general funds.** Even if the MSCP operated at a deficit, which it does not, the revenue generated by the Department of Psychology covers the gap. **It is unclear why the CAS Dean would recommend deleting a program that does rely on state appropriations.**

Summary

The MSCP is an important part of the UAA’s mission as a health campus addressing health workforce needs in the state. The MSCP trains graduates to provide clinical mental health services and conforms to licensure requirements for the LPA and LPC practice licenses in Alaska. It makes a unique contribution to the mental health workforce in Alaska and is central to addressing the critical shortage of mental health clinicians in the state. **Eliminating the MSCP would remove potential practitioners from the mental and behavioral health workforce at a time of increasing demand and increasing shortfalls.** The MSCP makes a unique contribution to the health workforce that cannot be duplicated by increasing the number of graduates from other disciplines, particularly the MSW. As shown, **the MSW and MSCP are complementary but not interchangeable disciplines in terms of the training, emphasis, and scope of practice of graduates.** Alaska needs graduates of both the MSW and the MSCP.

The MSCP contributes substantially to the sustainability of the only PhD at UAA. Without the PhD, UAA is no longer a PhD-granting institution and without the MSCP to share course and faculty and support the operation of the Psychological Services Center, the long-term sustainability of the PhD as an APA-accredited program is in jeopardy. In addition, **contrary to the Dean’s conclusions, the MSCP covers its costs and does rely on general funds to operate the program.**

The MSCP is in a position to expand, attract additional students and additional revenue, and provide additional opportunities for psychology students at UAA and in Alaska. **As demonstrated, there is an urgent unmet need for graduate training in Applied Behavior Analysis in Alaska.** There are over 25 open positions for Applied Behavior Analysts in Alaska and there is no training program that can supply that need. Since fall of 2019, the MSCP has had a program – which has been supported by the Provost – waiting for the CAS Dean’s approval before it can be moved from CAS Course and Curriculum (which it passed) to the Graduate Academic Board. **Offering this program would immediately allow us to double the size of MSCP enrollment and address an urgent workforce need in the state.**

Finally, the APA, for the first time, is about to publish its requirements for accreditation of master’s level clinical psychology programs. Because the MSCP and PhD at UAA are closely integrated, the **MSCP is uniquely positioned to seek immediate APA accreditation.** This will make the MSCP one of the few master’s degrees in clinical psychology in the country to have both an APA-accredited MSCP and PhD, which will confer enormous advantages to graduates in terms of employability and license portability, and will enhance our ability to attract applicants.

For these reasons, the MSCP should be removed from the delete category and placed in the ENHANCED category.