Reaccreditations: Two Down, One to Go!

The UNK Counseling and School Psychology Department has had a busy year of reaccreditation. As announced earlier in the Spring 2015 CSP Newsletter, the School Psychology program was received reaccreditation through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) through 2021. The School Psychology faculty is preparing application and self report for the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) reaccreditation this fall. An ISPA review team will conduct a campus site review Spring 2016.

The Clinical Mental Health Counseling program was awarded an eight-year accreditation period through 2023 by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the premiere accrediting body for graduate counseling programs. An eight-year period is the best CACREP accreditation achievement with the longest period possible. The Board based the decision on an extensive review of the self-study documents, the site team's report, and the institution's response to the site team's report. UNK holds the distinction of being one of two CACREP-accredited institutions in Nebraska. The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) has announced that after January 1, 2022, individuals applying for the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential must hold their degree from a CACREP accredited counselor education program. TRICARE regulations also require applicants to hold a CACREP accredited mental health counseling master’s degree.

These national and international accreditation achievements are the result of years of preparation, program and curricular reviews, and program enhancements. We are pleased to be among the elite programs that have
earned these designations. The distinction reflects the faculty’s commitment to providing students with the highest level of preparation for knowledge, skills and professional dispositions in their fields. Accreditation increases the value of student’s degree and gives them more marketability for job opportunities across the country.

Curriculum in accredited programs provides a solid foundation for students to pursue doctoral studies, eases state licensing and national certification application processes, gives students more flexibility when transferring licenses to other states, and increases marketability for employment. Employers recognize that candidates have graduated from a rigorous program, have achieved high quality standards and competencies and are knowledgeable of current trends and best practices. The Counseling and School Psychology programs also have a strong local and national reputation of preparing diverse, ethical, reflective, clinically skilled and multiculturally competent school psychologists and counselors who are strong social advocates for their profession.

Please join me in congratulating our faculty for these amazing accomplishments!

Images from the fall faculty retreat!
School Psychology

This time of year is always bitter sweet for those of us in school psychology! It is a time to say goodbye to the relaxing days of summer and hello to the exciting, yet busy, new school year! Classes at UNK began on August 24th with a total of 46 students in the school psychology program. This year we have 13 students who ventured out on their own to complete the final stage of the program. The interns began working this year in school districts across Nebraska, Colorado, and Texas. Specific sites include Kearney Public Schools, Lincoln Public Schools, Central Nebraska Support Services Program, ESU 1 (Wakefield), ESU 2 (Freemont), ESU 7 (Columbus), ESU 8 (Neligh), ESU 15 (Trenton/McCook), ESU 16 (North Platte), Alief Independent School District (Alief, TX), and Greeley Public Schools (Greeley, CO).

As the 13 interns were moving away to begin their full time work in the public schools, our 17 second year students were beginning their practicum experiences which involve spending two full days each week at their respective sites. The practicum students this year are placed in Kearney Public Schools, ESU 10 (Kearney), ESU 11 (Holdrege), Minden Public Schools, Central Nebraska Support Services Program, Lincoln Public Schools, Broken Bow Public Schools, ESU 7 (Columbus), Millard Public Schools and Papillion La Vista Public Schools. It was nice that so many of them preferred placements outside of the Kearney area as it would have been difficult to find placements for 17 students. The practicum students meet one time per week for class where they are able to share all of the wonderful experiences they are having with each other and the faculty.

Last but not least, we welcomed another large group of 16 new students into the school psychology program this fall from UNK, UNL, Hastings College, Midland University, Morningside College and Purdue University. We are looking forward
to learning more about each one and the skills they bring to the program as they are coming from backgrounds in psychology, sociology, criminal justice, counseling psychology, English, and communication disorders. The new students have been very busy with coursework as they are learning about the field of school psychology, how to conduct assessments, and all about child development. They are also beginning to work on their research projects this semester and will hope to have them near completion by the end of this academic year!!

It is with mixed emotions that we begin this academic year with a major change in the faculty of the school psychology program at UNK. Dr. Max McFarland decided to retire after serving the school psychology program for nearly 30 years. Max has been a faculty advisor, mentor, and colleague to many and brought the school psychology program at UNK to a level of excellence which is now known and recognized across the state, country and world. We cannot thank Max enough for all of his hard work and dedication to the program and profession! While it is sad to see an empty office (that’s right for those of you who did not think it could happen….his office is empty!) and not having him stop in with his cup of coffee each day, we could not be more happy for him to begin the next chapter in his life!

School Psychology Partner School Projects

This year the school psychology program is involved in projects with three partner schools. The students in the school psychology program administer academic benchmark assessments three times per year to students at Amherst and Gibbon Elementary Schools. In addition, the second year school psychology students conduct weekly academic progress monitoring with the students who fall within the “at-risk” range on the benchmark assessments at Gibbon Elementary. The progress monitoring helps the faculty and staff at Gibbon Elementary evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions provided to the students who are struggling in reading. The third partner school project involves work with Lexington Public Schools in which the school psychology students from UNK administer academic and language screening assessments in the fall of each year.

Congratulations Meghan McKeone on receiving the NSPA Outstanding Student Award
This fall has been a great time to meet new students and say hello to our alumni out in the field. Recruitment for our programs is going well and we thank all our alumni out there that are referring some great students to our program. It has been fun connecting and catching up with at the Nebraska Counseling Association (NCA) conference and meetings at the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). As many of the faculty members travelled to Philadelphia for the national counselor educators conference we were also able to talk with two CMHC Alumni Greg Sandman and Marissa Ahlvin who are getting their doctorates in the field.

The clinical mental health field has been active on a number of fronts, particularly in lobbying for access to services. Everyone should be out there promoting access for the elderly by advocating that licensed professional counselors be recognized providers for medicare. It is great that Dr. Chasek is now going to be the BHECN Director at UNK so mental health will have a stronger voice in some state policies and decisions as well as wonderful training opportunities. A few students also travelled to Lincoln for the NCA Day on the Hill and hopefully we will have more students make this trip each year.

School Counseling is also going through some updates. The addition of Dr. Eric Davis provides a much needed expert in school counseling. He gave a play therapy workshop this fall and hopefully many of you will take his new Play Therapy course this spring. School Counseling endorsement is also being discussed on a state level and faculty have been active in those discussions. It will be fun to see past students at the NSCA conference later this fall.

The first group of Student Affairs Online is in fall classes and the mixture of local and national viewpoints has been interesting in discussions. Students from as far away as Florida, as well as different universities and community colleges, enrich the learning for all. The use of technology and different programs is always a challenge at the beginning but after a period of learning, the interactions can be very dynamic. For a fun interactive event, these online students also communicated at a wine and cheese social that was very much a true “bring your own” since everyone was at different locations. Bridget Brown won next semester’s textbook by using her broad knowledge of wine facts.

The program also continues to promote stronger connections throughout the professions. I was honored to accept on behalf of UNK a wonderful African painting from Dr. Natalie Hahn who hosted my multicultural counseling class last spring at her home. The painting was officially presented in honor of Jerry Fox in September and now hangs in the lobby outside of International Education. Dr. Hahn continues to be helpful to expand our multicultural understanding and there is another project in the works to even design some courses to cover global issues.

So, as you can see, we have had plenty of classes, meetings, workshops, and even a grand presentation of a donated painting. Counseling and School Psychology hopes that you are all doing well and encourage you to stay in contact with the department. As you can see through this article and the entire newsletter that we are very active, yet we always have
Forensic Mental Health

In the past few years, forensic mental health has become a leading topic of discussion across the country and in Nebraska. Data collected by the Nebraska Department of Corrections in 2012 reveal that 30% of inmates have a diagnosed mental illness and 76% have a diagnosed substance use disorder. On September 1, 2015 Dr. Chasek testified at a hearing held by the Department of Correctional Services Special Investigative Committee of the Legislature (the LR34 Committee) to address issues related to forensic behavioral health and to advocate for internships for students who are interested in working with this special population. The LR34 Committee has been authorized to study the availability of mental health care for inmates, the transition of inmates from incarceration to the community at large, and other issues relating to the Department of Correctional Services. The Counselor Education program at UNK has been involved in developing a proposal for an Interprofessional Behavioral Health Training Site with other partner institutions including UNMC, UNL, and UNO to be a pilot training program working with inmates and corrections professionals. It is hoped that this project will give students an opportunity to complete internships in a corrections setting enabling them to explore the Forensic Behavioral Health field and gain valuable experience in working with a variety of clients. This work will continue into the next Legislative session in January 2016. If you would like to know more or get involved in the issues facing Nebraska’s correctional services and mental health, contact Dr. Chasek at chasekc1@unk.edu.

School Counselors

In October Matt Mims, David Hof, and Grace Mims traveled to the capitol to testify on State Certification Requirements for School Counselors. This team of faculty testified on behalf of the School Counseling Profession advocating for more relevant and appropriate certification requirements for school counselors. Contact Dr. Grace Mims at mimsga@unk.edu.

Rural Mental Health Counseling Public Policy

The Counseling and School Psychology (CSP) 862 class is being provided an opportunity to engage in hands-on advocacy for their chosen profession, and in turn, the future clients they will be serving. Throughout the 2015 Fall Semester, the CSP 862 class will be meeting and collaborating with Amy Holmes, an attorney, education and outreach coordinator for the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN). The class will be assisting Ms. Holmes to secure personal testimony interviews from recent graduates of the program and newly licensed counselors practicing in non-urban areas, to identify obstacles and struggles they have experienced early on in their career which, if left unaddressed, might ultimately result in a reduction of available providers. These personal testimony interviews will then be forwarded to Nebraska District #45 Senator Sue Crawford, to assist with upcoming hearings on related matters. This opportunity will not only allow the students to gain a better understanding of the important role advocacy plays in the profession of counseling, but also the power they possess as a constituent and liaison between their future clients and government representatives. Stay tuned to the next CSP Newsletter to hear about the outcome of this class advocacy project. If you have questions, contact Doyle Diass, MS.Ed., LIMHP, LIPC at daissdd@unk.edu.
Counselor Education

Introducing Dr. Eric Davis

Please join the Counseling and School Psychology department in welcoming new faculty member, Dr. Eric Davis, our first Registered Play Therapist, to UNK. Dr. Davis grew up in Tennessee in the small town of Winchester. He began his journey in the world of play therapy when earning his master's degree in School Counseling at Middle Tennessee State University located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Dr. Davis was exposed to Play Therapy during a practicum course,

“It just clicked. Children can't sit for 45 minutes and talk about how something made them feel, play is universal, the same all over the world, for all children. In counseling we are to adjust to our clients, not our clients adjusting to us. Play has the ability to allow children to let go of their defenses, provide the therapist with an opportunity to enter the world of the child as well as use developmentally appropriate practices.”

Once completing his master’s in School Counseling, Dr. Davis then worked as a School Counselor in a high school setting for four years in Manchester, Tennessee. Prior to that, he worked across a variety settings ranging from a special education school to a juvenile detention facility. After earning his Ph.D. in Counselor Education from the University of Florida, Dr. Davis became a professor at Agrosy University in Tampa, Florida. In his five years there, Dr. Davis shared he met many wonderful colleagues, and students, but decided to transition away from more of the business side of universities, and explore other opportunities.

When Dr. Davis came across the position at UNK, he stated, “Everything just fell into place, we found ourselves thinking, is this too good to be true?” Dr. Davis spoke of his time this far at UNK in the warmest, most glowing terms, expressing how wonderful it is to feel apart of a collaborative team with people are so kind and genuine. Dr. Davis also shared how impressed he has been with the students. “They read the material, think about it, process it, and then apply it.”

Dr. Davis’ passion for children and Play Therapy has greatly shaped his direction of study, as well as research interests. He is conducting research pertaining to Reality Therapy, and Play Therapy, as well as implementing Play Therapy in School Counseling. He also enjoys incorporating “anything creative,” such as implementing the use of music, and song lyrics to provide individuals with a creative opportunity to express themselves. This idea sparked from the song “Pumped Up Kicks,” by Foster the People, Dr. Davis indicated. As he focused on the lyrics and meaning behind them, he found himself calling a dear friend and colleague asking, “Have you ever really listened to this song?” This moment further spurred the concept of interacting and teaching others through more creative means.

Dr. Davis made the journey to Kearney along with his wife, Amanda, of nearly five years, and a vivacious two and a half year old daughter, Annalie. Amanda, a Nebraska Native, is a pediatrician at Kearney Clinic. Both Dr. and Dr. Davis, share an immense passion for children, and are dedicated to improving their quality of life. When asked his hobbies outside of academics, and his wonderful family, Dr. Davis stated, “I'm a geek at heart.” He has a love of comic books, attending comic book conventions, collecting autographs, as well as being a dedicated Walking Dead fan. In addition to his preparation for the Zombie apocalypse, Dr. Davis is also a Chicago fan, following both the Chicago Bears and the Chicago Cubs.

This spring, will be the first Play Therapy class offered in the Counseling and School Psychology department. This course will cover essential Play Therapy theories, practice, and tools. There are currently no specific pre-requisites for the course, and will be considered an elective for students. Alumni are encouraged to register! Please join us in giving Dr. Davis a warm welcome!
Celebrating Alumni!

Angie Kovarik, Ed.S., 2003

Where do you currently work and what are your primary duties/responsibilities? I work at ESU #11 serving Franklin, Loomis, and Wilcox-Hildreth. My duties include consulting and performing assessments in my schools. I provide the traditional assessments for special education, as well as more specialized assessment in Autism and Traumatic Brain Injury. I am actively involved with special education programming, implementing Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Concussion Management Teams, Return to Learn, Social Thinking Strategies, and Mindfulness. My role changes from day to day depending on the needs of each district. I enjoy working with administration, staff, students, and families in each of my districts to promote a positive learning climate for all students.

What was your career journey from graduation to now? I completed my internship at ESU #8 in 2003 and continued to work there for another 8 years. My family then relocated to south central Nebraska where I worked as K-12 Counselor/School Psychologist for Franklin Public Schools for one year. Then transferred to ESU #11 where I am completing my fourth year as a school psychologist.

In your program experience, what stands out as turning points or were there any specific valuable learning experiences? In my program experience, I remember having a tremendous amount of respect and sense of family with those in the school psychology program. I think we all felt that disappointing Dr. Max McFarland or Teresa McFarland was equivalent to letting your own mom and dad down. To this day, I evaluate my practice and align it with what I believe would make them proud, and reflect well upon the program that they had a part in building. I sincerely believe that UNK has one of the very best training programs available in school psychology.

Do you have a favorite memory from your program experience? Some of my favorite memories of my program experience have been the relationships that I built with my classmates as we stressed, achieved, and grew. A couple of them have become lifelong friends who still keep in touch. I have the privilege of working side by side with one of them at ESU #11.

What’s new in your life? I’m excited to have the opportunity to give back to the school psychology program at UNK by teaching a class this Fall. I thoroughly enjoy each one of my students and it excites me to see compassionate people like them preparing to enter the field. My hope is that they continue to share their passion for school psychology and do wonderful things for the families and schools that they serve. In addition, I am also completing my endorsement for Special Education Administration at UNK, hopefully by May 2016.

Marv Knittel, “One Hand Clapping: An Amputee Tells His Story”

Marv has authored a new book about his own story of being an amputee. This is his journey from anger and shame to acceptance and pride. He shares how he discovered that the loss of a limb does not diminish one as a person and realized that how he saw himself determined how others saw him. His hope in writing the book was to give the over two million amputees in various stages of adjustment courage and optimism. His book can be found online: http://upper-limb-loss.com
Ann Gillen, M.S.Ed.

I jumped into the UNK Community Counseling program when my kids, Zach and Nathan were still pretty young. I felt this was “my calling” and was excited yet nervous about the endeavor. I started by taking one class per semester, and then raised that to two. I joked that I might still be taking classes after retirement at that rate!

In May 2011 I graduated! I was so relieved and proud to have made it through. But I soon discovered that finding a counseling job in a small town with many other counseling graduates is not easy. I looked into a few openings but not much was available and nothing really seemed right for me somehow. I thought about putting together my own little “practice” as I had done for practicum, doing pro bono work for hours, but finding a supervisor proved to be a challenge. So, I resigned myself to the fact that this wasn’t going to happen and continued to work as a pharmacy technician.

In October, 2013 my husband, Mark, was offered a job outside Denver, Colorado. He moved to test out the job offer and then “set up camp” for the rest of us. In June 2014 we joined him. I spent the first few months getting settled and then got a part-time job as a pharmacy technician. I didn’t enjoy the large chain pharmacy as much as the private one in Kearney, but it was a job so I put up with it. I thought occasionally about counseling, but couldn’t even imagine how I would ever get that off the ground. I had no idea how things were about to change.

Sometime after Christmas 2014, Mark and my oldest son, Zach, were just out and about together, doing whatever it is guys do when they are out of the house. On a whim (I was told later) they stopped into a business that had recently opened across the street from our house. They learned that it was a mental health clinic that had just opened up. Later that day, Mark was excited to tell me about their adventure, and handed me a pink Post-It-Note with phone numbers to call for more information.

Now you would think that I would have been on the phone immediately. Nope. Let me explain here that my husband Mark is a very nice guy. I knew that all he had to do was go in there and smile and talk to the people and ask for some contact numbers and they would give him the numbers even if they had no interest in talking to me or hiring anyone. I also couldn’t imagine an established business hiring someone who hadn’t even applied yet for a license and still hadn’t gotten a counseling job four years after graduation. So I didn’t call. I kept the paper, nestled somewhere on the kitchen counter under the coffee spills and forgotten coupons snipped from the paper. I went back to work at the pharmacy.

But something strange happened a couple of days later. I came out of work one night and there was a message on my phone asking if I could come in for an interview at the mental health center at 3:00 the next day! I was totally surprised and baffled. A business was actually asking me to come in, when I hadn’t even applied? Now don’t get me wrong. I do not have ground-level self-esteem or anything, but the standard procedure has always been that I have to apply before I can get an interview for a position. And once that is done, I would need to compete against a long line of other applicants. This was something entirely different!

I printed out a copy of my most recent resume and took it along on the 3-minute walk from my front door to the business. I had no idea what to expect but figured that once they found out I had no license and had never had a counseling job since college, they would not have an opening for me. And if there was some slim chance they let me
work there, I was sure my counseling would be for free. But I went in, smiled and told about myself. The office manager explained they had just moved from another location and were wanting to expand, with a full-time therapist to join their part-time therapist and the owner, a psychiatrist. Oh, and they would pay me $1/hour more than I was making at my current job. When I heard that, I kept thinking they must not understand that I do not have my license and I have no post-degree experience. And are they really going to pay me? Full-time? Oh and yeah, by the way, the part-time licensed therapist has agreed to be your supervisor. Seriously?

Well, several months have gone by now and I am a therapist. I got my Licensed Professional Counselor Candidate (LPCC) license a few months ago, which was quite simple coming from a CACREP-accredited program like UNK. I love my job. It is so wonderful meeting these clients. I am honored and humbled to have them come to me and allow me into their world so we can try to find a clearer path together. I am where I am supposed to be, doing what I am supposed to be doing. This is the first time in at least 27 years, maybe in my entire life, that I have felt this way. And I can't help but think that Someone else must have thought it was about time I got to where I needed to be. What are the odds of moving into a residential neighborhood that just happens to have an old building that was commercially-zoned and grandfathered into a residential area? And having that business be purchased by a mental health clinic and opened just months after we move in? And having it be a three-minute walk from my front door? And get an interview because my husband and son followed their curiosity through that door one afternoon? And have them pursue me for the position, wait for me to get licensed, and secure supervision for me? This was too perfectly orchestrated to just be chance. At one time I had felt that sooner or later the chips would all fall into place, but as time passed I sort of pushed the thoughts to the back of my mind and figured maybe it just wasn't meant to be. I guess Someone else had kept working on it even when I had given up.

I recently got in touch with Doctors Grace and Matthew Mims at UNK and told them this story. I originally contacted them because I wanted to share with them that my supervisor, who also is a professor in a counseling program at a university, told me that I was well-trained. I really wanted to let them know that they and my other instructors did a good job at UNK in getting me ready for this calling and profession. Now this is not to say I am always sure I am using the perfect methods during a session or that I always feel successful. I told my husband the other day that I usually feel like I am flying by the seat of my pants when I meet a new client. However, I am finally getting to the point where I am not always worrying about my appearance and techniques during a session and am able to concentrate more on the client. And that right there – letting the client know you are listening and that you understand and care about them – is a huge part of helping them. How humbling is that?

I wish you all good luck on your counseling journeys, whether you are students, new to the profession, or a seasoned therapist. It is a wonderful path we walk! ~Sincerely, Ann Gillen ann.happyminds@gmail.com

Ann and her family enjoy living in the Denver area. Her husband Mark is a Crane Operator. Her youngest son is in high school and he and his older brother both are busy with work. They enjoy hiking in the mountains and foothills, eating at different restaurants, and she and Mark enjoy riding motorcycles (and yes, she has her own too). Their extended family live in central Nebraska.