

FACULTY POSITION STATEMENT: TEACHING PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING FROM WITHIN A CATHOLIC WORLVIEW

Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program Department of Counseling and Social Work Franciscan University

The key element of our approach as faculty in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program is that we can teach effectively whatever we find interesting, and we find interesting whatever may help us or our students to serve better in the role of counselor. Our “litmus test” for teaching content, therefore, is that it actually matters for being a better counselor in some way, shape or form.

To this end, we are interested in continuing to learn more ourselves. Some of us have become certified in Trauma Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and learned to apply Exposure Therapy; have learned and applied Bowen’s Family Systems Psychotherapy, Minuchin’s Structural Family Therapy, and Hayley’s Strategic Family Therapy; have learned and applied psychodynamic approaches; have learned to apply Multimodal Therapy, Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy, and Beck’s Cognitive Behavior Therapy; and are able to apply Solution-Focused interventions. Others of us use a philosophical, and particularly existential counseling framework that is informed by a developmental and cultural perspective on human beings and family systems. Still others have learned to apply and train others in the areas of Cognitive-Behavioral informed substance abuse recovery methods, as well as sexual addiction recovery methods. A phenomenological approach has helped to organize what otherwise might only have been a set of contradictory systems.

Although this might sound as if it leads to a hyper-pragmatic, anti-intellectual approach to teaching, that is not the case. “What works” is *understanding*, and best practice requires understanding on multiple levels. This is all the more true because counseling is a task carried out in response to the desires and needs of a human person. Therefore, it is important for us and our students to reflect somewhat intelligently on theological, philosophical, psychological, interpersonal, systemic, neurological, biological, and physical perspectives on what it is to be human. Furthermore, it helps to have some idea how “the truth is one” as it reveals itself in these differing provinces of meaning.

We also want our students to develop the most integrated understanding of counseling of which they are able. We aim to present logically, and in a way which builds in a step-wise fashion. To the degree they are willing and able, we want them to take ownership of being Catholic Professional MH Counselors. Granted, they will not all be “Catholics,” but in our view ecumenism is an important aspect of an authentically Catholic approach. Whatever they learn as professional counselors, we are hoping will be run through and integrated with a sound understanding of Nature and Revelation, and will in no way contradict the authoritative teachings of the Church. We want their professional counseling to be informed by sound theology, philosophy, and anthropology, as well as the natural and human sciences and everyday life. Any finite area of knowledge that fails to situate itself in relation to other areas, especially if it exalts itself as a be-all and end-all, becomes a source of harm rather than good.

However, it is necessary that our students learn to be professional about counseling, as well. Therefore, we believe that they benefit greatly by learning to view counseling as a career and by meeting and exceeding the ethical standards of all professional counselors. We want our students to learn that they are guided by explicit or implicit contracts with clients, supervisors, employers, supervisees, employees, etc., and we want them to aim to fulfill those contracts honorably. As professional counselors, it will behoove them to be very concerned with outcomes, validation of methods and techniques, etc. It also is important that they can dialogue with others with differing perspectives both within and outside their profession. The process of their becoming professional counselors involves implicit stages of apprentice, novice, journeyman and master of the profession.

This last assertion has at least a couple of important implications. The first is that while they all know much of value coming into our courses, we, as masters of the profession, know much they have yet to learn. In other words, there is a point to their listening to us and asking us questions, in addition to their telling us what they think. There is a point to our holding them accountable to learn and know certain things.

A second implication of the journey from apprentice to master is that the learning process can well be understood according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Counselors learn in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains as they become counselors. Therefore we are seeking to impart knowledge, attitudes and specific integrated skills. Counselors develop by knowing, appreciating and embodying the art and science of counseling. We seek to help our students move into knowledge of relevant material, and from there, to comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis

And from the beginning, we seek to expose our students to the "evaluation" of ideas, assumptions, practices and the like. Evaluating the principles, practices, and data of a complex yet finite province of meaning like counseling ultimately calls for good learning at all the prior levels.

In summary, what we attempt to do in our program is to teach with interest that which we know. We seek to encourage all our students and to help them appreciate what they have while extending it further. We want them to know, to understand, to apply, to analyze and synthesize, as well as to evaluate. We want them to do what they do thoughtfully and competently. We lecture, listen, inform, encourage, question, test, role-play, dialogue, tell stories, give examples, lend perspective and shape through successive approximations to reach this end.

Though it need not be the aspiration of all our students, the following may describe our ideal: professional counseling grounded in Catholic understanding of the Person, of Life, and of the Human Person's relationship with God. In addition to solid foundations in the evidence-based interventions of professional counseling, it draws, as appropriate, upon pastoral wisdom available in our Catholic Tradition for inspiration, hope, and transformation.