

Introduction

Welcome to the Master of Science in Counseling (MSC) program. We are excited to be working with you to help you become a person who is continually growing in the knowledge, the skill and the character of a counselor who is effective in impacting others' lives. This process of growth should not stop after you graduate but should continue as you serve Jesus Christ in whatever capacity He calls you to in the field of counseling or in any other field. That is why we believe that we need to start with ourselves so that we can be effective in helping others to overcome problems and issues that are faced in life.

In lab, we will look for opportunities to help you grow and to help you become competent in the counseling process. Our desire is to be there to mentor you in this process of becoming a counselor.

In order to orient you to the distinctive elements of our counseling program, we have created this Lab Handbook. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with some of the topics addressed here. We want each student to have a clear understanding of how we approach lab and lab interaction. While this handbook can't possibly address every possible question, our hope is that it will serve as a good starting point for everyone.

What is lab?

Lab is a key component of the Cairn University Graduate Counselor training program. Synchronized with the core lecture in the student's first four semesters, Lab is an 8-10-student, small-group training course designed to assist students in developing biblical and professional wisdom necessary to be a counselor. Every lab is co-led by a two-person team of instructors, referred to as lab-instructors. Each week, lab-instructors will assist students in putting to use the concepts being taught in their core lectures. Various methods and activities will be utilized in this process. These include skills practice, peer-counseling and role-play activities, group process discussions, feedback discussions, and reflection of the process. Students will have opportunities to attempt, practice, and polish the same skills that will help them effectively interact with their future counseling clients.

In addition, a premium is placed upon the development of the student's character. Lab students will spend time in both the counselor's and the counselee's chair, during which time they have opportunities to develop greater competency in personal self-reflection, introspection, and assessment of how their thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and motivations are impacted in the counseling environment. Students are challenged to evaluate the effectiveness of these responses and to attempt new behaviors as they experience challenging circumstances.

- 4 Lab sections

As stated earlier, there is a lab in each of the students' four core semesters. The lab is specifically designed to be coordinated with the core lecture and thus compliment the focus of the core lecture. For example, the first core course in the program is CSG 601: Counseling Theory and Helping Relationships, a foundational course. Students taking this course will concurrently enroll in CSG 602: Helping Relationships Lab. This lab will provide opportunities to learn and develop the micro-skills associated

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with counseling at a foundational level. In this semester students will consider their own life and stories and hear about other student's life and stories with opportunities to empathically practice listening skills.

In the next semester, students will take CSG 611: Individual Assessment and Counseling concurrently with CSG 612: Individual Assessment and Counseling Lab. Building on the previous semester, semester 2 allows the student to begin using the counseling micro-skills in a conceptual framework designed to effectively move the client past his/her obstacles and toward their goal objectives. Both semester one and two are designed to train and develop counselor's abilities to work effectively with individuals.

In the third semester, Students will enroll in CSG 701: Marriage and Family Counseling concurrently with CSG 702: Marriage and Family Lab. This lecture and lab combination will provide the opportunity for students to learn and develop skills related to working with couples and families. In this semester students will address how their own family of origin (FOO) impacts how they interact with others.

Lastly, Semester four consists of CSG 711, Group Theory and Leadership Development and CSG 712: Group Lab. In this final core semester, the focus is on learning and developing group counseling competencies. This final Lab is also designed to showcase the student's comprehension of counseling theory, skills, and ability to design, develop and execute a protocol for effective group counseling. Students in this semester will be expected to step up into leadership roles.

- The Group Dynamic in Lab

Group dynamics is a system of behaviors and psychological processes occurring within a social group (Backstrom, L.; Huttenlocher, D.; Kleinberg, J.; Lan, X. ,2006). Within the lab setting, students may experience a wide range of experiences. Some students may be drawn to other students or leaders. Others may find themselves avoiding or being disrupted by other lab members. Why does silence cause some people to become uncomfortable? What role do certain students take on in a group setting? How does our family of origin experiences impact who we are and how we inter-relate in lab?

Over time, students are invited to look deeper into these facets of the group dynamics and why they are impacted in certain ways by others. Yalom (1995) stated that "everything is grist for the mill", meaning that every interaction, no matter how slight or nuanced has meaning and can be used to enhance ones understanding of themselves and ultimately how they impact others. While this process may feel somewhat unpredictable, or to some even uncomfortable, we can say from considerable experience that your lab-leaders are capable of harnessing this process in a safe and effective way that brings growth and development to those who actively engage in the group process. Our goal is to keep the process of group dynamics safe while at the same time using the process to deeply challenge the student to grow. If at any point you as a student feel that the process is becoming too disruptive, we would ask that you immediately make an appointment with your lab instructors to discuss how you are being impacted.

- What is lab like?

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Lab can be intimidating. Unlike most graduate lecture-style courses, lab is highly interactive and interpersonal in nature. Lab students are expected to engage with lab-instructors and fellow students in a wide variety of activities and discussions. Some students will struggle with thoughts of how much to share, how often to speak, what others may be thinking of them, and fears of whether or not they say something “wrong” or make a mistake. While lab is a place where the student’s skills and abilities are assessed and evaluated, lab is also a place where students are encouraged to take risks, try new things, and learn through a trial-and-error approach.

Typically, the three-hour lab is split into two halves. In the first half of lab, students will typically engage in leader-led activities designed to put into practice the concepts, skills, and ideas that were taught in the core lecture. Lab instructors will take a very hands-on approach in directing the student’s work helping, correcting, and redirecting as needed. After a short break midway through the class, lab students will reconvene to do process work. Process work refers to elements which came into play during the first half of lab. In the small-group setting, lab-instructors and students will use their counseling skills to engage one another in a guided self-exploration of the various thoughts, emotions, motivations, and behaviors which were noticed or experienced in the first half of lab. An example of this might exploring with a student who struggled to effectively demonstrate appropriate empathy to another lab member in a training exercise. The goals of this would be to explore the factors which might be keeping a student from performing at the highest possible level.

- What lab is not

While lab is therapeutic, it is not individual therapy. What we mean by this is that the small-group community does provide many of the therapeutic factors normally associated with group therapy such as instilling hope, universalism, altruism, interpersonal learning, and catharsis (Yalom, 1995) to name a few. Labs are a place where character growth and development are expected to occur. Yet some individuals require a higher level of care and attention to various impairments than lab cannot effectively address. Keep in mind that the primary purpose of lab is a vehicle for counselor development in a graduate counselor education program. Occasionally the process and interaction in lab can reveal areas that may require more concentrated focus on specific issues than the lab can provide. When this occurs, lab-instructors may approach students privately and encourage the student to engage in therapy or to regularly meet with a mature Christian who is willing to mentor them to address the concerns they have noticed. The program lab instructors are dedicated to your growth and development and will do everything in their power to appropriately assist in your personal and professional growth and maturity.

- How labs are assigned

In designing our labs, our goals are to create labs which are fairly diverse and have some degree of anonymity. The reason for this is that character growth and group dynamics are most effective when group members experience a sense of universalism across multicultural differences and when group members do not have a high degree of familiarity with other group members (Yalom, 1995). Our hope is that each lab member would enter into lab not knowing other lab members. While this may not always be possible, we do believe it is important enough that if you as a lab student find yourself assigned to a

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lab with a close friend, a relative, a roommate or a former boyfriend/girlfriend, that you would inform the lab Supervisor as soon as possible.

- Roles

Labs are composed of two instructors and up to ten students. At least one of the instructors is a faculty member of the Cairn University graduate counseling program. Typically, co-instructors are graduate interns who are gaining practical experience as they move toward state licensure.

Instructors: The role of the instructor is to lead and direct students through activities, model and demonstrate both technique and character, and to assimilate into the small-group community which develops. In addition, lab-instructors will be critiquing the student's performance and providing graded assessments of both their in-lab performance and various written assignments.

Students: The role of the student is to observe and mimic behaviors and attitudes observed, to try new behaviors, to share with each other the motivations, emotions, and thoughts that are brought up in lab, and to embrace an attitude of interpersonal and intrapersonal curiosity within the lab. As labs are highly interactive; taking a closed, passive, defensive or unengaged approach to lab is unacceptable.

Goals of Lab

- What is expected

Simply put, lab is highly interactive. Unlike a lecture-style course, Lab is designed to engage the student in a variety of activities designed to aid in the development of counseling skills and character. Students will have opportunities to "try out" various skills and concepts in a wide variety of activities including peer-counseling, role playing, and group process. In addition to learning how to counsel others, student will also have opportunities to experience being in the role of the counselee in structured activities. Students will be evaluated in a number of ways throughout the semester and it is expected that students would show a high degree of initiative in attempting to use the tools that are being taught. Students should embrace these opportunities and understand that through this trial and error process that they can achieve a high level of proficiency.

In addition to the practice opportunities, lab students will also be expected to engage in weekly group process. This portion of lab will facilitate open group dialogue about what the student is learning about themselves in the context of counselor development as well as how they are experiencing certain challenges to the training. Students will be encouraged to provide feedback to each other in an effort to assist in both character and skill development.

- Personal reflection

Lab-students will spend a significant time learning the art and practice of personal self-reflection. The psalmist states that "the purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, and the man of understanding can draw them out" (Proverbs 20:5). Self-reflection can be described as "the capacity of humans to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about their fundamental nature, purpose and essence.

Human self-reflection invariably leads to inquiry into the human condition and the essence of humankind as a whole” (A.I. Levine; S. DeMaria Jr.; A. D. Schwartz; A. J. Sim, 2013). It is the process of noticing our own emotions, behaviors and thoughts and how they emanate from our human motives. Often, this occurs in a largely subconscious process, mostly outside of the person’s awareness. We believe that the best counselors possess a high capacity for intrapersonal or self-reflection and thus, a significant amount of time will be spent assisting student in developing this skill. To a certain degree, we concur with Socrates that the unexamined life is not worth living. Lab-instructors will use a combination of homework assignments as well in-class activities in an effort to hone this important skill.

- Subgrouping

An ideal group setting occurs when all members of the group are anonymous to one another. Anonymity allows each member to be relatively free from the relational power that exerts itself upon one another in relationship. In a sense, when a person enters a group with no pre-existing relationships with other members, they are in a sense free to engage in open, honest dialogue that can help lead them to do important intrapersonal work while positively impacting others. When members in a group have other established relationships, then there are the complicating factors related to managing that relationship which can impair a person’s ability to get the most out of the group. This is the basic idea behind dual-relationships which harm the counselor-counselee relationship.

In group theory, subgrouping refers to when cliques or groups within groups begin to manifest in the lifecycle of the group. A subgroup is a group within the group which shares a closer affinity between two or more members and excludes others in the group. Sub-grouping creates imbalance within the group and impairs the effectiveness of the group. For this reason, lab faculty have identified certain rules related to lab membership which must be followed by all members for the lifecycle of the lab.

- If possible, close friends, roommates, relatives, or those with significant relational history should not be grouped together in the same lab. Before the semester begins, lab faculty attempt to ensure that those with any relational history are not grouped together in the same lab. Since the faculty cannot know everyone’s relational history, students are encouraged to inform the lab supervisor or lab-instructors before the first lab of the semester if they are paired in such a way. At times, because of scheduling issues, multiple relationships, etc. it may be necessary to pair individuals who know each other. In those situations those individuals are asked to be vigilant in making sure that their outside relationship is not hindering the lab process. If that starts to occur, it is essential that the students immediately set up an appointment with the lab instructors to discuss what is happening.
- Lab students are prohibited from engaging in lab-type discussion outside of the lab. All lab-type discussions must be done in the context of the entire lab when lab leaders are present.
- Lab students are urged to exercise caution in engaging in social activities outside of lab with lab members during the academic year.
- Lab students are prohibited from engaging in romantic relationships with other members of their lab during the academic year.

- Process Awareness

A significant component of lab, as well as group therapy involves a concept called process. To better understand what process is, it is sometimes easier to describe it by defining what process isn't, and that is content. In a group discussion, content refers to the things, or topics that are being discussed. It is the content of the actual discussion. Process involves the way the discussion is taking place; who is involved, who is remaining un-engaged, who is upset or annoyed, who wants to soothe hurt feelings, who wants to gain approval? As lab students gain in skill and awareness, they will grow in their ability to identify various elements of group process and harness them for group growth and interpersonal learning.

- Affect tolerance

Another aspect of Lab that deserves mention is affect tolerance. Affect tolerance is the ability to withstand or endure significant amounts of emotional disruption. In a sense, it is the ability to endure emotional stress without having to resort to a fight, flight, or freeze response. This is something which is tremendously important to develop as a counselor, and something that can't simply be learned from a training manual. Though lab leaders are adept at managing a safe lab experience, most students will experience moments of strong emotion and will be guided in developing methods for working through this disruptions in effective and beneficial ways. The character of resilience is essential for the counselor and growth in affect tolerance is an indication that the student has the kind of resilience needed for a future counseling practice.

- Character development

At Cairn University, we believe that a counselor's character is a critical component of the counseling process. We believe that effective counselors must commit themselves to a routine of deep, personal self-reflection designed to assist in their own personal sanctification. Our model for this is Christ himself. Throughout the lab journey students will be instructed to analyze and assess various aspects of themselves, their emotions, their thoughts, their behaviors, and their motives and determine how their character might need to undergo some refinement. We believe that competent counseling is a product of several aspects and character development is foundational.

- Practice of skills

Counselors utilize a set of skills to assist in moving people toward their established goals. These skills include developing competencies for effective listening, data collection, reflecting, challenging and more. Like building blocks, students will learn and practice these skills one at a time and have opportunities to use them in concert with one another in individual, couples, family and group contexts and role plays. Through the progression of lab, students will be able to hone these skills effectively.

- Practice of models/theories

Similar to the development of counseling skills, lab students will be taught various approaches and techniques to use in the counseling context. Theories and models of counseling provide a process through which counseling skills are employed. Students will use lab as their place to experiment with various schools of thought as it pertains to how humans think, emote, behave, and are motivated and how this inter-related process can be used to help foster change. Students will be encouraged to view models of psychology through a Biblical worldview lens as a way of assessing various aspects of human nature and functioning.

What is Expected

- Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a foundational component of the counseling relationship. Confidentiality refers to the concept of keeping private information private. In a counseling relationship, the counselor is required to protect the counselee's name and the information discussed protected from disclosure to others. In a similar way, Labs are places where the things discussed within the lab are not shared with others outside the lab group. It would be unreasonable to ask lab-students to engage in a level of interpersonal self-reflection and disclosure without providing a high level of safety from exposure. That means that each lab-member, including the lab-instructors are required to hold themselves at a professionally responsible level of behavior, agreeing to not disclose the contents and discussions in lab to those not part of their lab. Lab members will be required to review components related to lab confidentiality at the start of the academic year and pledge their adherence to confidentiality. Violations to this standard will be addressed by the lab-instructors and the lab-supervisor and may include discipline and a reduced grade for the semester. Although this policy is strictly enforced, the student may share what God is doing in their lives through the process of lab with others. The key distinction is that when doing so, they must make sure that they do not disclose any information concerning other students. Even the acknowledgement of who is in the student's lab could be inappropriate and therefore a breach of confidentiality.

- Expectations for attendance

Unlike undergraduate education, graduate-level education presupposes an assumption of elite scholarship. Graduate-level scholarship requires a high degree of diligence, commitment and personal sacrifice. In addition, the lab environment revolves around several critical small-group principles, one of which is a commitment to regular attendance and active participation. For these reasons, each student is expected to attend all scheduled lab sessions each semester. Students who miss more than two lab sessions will have their grade lowered to no better than a C+, and will be required to repeat the section the following year. Students who come after class attendance is taken are counted as absent. If you believe that you will not be able to achieve this level of attendance, it is recommended that you speak with your lab instructor immediately.

Academics

- Minimum grade

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Much like the attendance policy, grading at the graduate level is also at a higher level than at the undergraduate level. The Cairn University Graduate Counseling program requires that students achieve a 3.0 cumulative GPA in order to graduate. Additionally, students are required to pass each lab with a letter grade of “B” or better to advance to the next lab. Any student who fails to achieve a final grade of “B” or better will be required to re-enroll in that lab. Because labs are scheduled for an entire year, not just a semester, any student reenrolling for a spring semester lab will also be required to audit the upcoming fall lab which precedes the lab they are re-enrolling in. This will require the student to perform all lab-activities in the fall semester as they prepare to re-take the spring lab.

- Lab Evaluations

Lab students are evaluated throughout the semester. Various assignments and activities, along with a cumulative evaluation of the quality and quantity of lab participation all intersect to provide the arena that student’s performance will be measured against. Through-out the semester, lab instructors will provide instruction and corrective feedback on the effectiveness of the student’s demonstration of skill, techniques and other details germane to the field of counseling. While a student is encouraged to not react too strongly to having their attempts corrected, a student who receives a disproportionate amount of corrective feedback may need to invest more time and effort in practicing their craft.

At the mid-semester mark, lab instructors will meet with each lab student and conduct a mid-semester evaluation. This may be done one-on-one, or in a group format. This evaluation is an opportunity for the lab instructor and student to review the student’s strengths and weaknesses, abilities and development areas and devise a plan to improve the areas that may need more attention. If a student appears to be in danger of failing to perform at an acceptable level, the lab leaders will inform the student so that the student has sufficient time to improve their overall performance to a passing level.

At the end of the semester, lab instructors will once again meet with each lab student and conduct an evaluation. This also may be done one-on-one, or in a group format. Again, this evaluation is an opportunity for the lab instructor and student to further review the student’s strengths and weaknesses, abilities and development areas and devise a plan to improve the areas that may need more attention for the following semesters.

- Mentoring

Occasionally, students who are having difficulty in lab will benefit from some tutoring, guidance and mentoring in various aspects of lab. The Oasis counseling center is staffed with graduates and interns of the graduate counseling program. Lab students may request assistance for lab mentoring from the Oasis counseling center at no cost to them. Examples of assistance range from tutoring for writing better reflection papers, increased self-awareness, improved demonstration of empathy, or increased capacity for reflection.

We will be praying specifically for you and your journey with us through the process of lab. May God richly bless you, The Lab Team

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