

**PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME (PLO) 4: USE OF RESEARCH  
ANALYSIS AND REPORT (CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH  
AND REHABILITATION COUNSELING)  
FALL 2013 - FALL 2014**

Program Learning Outcome (PLO) 4: Students in the master's degree programs (CMHC, RC, and SC) within the Department of Counseling and Human Services at the University of Scranton will: "formulate, conduct, and evaluate master's level research procedures and assessment processes."

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A systematic assessment of PLO 4 was conducted in the summer of 2015. Evaluation outcomes for three assignments from COUN 505: Research Methods were used to conduct the Clinical Mental Health and Rehabilitation Counseling Programs component of the analysis for PLO 4. Three recent semesters of outcomes (F13, S14, F14) were included in this assessment cycle for analysis. Outcomes for all students ( $N = 48$ ) in three semesters are included (F13  $n = 18$ , S14  $n = 16$ , F14  $n = 14$ ).

COUN 505 is a graduate course in counseling designed to meet CACREP and CORE accreditation standards for the research methods curricular material. Rehabilitation Counseling students generally complete this course during the latter portion of their master's degree work, often while completing their internship, and Clinical Mental Health Counseling students do not take it in a typical course sequence. All students complete primary assignments in this course of 1) critiquing research articles of their content and utility ("Journal Article Critique"), 2)

completing a qualitative research investigation (“Qualitative Research Write-Up”), and 3) proposing new research to be completed (“Research Proposal”).

To assess the Program Learning Outcome of “formulate, conduct, and evaluate master’s level research procedures and assessment processes,” the Research Proposal is used to evaluate students’ ability to formulate research, the Qualitative Research Write Up is used to evaluate students’ ability to conduct research, and the Journal Article Critique is used to evaluate research and assessment. The Journal Article Critique is an assignment where students are to find two empirical research articles from a counseling journal and then critique the journal articles. Students are shown how to find and evaluate research articles during class time, and this assignment evaluates their ability to understand the article and critique the methods, findings, and conclusions of the researchers. A scoring rubric was provided to students and used to evaluate their ability to evaluate research procedures and assessment processes. Students completed this assignment twice; once with an empirical article using correlational type of research and once with an empirical article using comparative or experimental research. The Qualitative Research Write Up is designed to have students understand the research process by obtaining new qualitative data and to write the methods, results, and discussion sections of a manuscript. Students were to recruit at least 2 participants to complete interviews or surveys to generate data that they would then analyze using an Ethnographic, Narratological, or Phenomenological approach. Students were to create themes/categories/narratives based on their data and to report it according to the type of qualitative research approach that they used for their

investigation. Their completed projects were evaluated by a rubric provided to the students that assessed their ability to complete appropriate qualitative research methods and to appropriately write and report their methods, results, conclusions, implications, and limitations. The Research Proposal was completed by using actual research proposal formats from counseling organizations or from the University of Scranton's Institutional Review Board. While they did not have to submit these research proposals to anyone but the instructor, students work was assessed by their ability to meet the criteria of the specified research proposal format that they choose and to clearly describe their topic, research question(s), methods, and analysis. There was not a rubric for this assignment because of the various formats that were possible for students to complete this project.

Over this time period of analysis (Fall 2013 – Fall 2014), the same instructor taught each section of the COUN 505 Research Methods course and evaluated every students' work (N = 48). While the instructor remained the same for each of these classes, the instructor did make some slight changes to these assignments during this period of time, including change the percentage of the final grade that these projects were worth and by providing examples to students of how to complete the Journal Article Critique and Qualitative Research Write Up to students in semesters Spring 2014 and Fall 2014. As Fall 2013 was the instructor's first time teaching this class, the instructor was unable to provide the students with examples of these assignments.

## RESULTS

Results are reported in Table 1 (below). Areas of note are presented proceeded by a “Recommendations” section and a subsequent “Action Report” section to document the department’s ongoing “Closing the Loop” activities.

**Table 1: F12-F14 Use of Research- COUN535: SC Research and Accountability (Overall and Disaggregated by Year)**

	Journal Article Critique*	Journal Article Critique: $\geq 84\%$ **	Qualitative Research Write Up	Qualitative Research Write Up: $\geq 84\%$ **	Research Proposal	Research Proposal: $\geq 84\%$ **
Fall 2013 ( <i>n</i> = 18)	<i>m</i> = 97.0 SD = 5.8	<i>n</i> = 17 94.4%	<i>m</i> = 94.0 SD = 2.8	<i>n</i> = 17 94.4%	<i>m</i> = 93.0 SD = 5.7	<i>n</i> = 16 88.9%
Spring 2014 ( <i>n</i> = 16)	<i>m</i> = 96.4 SD = 5.3	<i>n</i> = 16 100%	<i>m</i> = 92.1 SD = 8.0	<i>n</i> = 13 81.3%	<i>m</i> = 94.1 SD = 6.6	<i>n</i> = 15 93.8%
Fall 2014 ( <i>n</i> = 14)	<i>m</i> = 97.1 SD = 2.4	<i>n</i> = 14 100%	<i>m</i> = 94.3 SD = 5.7	<i>n</i> = 14 100%	<i>m</i> = 88.9 SD = 10.3	<i>n</i> = 11 78.6%
<b>OVERALL</b> ( <i>N</i> = 48)	<b><i>m</i> = 96.8</b> <b>SD = 4.8</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 47</b> <b>97.9%</b>	<b><i>m</i> = 93.4</b> <b>SD = 5.9</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 44</b> <b>91.7%</b>	<b><i>m</i> = 92.1</b> <b>SD = 7.7</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 42</b> <b>87.5%</b>

\*Journal Article Critique scores listed here represent an average of the first and second Journal Article Critique scores for each student.

\*\*84% represents the minimum overall acceptable end-of-course grade established by the CGCE. It is used here as a baseline standard of performance for the individual course assignments linked to this PLO.

Overall means for the Journal Article Critique (*m* = 96.8, SD = 4.8), Qualitative Research Write Up (*m* = 93.4, SD = 5.9), and Research Proposal (*m* = 92.1, SD = 7.7) for the current assessment cycle are encouraging as are the disaggregated means (by semester) for each assessment. Means indicate that course participants, in the aggregate, perform quite well on each of the assessments for assessing students ability regarding PLO4. Additional frequency analysis to evaluate the numbers of students exceeding or falling below a final score of 84% on each assignment, however, provides a slightly different picture.

Eighty-four percent represents a “minimum” level of overall performance for graduate students. In other words, those whose overall G.P.A. dips below a 3.0 average, or “B” (represented by a grade average < 84%), are typically placed on

academic probation. Students whose grade dips below this point in a particular course typically receive a letter of warning from the CGCE Dean indicating that sustained performance at this level may result in the student being placed on probation. Thus, 84% was used as a previously “established performance bar” to evaluate student outcomes on each of the assessments. Overall, 97.9% of students ( $n = 47$ ) surpassed the 84% level on the Journal Article Critique assignment; 91.7% ( $n = 44$ ) surpassed this level on the Qualitative Research Write Up assignment; and 87.5% ( $n = 42$ ) surpassed this level on the Research Proposal. While this shows that a strong majority of students are performing well on all of these assignments, it also shows that more students do not meet or surpass the 84% standard on the Research Proposal. This is consistent with this assignment having the lowest mean score and greatest standard deviation and shows that not as many students are able to formulate research procedures and assessment processes as they can conduct or evaluate research procedures and assessment processes. Recommendations for the future include spending more time on helping students understand how to formulate their own research questions into appropriate research methods and might include a focus on additional analyses to examine where students are struggling on these assignments as well as instructional approaches that might increase the numbers of students exceeding this performance level the next time this PLO is evaluated.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Discuss the merits of establishing *baseline performance* expectations for each assignment and subsequently, if deemed appropriate, develop appropriate

mechanisms to insure that students are meeting these minimum expectations in order to earn credit for the course.

2. Discuss the merits of establishing a *benchmark target* for each assessment based on current data in order to measure improvements during the next PLO cycle.
3. Standardize and stabilize assessments in order to insure greater reliability and validity throughout the next PLO cycle.
4. Devote more class time to helping students be able to appropriately choose research methods and appropriate assessments to address their research questions.
5. Determine where students are struggling on each assignment by conducting sub-construct item-analyses for each assignment. Utilize outcomes to focus instruction with increased intention.

#### **ACTION REPORT**

1. Preliminary working draft sent to Standards Work Group via e-mail for preview and discussion at upcoming meeting (9/24/15).
2. Draft reviewed by the Standards Work Group (10/14/15).
3. FALL, 2015- Instructor for COUN 505 devoted more class time to help students appropriately choose research methods based on their research questions as per Recommendation #4.

# Appendix A

COUN 505: CMHC and RC Research  
Methods Rubrics and Guidelines

## Guidelines for Critiquing Research Articles

1. **Title**
  - a. Did the title describe the study?
  - b. Did the key words on the title serve as key elements of the article?
  - c. Was the title concise (free of distracting or extraneous phrases? Etc.)
2. **Abstract**
  - a. Did the abstract summarize the study's purpose, methods, and findings?
  - b. Did the abstract reveal the independent and dependent variable under study?
  - c. Were there any major premises or finding presented in the article that were not mentioned in the abstract?
  - d. Did the abstract provide you with sufficient information to determine whether or not you would be interested in reading the entire article?
3. **Introduction**
  - a. Was the research problem clearly identified?
  - b. Is the problem significant enough to warrant the study that was conducted?
  - c. Is the conceptual framework of the study appropriate in light of the research problem?
  - d. Do the author's hypotheses and/or research questions seem logical in light of the conceptual framework and research problem?
  - e. Are the hypotheses and research questions clearly stated? Are they directional?
  - f. Overall, does the literature review lead logically into the Methods section?
4. **Method**
  - a. Is the sample clearly described in terms of size, relevant characteristics, selection and assignment of procedures, and whether any inducements were used to solicit the subjects?
  - b. Do the instruments described seem appropriate as measures of the variables under study?
  - c. Have the authors included sufficient information about the psychometric properties (reliability, validity, etc) of the instruments?
  - d. Are the materials used in conducting the study or in collecting the data clearly described?
  - e. Are the study's scientific procedures thoroughly described in chronological order?
  - f. Is the design of the study identified (or made evident)?
  - g. Do the design and procedures seem appropriate in light of the research problem, conceptual framework, and research question/hypotheses?
  - h. Overall, does the method section provide sufficient information to replicate the study?
5. **Results**
  - a. Is the results section clearly written and well organized?
  - b. Are data coding and analysis appropriate in light of the study's design and hypothesis?
  - c. Are reported results connected directly to the hypotheses?
  - d. Are tables and figures clearly labeled? Well organized? Necessary (non-duplicative of text)?
6. **Discussion and Conclusion**
  - a. Are the strengths and limitations of the study delineated?
  - b. Are findings discussed in terms of the research problem, conceptual framework, and hypotheses?
  - c. Are implications for future research and/or the specific study population identified?
  - d. Are the author's general conclusions warranted in light of the reported results?

**7. References**

- a. Is the reference list sufficiently current?
- b. Do works cited reflect the breadth of existing literature regarding the topics of this study?
- c. Are bibliographic citations used appropriately in the text?

**8. General Impressions**

- a. Is the article well written and organized?
- b. Does the study address an important problem for counseling?
- c. What are the most important things you learned from this article?
- d. What do you see as the most compelling strengths of this study? Weaknesses?
- e. How might this study be improved?

COUN 505 Research Methods  
Journal Article Critique  
Grading Rubric

Methodology: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title 5 points \_\_\_\_\_

Abstract 5 points \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

Methods 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

Results 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion and Conclusion 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

References 5 points \_\_\_\_\_

General Impressions 10 points \_\_\_\_\_

Overall Organization 5 points \_\_\_\_\_

APA Format (title, reference, body) 5 points \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL POINTS \_\_\_\_\_ / 75

COUN 505 Research Methods  
Qualitative Research Write-up  
Grading Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Methods 70 points \_\_\_\_\_

- Are the research questions clearly laid out?
- Are the participants described? (Including the N and pertinent information of the participants)
- Is the sampling method described?
- Are the instrument(s) used described and a brief rationale for why this instrument was selected?
- Is it clear how the variables are conceptualized and/or measured?
- Are the variables clearly described and labeled?
- Is the methodology clear?
- Are the procedures described in depth with clarity?
- Is there enough information provided to be able to repeat the study?
- Are the analyses clearly described?
- Are any applicable researcher bias(es) reported?

Results 70 points \_\_\_\_\_

- Are all of the research questions addressed?
- Is there information provided to support the written findings?
- Are the results reported consistent with the methodology used?
- Are appropriate themes/categories constructed?
- Are quotes from the participants/data provided?
- Are the findings related to the research question(s)?
- Is there a coherent structure (including subheadings if applicable) to present the findings?
- Are the results provided in adequate depth while still being brief?

Discussion and Implications 70 points \_\_\_\_\_

- Is it clear what the results show, and is a link provided for what the results mean?
- What is the clinical or practical significance of these findings?
- Is the information discussed consistent with the methodology of the study?
- How trustworthy are the results?
- Did the author describe the meaning of the results to the full extent of the findings?
- Did the author not overextend the importance and meaning of the findings?
- Are the limitations of this study reported?
- Is future research suggested from this study?
- Is it clear what the author thinks the importance of this research shows?

Overall Organization 25 points \_\_\_\_\_

- Does the organization of the manuscript fit within the generally accepted structure for academic journal articles?
- Is there a flow to the writing that helps the reader to understand the meaning of the study?

APA Format 15 points \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL POINTS \_\_\_\_\_/250

Comments: