CREATING A PORTFOLIO OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR COMPETENCE

The following instructions outline the process for creating the portfolio. Decisions regarding contents are influenced by: (1) the purpose of the portfolio; (2) the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the counselor; and (3) the context in which the counselor is working. Each portfolio, therefore, will be unique.

Step I: Purpose of the Portfolio

The first step in developing a portfolio is to clarify its purpose. There are at least three functions to consider. First, students use it to document current levels of competence and to identify those areas where improvement is needed. Second, advisors review portfolios to determine whether performance is sufficient for graduation. Finally, students may decide to use their portfolios as marketing tools with potential employers. Minimally, the portfolio is a degree requirement that must demonstrate a counselor’s competence and readiness for graduation. Conversations with one’s faculty advisor will clarify both the purpose and the process.

Step II: Get organized

Note that there are eight competencies to satisfy. Begin collecting evidence from each course completed and from each practicum experience that fits those categories. Note categories that are lacking and determine how to fill the void. Give yourself a timeline for each separate competency, a date when that portion is to be completed. Your advisor will help you in this process as will your departmental practicum supervisor. Students will find it helpful to identify competencies that need development and then to create opportunities where those competencies can be practiced. The areas of competence that are expected to be addressed in portfolios are:

- Case Conceptualization - Individual and Organizational - the ability to acquire case information, to develop a formulation (diagnosis), to determine a treatment plan, and then to implement and evaluate that plan within a coherent theoretical framework.
- Presentation Skills - the ability to present information to or to train a group in a particular topic or skill(s).
- Counseling Skills - the ability to use counseling skills with individuals, groups and families to produce change.
- Multicultural Skills - the ability as a scientist practitioner, to address cultural factors (e.g., class, gender or ethnicity) in one’s professional activities.
Consultation Skills - the ability to work with individuals or groups to resolve problems.

Professional Identity - the development of an identity as a member of the counseling profession.

Scholarship - the ability to inform the practice of- or to generate knowledge related to counseling.

Specialization - identify skills, knowledge, and actions that are unique to one’s area of specialization.

Step III: Choose Evidence

Third, choose the evidence that best demonstrates competence in the area. Portfolios, for example, often contain an essay related to the area of specialization that outlines one’s personal theory of counseling. Once evidence is chosen, prepare a brief competence statement describing: (1) what the evidence is; (2) how it demonstrates the counselor’s competence; and (3) why it was selected. Be mindful of issues related to confidentiality, taking steps to be certain that clients referred to cannot be identified. In some instances, students may wish to obtain clients’ informed consent. In these cases, client’s written permission must be included. Additionally, evidence should focus on the level of competency achieved at the end of the training program.

Step IV: Produce

Once evidence is collected and described, the portfolio should be organized in a manner that will allow a third person unfamiliar with your work to understand and evaluate the material.

Step V: Reflect

As evidence of self-reflection, students should prepare statements describing their strengths and weaknesses. These statements (1 page each in length, approximately) will appear at the beginning of each chapter as a means of introducing the reader to the chapter.

Step VI: Submit for Evaluation

The faculty advisor and another faculty member will evaluate the portfolio to determine whether a student has satisfied the portfolio requirement. Feedback may simply be a signature on the PAF or a formal written response.
Summary

Creating a portfolio can be time-consuming and anxiety-producing. The end result should be satisfying for both the student and readers. It is an opportunity to integrate all learning, both classroom and clinical, and then to feel truly competent to enter the counseling profession.