

Affordable Learning Implementation Grant Report

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COUN 577 Evidence-Based Practice

I. Summary

This report is for the Affordable Learning Grant for the COUN 577 Evidence-Based Practice course in the Fall 2023 semester. COUN 577 is a required course for students in the M.S. Clinical Mental Health Counseling program and is an elective course available for students in the M.S. Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling and M.S. School Counseling programs. It is a course to help students with the clinical skills of case conceptualization, treatment planning, and outcome evaluation. There are several ways and models of case conceptualization and treatment planning, and I offer three models of treatment planning and over a dozen ways to case conceptualize. In the past, one textbook (Gehart's *Theory and Treatment Planning in Counseling and Therapy*) was assigned as required reading for this course, and the textbook costs about \$75. I was using many additional readings for this course in the past, though I increased the amount of supplemental materials to cover any content that was covered in the textbook. Because of the different ways that counselors utilize these skills, I offered a choice of readings most weeks in the course to allow students to individualize their approach and to support their own distinct professional identity and approach to counseling. I utilized several readings each week of mostly journal articles to provide a background in the way to case conceptualize, treatment plan, and evaluate outcomes. Primary sources from founders of the counseling approaches as well as secondary sources were offered as readings. Twenty students were enrolled in the course in the Fall 2023 semester.

II. Implementation

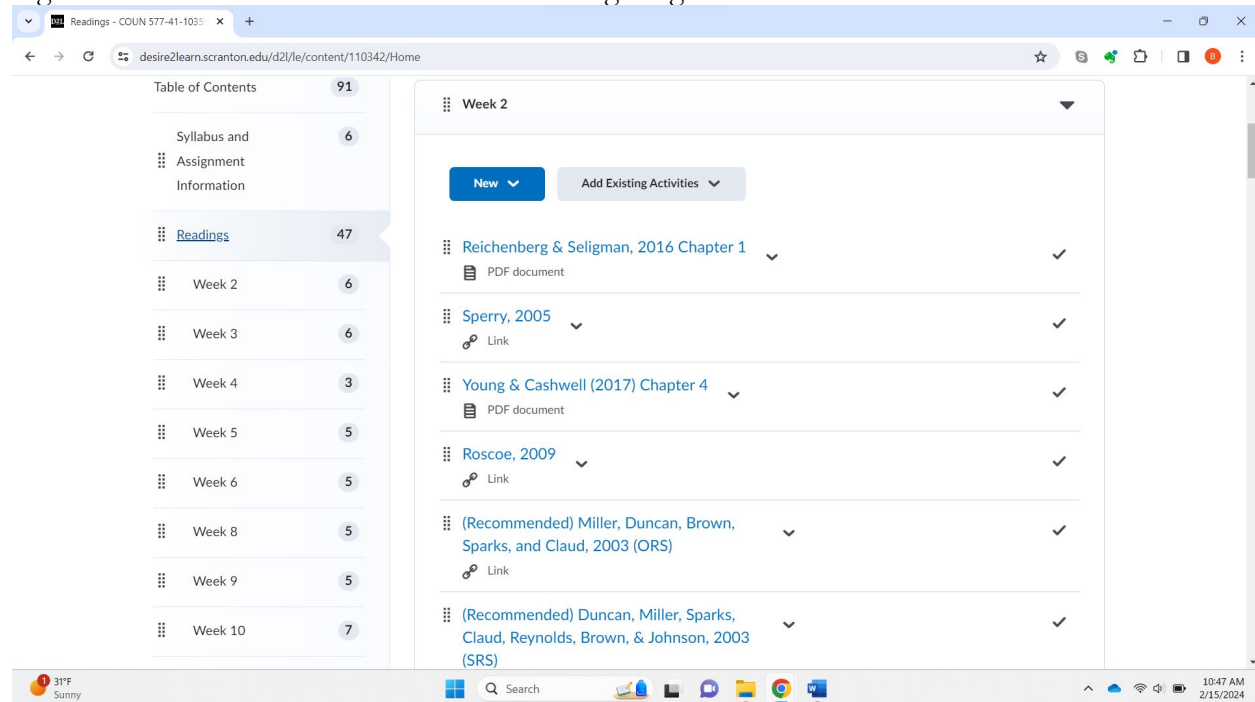
For the COUN 577 Evidence-Based Practice course, I removed the required textbook to reduce costs for students and had 39 journal articles as well as some book chapters as readings. I added suggested readings for students who wanted to add quality books on the subject for their professional library, though none of those were required reading for the students.

To help the students meet the learning objectives related to developing skills in case conceptualization, treatment planning, and outcome evaluation, the readings varied from descriptions of what is important to focus on in what a client tells the counselor and how to understand people from founders of counseling theories, meta-analyses of outcome research on using a specific theoretical approach, and descriptions of how to utilize the theory with specific interventions.

To give students access to the materials, I learned more about linking open resource articles in Desire2Learn and was able to make them available for students. This was beneficial for me, as I was previously aware of only adding pdf copies of the readings for students for these journal articles. There were also some challenges with some of the links working for students, so I was also able to problem solve with them to be able to find the resources. Some of these resources were available open access to all, and other resources were available through our library's links.

I categorized the readings by week that there were required to read in Desire2Learn (see Figure 1 below). This helped the students to not be overwhelmed by the volume of reading and eased the ability of them to find the readings for each week. I also made it clear in the syllabus and in Desire2Learn which readings were required, which were recommended, and which were their choice. The required readings only had the name of the readings, and the recommended readings had “(Recommended)” at the beginning of the name of the Desire2Learn item. When different readings choices were offered, it allowed for students to choose approaches that fit with their own approach to counseling. The journal articles seemed to stimulate more ways to learn about the theoretical approaches and to provide new ideas for interventions to add to treatment plans.

Figure 1. Screenshot from Desire2Learn Readings Page



To help connect the material and readings to the course, I also made video lectures for most of the content in the course. The videos were lectures that they could listen to freely and a time of their own choosing. This helped to connect the readings more closely to the learning objectives of the course. It also helped to fill in the gaps from the journal articles and the textbook that was no longer required reading.

III. Student Feedback and Outcomes

Students expressed positive sentiments about this method and process for readings. This was shared with me anecdotally and formally through the Course Evaluations. Anecdotally, students shared with me that they appreciated the cost savings, as our students are typically working 20 or more hours per week on top of taking graduate school courses. A couple students shared with me that they were glad that they did not have to buy them, though they did buy one or more of the suggested books

because they wanted to learn even more about the topic and found the books that I recommended beneficial for their professional library.

In the formal Course Evaluations, one student said, “I really liked the suggested textbooks. While purchasing them was not required, I did purchase three of them because I think they will be excellent resources.” In more general feedback about the readings for the course, one student shared “Good readings, enjoyed that there were optional articles,” and another said, “The readings aligned with the course outline.”

This course is also connected to one of the Program Learning Outcomes for the CMHC program. The Program Learning Outcome is: “Demonstrate knowledge pertaining to the provision of evidence-based clinical mental health counseling services that enhance the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, relational, and spiritual well-being of individuals, families, and groups seeking help with either everyday life concerns or significant challenges.” Each of the wellness areas of emotional (M = 3.58), cognitive (M = 3.42), behavioral (M = 3.47), relational (M = 3.68), and spiritual (M = 3.21) wellness are assessed on a 4 point scale with 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = needs improvement, 3 = proficient, and 4 = excellent. A score of 3 or above is desirable for students on this scale, and only three students had a mean score of the wellness areas below 3.0. This is slightly higher than the year before when four students had a mean score of the wellness areas below 3.0, and all areas except for spirituality had lower averages.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, it seemed like the implementation of open access resources was beneficial for students academically and financially. The inclusion of journal articles seemed to allow for choice and more ownership of their learning experience. Since counselors can work from different theoretical lens, I believe that this stimulated their movement toward being able to work and learn more independently of professors or supervisors. Since this class is often completed near the end of the program, this is an important developmental step for them. Also, it seemed that the suggested books were beneficial for those ready to buy the resources or to know of these books in the future if they decide to add them to their professional library. This was in addition to the journal articles that I encouraged them to download to their own devices to have for later use. I find that the open resources for this class was very beneficial for students, and I plan to continue to offer them in future semesters with COUN 577 Evidence-Based Practice.

Readings

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SUGGESTED TEXTS

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